

“Celebrate!”

Rev. Betty Kornitzer

June 5, 2005

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County

Today is a day to Rejoice – to open our hearts and minds in amazement at the blessings and gifts of our liberal religious community.

I open with words adapted from the poetry of Rev. Nancy Shaffer:

Tell me: did you really rest?
You who made day
and night and sky that separated
waters above and below,
And then made sun
And moon and stars.
Who made birds fly
and everything that swims,
and cattle and creeping things
and then made man and woman
and finally supposedly rested:

Tell me how-
in the midst of all that buzzing
and flapping,
and the slithering,
all that bursting forth of leaf
and fruit and stem
that never had known themselves before-
tell me:
how could You possibly have *rested*.
After seeing what no one
Ever had seen before:
Beak, hoof, pebble;
After losing yourself
In a thousand versions of blue:
Water in sun,
Sky against sky,
Didn't You long to caress
Each small thing –
Notice how toes work, and
Stamens and fingers?
Weren't You hollering out in amazement?
Weren't You so filled up glad
You couldn't sleep?

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Now friends, that's a celebration!

Today we welcome new members and dear children into the embrace of our faith community, and while I'm not likely to stand before you and holler out in amazement, I am likely to say a resounding *Alleluia!*

It is a good thing to celebrate. Hopefully, we've all experienced life moments when we were so filled up glad, we couldn't sleep. These are rare golden moments, mined through the labors of a lifetime.

Let me tell you about one such holy moment. It was on June 6, 2004 that I officiated at my first legal marriage of a lesbian couple, my close friends Wendy and Christine. I can tell you that my universe shifted when, for the first time, I spoke the words: "By the authority vested in me by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I now pronounce you legally married." Tomorrow, June 6, is their wedding anniversary – Let us celebrate and rejoice.

I read now from a press release that I have written about today's service:

Sunday, June 5, was "Celebration Sunday" at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County in Peace Dale. It was a day of child dedications and the welcoming of new members. It was also a day to celebrate the one year anniversary of equal marriage in Massachusetts. The Unitarian Universalist Association, headquartered in Boston, has been a strong advocate of equal marriage for many years. In fact, seven of the fourteen plaintiffs in the Massachusetts equal marriage case, *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, were Unitarian Universalists. It was on May 17, 2004, that gay and lesbian couples were legally married for the first time in the United States. Since that date, over 6,200 gay and lesbian couples have married in Massachusetts. Last Sunday, The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County raised its voice in song and word to celebrate this landmark event: the day that civil marriage was acknowledged as a civil right. Members of the congregation will participate in RI Pride activities in the coming weeks.

Now, don't make me a liar. I know that John Glasheen, Charlie and I will be joining other Rhode Island Unitarian Universalists in Gay Pride activities on June 17th and 18th, I hope many you will join us. During Coffee Hour, I will be circulating with a sign-up sheet.

Let me read from an email that

a colleague sent last February, when, for a brief moment in time, gay marriages were honored in San Francisco.

These are the words of her cousin, Christine:

“Ann and I have been partners for 18 years.

I was out o town this weekend...

Ann called on Sunday, and said,

“Let’s go the San Francisco

and get married.”

When we got there, the atmosphere was electric.

Folks had been lining up

to get married on Monday, , so we got in line.

The weather got colder, and the rain started,

then the wind.

Couple by couple the line grew,

down the street and around the huge city block.

The women in front of us were 2 lawyers

who had just flown in from Baltimore to get married...

We met a male couple from Holland that got married.

There were couples from NY, TN, Nevada, TX,

MD, GA., FL. Thailand and New Zealand.

During the night,

people streamed by giving us love and support.

Folks came by every 15 minutes

Throughout the night bringing us coffee,
hot tea, bottled water, donuts, flowers, candy and fruit.
Gay and straight people straight couples with their children
serving us tea at 2 in the morning,

At daybreak, people came through the line
offering us dry socks and sweatshirts.
It was the most amazing outpouring
of love & good will that I have ever experienced.

We entered City Hall before 10 on Monday morning.

The city staff and community volunteers
are doing an incredible job...
all are working without pay.

They aren't even getting comp time for this –
they just *wanted* to be part of it.

They gave up their long weekend
and their Monday holiday

to do this for those of us who have
been denied the right to marry.

Our ceremony was in the rotunda.

We are married.... After 18 years, Ann and I are married.

Today I am calling insurance companies etc
to inform them of our new marital status,
and so far all I've received are
the appropriate congratulations. Nice."

Friends, now doesn't that make you so filled up glad, you can't sleep?
But wait, the legislature of California obliterated gay marriage with the stroke of a pen.
Christine and Ann are no longer married – they have been marginalized again.
Equal marriage is not a matter to be taken lightly, not just a nicety. No, equal marriage is
a human rights issue, and we ignore it at our peril.

I know there are people of good faith among us who may not support equal marriage, let
us always remain in dialogue. Seeking always to understand each other.

Recently, a fellow Unitarian Universalist expressed to me some discomfort with marriage
among homosexuals. This person thought that legal civil unions might be a fair solution.
We had a good conversation, it centered on the very basic idea of equality.

Equality, like pregnancy is an all or nothing thing. One cannot be "almost equal"
anymore than she can be "almost pregnant."

It becomes very clear when we talk about trading places. This is how I explained it to
my mom: "It's 1943," I said, "and only gay and lesbian marriages are legal. But you and
Dad fall in love so big you know this is it for life. Too bad, you can have a civil union or
domestic partnership. How equal does that feel to you? Do you feel marginalized? Do
you feel second class?" She got it.

My friend and colleague Rev. Fred Small of Littleton, Massachusetts put it in perspective
when he said:

You can get married by an Elvis impersonator in Las Vegas. You can get married on a
roller coaster. You can get married while sky diving. You can get married if you're a
murderer, rapist, or child molester. You can get married in Kansas if you're a twelve-
year-old girl. But in every other state in this nation, you cannot get married if you're gay.

Equal means equal my friends, let us not delude ourselves, half measures continue to
marginalize our fellows. And for just so long as we do not step forward to act in support
of equal human rights, for just that long our own humanity is diminished.

William Sloane Coffin, former Yale chaplain and civil rights activist, in his most recent
book describes hell as "truth seen too late." My friends, let us not only see the truth, but
act on it.

I invite you to the celebration today – let us celebrate history together, for on May 17,
2004, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts it became legal for gay and lesbian

couples to marry. And I invite you to act to support and defend everyone's civil right to love whomever they will and to marry if that is where their hearts lead. May it be so.

Blessed Be and Amen