

A commentary from Michigan's four Episcopal bishops

As bishops of the Episcopal Church in Michigan, we are compelled by our office and our conscience to present a perspective on marriage equality that differs substantively from the positions of our state's top elected leaders and the religious leaders whose voices have dominated the public square. We offer a message of hope to those alienated by the traditional teachings of the church and the constitutional denial of civil rights.

When asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-38 NRSV). Condemning love and condemning those seeking to make a faithful, committed, and covenantal relationship to one another under God is not a message built on the teachings of Christ, but is rather a fear-laden response to one's neighbor. Our faith is in a loving and compassionate God who does not condemn love, and in our experience, there is holy goodness in the love of gay and lesbian couples and their families.

As the case of *DeBoer v. Snyder* continues to work its way through our judicial system, we hope that judges will find that the denial of marriage to those whose expression of love is same-gendered is both a denial of human dignity and a denial of rights under the law. We pray that Michigan will finally be able to proudly stand on the right side of history and join the 17 other states whose laws affirm the equality of all faithful, committed and covenantal relationships. As Christians, we cannot be silent as our state's highest laws discriminate against segments of our society based on the personal biases of those in power, particularly when a majority of Michigan's population now supports marriage equality. To remain silent is to be complicit in the decline of our society through demonizing unprotected minorities, segregation based on sexual preference, denial of benefits to selected groups, and fear-based prejudice. Our continued silence can lead only to further discrimination, bullying and other forms of physical, emotional and spiritual violence.

In a state marked by growing violence and desperate poverty, marks of love and grace ought to be welcomed in abundance and without qualification or restriction. We need to remove discriminatory policies that bar certain groups of people from enjoying the same benefits and privileges afforded other members of society.

We need to ensure that our schools are safe places for our young people to be open about who they are without fear of persecution or violence.

We need to create a Beloved Community in which all persons are equal, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sex, class, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. And we need the full opportunity to recognize faithful and covenantal relationships between any two people seeking our blessing, both within the church and within our civil society.

We look forward in hopeful anticipation to the day when all people receive equal treatment from one another and under the law.

May justice prevail.

This originally appeared March 25 in the Detroit Free Press and was jointly written by the four bishops representing the state of Michigan: The Rt. Rev. Wendell Gibbs Jr. (Diocese of Michigan), the Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley (Diocese of Eastern Michigan), the Rt. Rev. Rayford J. Ray (Diocese of Northern Michigan) and the Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Hougland Jr. (Diocese of Western Michigan).