

# Scripture and Marriage Equality: Resources

2006 Colloquy resource materials



## Opposing the Kansas Marriage Amendment – Rev. Kent Cormack, UCC

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The Kansas Marriage Amendment: Why My Faith Tells Me to Vote “No”

By Reverend R. Kent Cormack, pastor First Congregational United Church of Christ Manhattan, Kansas

Many voters characterize the “marriage amendment” to the Kansas constitution as a vote to be determined by one’s faith. I believe it is about civil rights. A “no” vote is a vote against bigotry. But my faith also compels me to vote no. I serve as an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, a denomination with a long history of support for marginalized people whose voices are too easily overlooked. I believe that as children of God, all people are endowed with worth and dignity that human prejudice cannot erase.

Scripture is foundational to my convictions. Unfortunately, this debate is often hijacked from the core of scripture to its fringes. I cannot discard the central message of God’s radical love, passionate justice and extravagant welcome in favor of single snippets of scripture extracted from their context and conveniently misinterpreted.

The prophets continually call me to task by their unflagging pursuit of justice for the least powerful members of society. The widow, the orphan, the foreigner—how I treat these people of no power is indicative of my faithfulness. (Jeremiah 22:30) Jesus sets aside every human barrier, every cultural prejudice, and every false tradition that violates the oneness of God and the oneness of all people. Jesus refused to build fences according to gender, disability, family status, or ethnic background. Instead, his ultimate concern was for what was in each person’s heart. He had but two requirements for those who would follow him: Love your God with heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

The early church struggled with Phillip’s controversial baptism of the Ethiopian. Critics of his day noted that this baptism was in violation of holy scripture. (Acts 8) Phillip set aside the prejudices contained in scripture in favor of an expanded understanding of God’s grace that overwhelms human attempts at limitation.

Because I take scripture seriously, I must challenge and test every scripture that rests in fear and ignorance and that violates the central message of the Bible: the oneness of God and God’s people, and the liberation of all God’s people from oppression. Supporters utilize the scare tactic that the marriage amendment is necessary to preserve the “traditional family,” but their definition is nothing but a narrow family fundamentalism. Scripture illustrates a wide variety of family structures: patriarchal extended families such as Abraham’s household and single parent families such as the widow and her son that Elijah visited. Adult siblings share a home like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Christian communes hold their property in common. The “traditional” biblical family is actually quite diverse.

Jesus’ views on family are anything but traditional: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?... Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:48-50) For Jesus, a radical love ethic trumped ancient customs of kinship, state laws, and even religious dogma. This amendment fails that love ethic miserably. This amendment could prevent my spouse from being at my bedside in the hospital. It seeks to keep parents from adopting children they are raising jointly with their partner. It reinforces laws that tax heterosexual

couples in one way and same-gender couples in another way. It exhibits neither love of neighbor nor justice.

But beyond shoddy religious justifications, Kansans must reject this amendment because it curtails civil rights for certain groups of law-abiding Kansans. The Constitution guarantees rights to all citizens, not simply those whom the majority finds worthy. As a native Kansan, I believe that Kansans hold these values as dearly as any Americans—perhaps even more so. I serve a church that from its beginning fought those who would have made chattel slavery acceptable in this state. It has continued to struggle toward justice and equality for all Kansans for the past 150 years. This amendment turns its back on that history.

Civil marriage is a civil right. As for religious marriage, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” When I officiate at a marriage ceremony, I do not marry the couple. Neither does the church. Neither does the state. The union is created by the covenant of two persons with each other and with God as they enter into a profoundly challenging and rewarding human relationship. No matter what the state says, what God has created, blessed, and brought together in love, I cannot call unclean. I will continue the free exercise of my religion, regardless of the genders of the two who stand before me. What matters to me is what’s in their hearts; and as best I can tell, that is what matters to God.