

## **Statement by the Rev. Dr. Franklin I. Gamwell Chairperson, Policy Committee of Protestants for the Common Good**

I am grateful to represent the Board of Directors of Protestants for the Common Good. They have adopted this statement on democratic equality regarding marriage, and it is they who speak through it.

We speak now for this reason: The government's relation to marriage has not only become a prominent political issue but also one in which religious communities have been engaged, and we find virtually no religious voice speaking for the basic equality we take to be essential to democratic justice. As religious people seeking equal treatment of heterosexual and same-sex couples, we call on the US Senate in general and Senators Durbin and Fitzgerald in particular to vote against the Federal Marriage Amendment when it comes to a vote in the next week.

Protestants for the Common Good seeks to relate Christian faith to politics, and this statement is concerned with same-sex marriage as a political issue. It is not intended to tell any religious community what form or forms of intimate relationships it should sanction or consider sacred for its members. We focus only on the government's responsibility to treat all persons equally under the law. However, our convictions regarding equality and justice stem from our religious values. From our perspective, God calls us to work for democracy at its best, in a society where we all live together as equals for the sake of the common good.

Our statement accomplishes four goals: first, it opposes a constitutional amendment defining marriage, because this amendment would violate the purpose of a democratic constitution. The constitution should set a framework of rights and procedures essential to government by all the people, where laws and policies are determined through full and free debate. Thus, the constitution should not include any substantive political decision, only the structure under which those decisions is made—just as Robert's Rules of Order should not settle any matter belonging to the business of a meeting. Because this amendment would circumvent the democratic process, we believe it to be anti-democratic.

Second, the statement restates a basic principle for democratic laws: Unless some compelling public good is served, the laws should not treat people differently based on differences about which they have no choice, and such discrimination is especially suspect when the disfavored group has been otherwise abused. Differences in sexual orientation, at least typically, are not the result of relevant choices individuals have made, and gays and lesbians have been widely harassed.

Third, the statement discusses the arguments others have advanced for why privileged standing for heterosexual marriage serves a compelling public good—and finds them all unconvincing.

Finally, the statement concludes that the civil order should treat heterosexual and same-sex couples equally; any privileges and immunities given to the one should be given to the other.

We hope that our focus on the demands of justice will help resolve this question, and we welcome responses to the statement. For our part, however, the opportunity to live together as democratic equals is a divine gift to be cherished and protected.