

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Award-Winning Supporter of Gay Rights:
Coretta Scott King

BY DR. G. PENNY NIXON

With the passing of Mrs. Coretta Scott King, we have lost not only a woman who stayed in the struggle for freedom but also a leader who embodied the ideals and true values of that freedom.

And in her passing, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community has lost an advocate and an ally. Mrs. King's vision of freedom deliberately – and sometimes controversially – included her advocacy for the rights and equality of the LGBT community.

In November of 2002, I met Mrs. King when she made a rare trip to San Francisco to accept our Circles of Hope award from the Metropolitan Community Foundation. The award honors outstanding contributions to the advancement of LGBT civil rights. People from every walk of life, from within and beyond the LGBT community, came out to honor her. The gala crowd was as diverse as any I have seen in San Francisco. Patti LaBelle appeared and sang in tribute to her.

Mrs. King had this to say on that unforgettable evening:
"I accept this award as a reaffirmation of my commitment to challenge all forms of discrimination and persecution and to do everything I can to help make our democracy more inclusive, because none of us can be free, until all of us are free...and I accept this award with heartfelt appreciation for my lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers who are working for human rights and social progress for people of all races."

Mrs. King's unparalleled and dignified grace framed her life of love and justice at every turn. As the American flag flies at half mast, it is a sad irony that the America she dreamed of and worked for is dissolving day by day as our liberties are being eroded. On the day of her passing, the President paid brief homage to her in his State of the Union address, and Judge Samuel Alito was sworn in as a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. As the political environment continues to endanger civil rights and personal freedom, I am already missing the voice Mrs. King brought to the public conversation. Even as



I mourn her death, I will call on her inspiration to light the darkest days and work for the vision she held so fiercely.

Here are a few more perspectives Mrs. King shared with us at Circles of Hope:
"It seems to me that true Homeland Security ought to be more about providing health-care for every citizen and less about reshuffling bureaucratic agencies and undermining our civil liberties. True Homeland Security should be about protection of pension assets for retired people. Genuine Homeland Security should also be about gun control, protecting Americans against domestic hate crimes, and getting serious about reducing the pollution of our air and water."

She went on to say:
"Homeland Security should mean feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and making sure there is quality education for every child and a job at a decent wage for everyone who wants and needs one...and that's how we make our coun-

try safe and secure for all citizens. And so I accept this Circles of Hope award with a renewed commitment to address these challenges and to work for a society where all citizens can live together in justice, equality and peace."

"In closing, I just want to say that I'm proud to stand with all of you, as your sister, in a great new American coalition for freedom and human rights. With this faith and this commitment we will create the beloved community of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream, where all people can live together in a spirit of trust and understanding, harmony, love and peace. Thank you and God bless you all."

Her words reach across time in a prophetic call to us all. Thank you, and God bless you, Mrs. King. ▼

➔ The Reverend Dr. G. Penny Nixon is Senior Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco

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