

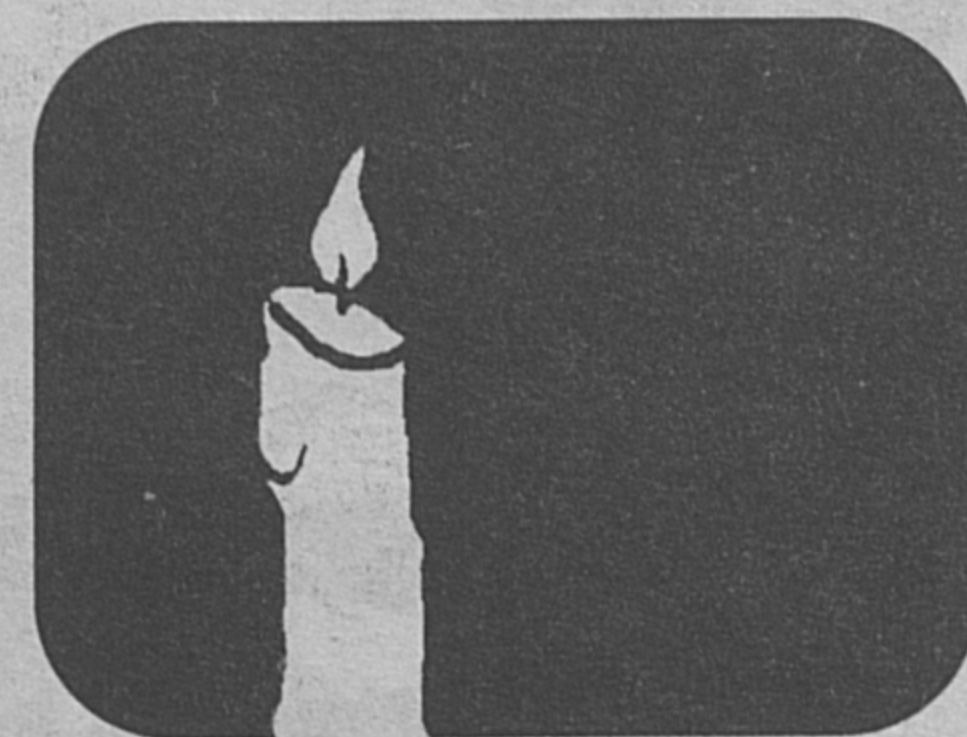
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COUNSELING CENTER OF NORTHERN VERMONT

**B**elow are two statements I hope give you a sense of just how many people of faith are in favor of same-gender marriage in Vermont.

The first is a letter that my partner, the Rev. Martha Dyson, and I helped 12 other Vermont clergy write. It was read on our behalf by the Rev. Gary Kowalski at the first House Judiciary Committee hearing on January 25.

At that time, 84 clergy from around the state had signed the letter that was given to the committee members. The signatures now number over 100.

I am pleased to tell you that these signatures include those of the Rt. Rev. Mary Adelia McLeod, Episcopal Bishop of Vermont; the Rev. Arnold Thomas, Conference Minister, Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ/Congregational; and the Rt. Rev. Susan Morrison, Bishop of the Troy Conference of the United Methodist Church.

This amazing letter reads as follows:

**Interfaith Clergy Statement on Same-Gender Marriage**

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." [Song of Songs 8:7]

"As religious leaders from a wide range of faith traditions, we believe that marriage can only be strengthened by extending our understanding of marriage to include the faithful committed relationships of same-gender couples. Since marriage involves taking on responsibilities as well as receiving privileges, we support same-gender couples who choose to enter into such a commitment. We believe that human beings are called to live in right relationship with each other and with God.

Therefore legalizing marriage for same-gender couples will build community, support the well-being of children and families, and promote the common good. We agree that when two women or two men make a loving commitment to one another and wish to assume the responsibilities of marriage, they exemplify a moral good which cannot be represented by so-called registered partnership. We support

the Vermont legislature's passage of a bill that legalizes same-gender marriage."

The second item I have included for you is the statement I wrote and submitted to the House Judiciary Committee on February 2, when religious leaders in Vermont were invited to testify before the House Judiciary Committee.

"To the esteemed members of the Vermont House Judiciary Committee:

"As a child, I was taught to say a pledge of allegiance every morning that led me to believe I live in a republic that is one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. To propose legislation that would not legalize same-gender marriage for same-gender couples in Vermont would violate the promise of this pledge and continue to violate the civil rights of gay and lesbian couples who deserve access to the same rights and privileges granted now only to opposite-gender couples.

"Many here in the state of Vermont and around this country, who learned the same pledge of allegiance that I did, and who love and serve the same God I do, would have us believe otherwise. They would have us believe that gay and lesbian people are objectively disordered and inclined to intrinsically evil acts when we love someone of the same gender out of the authenticity of our genetic and God-given makeup.

"Ironically, were Jesus himself here to speak to you today, I believe he would testify in support of same-gender marriage. I also believe he would have been among those in Northern California in 1981, who made it possible for me to be the first lesbian to be openly ordained in my mainline Protestant denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

"It has not escaped me that Jesus challenged the religious and cultural traditions of his day. In fact, the ancient Jewish holiness code found in Leviticus, that is often used to condemn those of us who are gay and lesbian, is the very same set of scriptural laws that Jesus challenged when he pre-

vented a woman caught in adultery from being stoned to death; when he ate and drank with tax collectors; when he healed the "unclean" sick and insane with his touch; and when he proclaimed that loving, human relationships take precedence over rituals and rules that exclude and oppress.

"The exclusivity in the ancient, Jewish holiness code, or "cleanliness" code, was designed to set Jews apart from their neighbors and to keep them "clean" for participation in the temple Judaism, which has not existed for over 2000 years. These religious laws were designed to keep the ancient Jews holy but not necessarily moral. They are religious laws that even the most orthodox Jews living today do not abide by in their entirety. To use the ancient Jewish holiness code as grounds for defining that which is moral and good today is a misinterpretation of the intent of these scriptures and an injustice that continues to wound and cripple many gay and lesbian people.

"Jesus did the right thing to challenge the religious laws and traditions that did not serve God's people well. The courageous, loving inclusivity with which he lived his life cost him his life. Apparently being such a person was worth dying for.

"Doing the right thing usually does not please the privileged status quo. You may face similar rejection and even death threats should you vote to legalize same gender marriage in Vermont. However, should you vote to legalize same-gender marriage you will uphold the pledge of allegiance, you will uphold your own integrity as justice makers, and you will join a mighty cloud of faithful witnesses that stretches from here to eternity." ▼

The Rev. Christine Leslie, cofounder and director of Triangle Ministries, A Center Lesbian & Gay Spiritual Development near Burlington, is available for individual and couple counseling, retreat and workshop leadership. Reach her at 802-860-7106 or email her at revcsl@aol.com