



Remarks of Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, IWR and faith work director of the Task Force, at the No on Prop. 8 rally in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Saturday, Nov. 15, 2008

My partner, Maggie, and I were married in San Francisco on July 4th of this year.

The day was foggy and cool for the beginning of July. But the setting was beautiful, and moving. There was a small waterfall behind us. We were enveloped with pine trees and large stones and small pink flowering bushes.

And next to us was the plaque that marked the spot as a memorial to the Japanese Americans who had been interned during World War II. It said, in part, that this garden had been built so that all would remember the power of injustice to harm and the importance of justice to heal.

In the midst of this beauty, and calling upon the witness of those whose spirit had inspired the garden's construction, Maggie and I held our toddler daughter, Shannon, and made vows to one another.

The service lifted up the reality that our ability to love, cherish and grow as partners is directly related to the love we have known from God, from our families, in the midst of our churches and from our community. And the responsibilities we have, because of our marriage, aren't just to one another. Saying yes to love means, for us, that we have the responsibility to act out of that love in all aspects of our lives: we must act in love with our daughter. We must act in love with our families, with our churches, with our communities. And, yes, we must act with love and justice as citizens of this nation and this world.

It is precisely because of this understanding of my responsibilities as a married partner to Maggie and as a Christian pastor, that I stand before you today.

While Maggie and I were making our vows to one another, so were thousands of other couples across the State of California. In total, between June 16th and November 4th, somewhere between 15,000 and 18,000 LGBT couples vowed to root their lives in commitment and love.

And, oh how our world needs that kind of joy and energy.

In that same period, June 16th-Nov. 4th, over 2500 people were killed in Iraq¹. In that same period, June 16th-Nov. 4th, six million children died of starvation or other preventable and treatable causes². Not to mention Darfur and Afghanistan — the list goes on and on.

Our world desperately needs the forces of love and justice — as present in the intimate lives of two people who love each other and in all the ways that love calls on us to love community, nation and world.

¹ Iraq Body Count statistic

² Bread for the World statistic

But instead of using the love and justice we have known and witnessed in California as an inspiration to stop the war in Iraq or feed starving children, many of my fellow Christians have put their spiritual energy into taking away the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons to marry the person they love. Think of what \$73 million, and all that spiritual energy could have done in our broken world.

My friends, I stand before you to say four things:

First, as a Christian, I am sorry. I am sorry that the great tradition of Jesus Christ has been used, not as a beacon of transformation and love, but as a weapon of hate and division. There is no other word to use but sinful to describe this. And we are all the poorer because of it.

Second, know that there are people of good faith — religious and spiritual leaders from every tradition — that stand with us today all over this country. Our struggle — for justice and equality — is a deeply spiritual struggle and we are supported by the core of every religious tradition in our land.

Third, we must not allow the temptation of racism to lessen the power of our struggle. Too much energy has gone into erroneous reports that the vote in California happened because of the votes of African Americans. This is simply not true.³ Polls showing African Americans voting in higher numbers for Prop 8 have been proven to be faulty. We must remember that our struggle will be successful only and when we recognize that LGBT equality is bound up with every other struggle for justice.

And finally, do not give up hope. Because, just as the crowd in Grant Park on that Tuesday evening two weeks ago attests: when we work non-violently for that which is just and right, we will be rewarded because God's universe always bends toward justice.

May God bless each and every one of us this day with this hope.

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel
IWR and Faith Work Director
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

³ Dr. Fernando Guerra of Loyola's Levy Center found that, unlike other polls with much smaller samples who reported 70% of African Americans voted in favor of Prop 8, only 57% of African Americans actually voted for Prop 8—only slightly different than other groups. Instead, the number one factor in voting in favor of Prop 8 was religious attendance—with those with higher attendance being far more likely to vote in favor of Prop 8 than those with less or no attendance.