

July 27, 2003

The Honourable Martin Cauchon
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
284 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0H8

RE: Equal Marriage for Same-Sex Couples

Dear Mr. Cauchon:

On behalf of the Canadian Unitarian Council, all of our congregations, fellowships and individual members across Canada, I would like to thank you sincerely for your leadership in the legislative area of Equal Marriage. Because of the basic principles and beliefs of Unitarians, our denomination has advocated forcefully for full and equal marriage rights for all Canadians, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We believe that your proposed legislation will achieve exactly that; nothing more and nothing less.

Because the majority of Canadians, when polled, repeatedly state their support for full equality rights for everyone, we have faith that your legislation will receive the support it deserves from the majority of MPs in almost all political parties. However, it's puzzling to us that your government has announced its intention to have a "free vote" on the matter rather than presenting it as government policy. It appears that the only free votes in the last nine years of Liberal government have been allowed solely for bills relating to sexual orientation. That pattern of lukewarm government support for sexual minorities in Canada disappoints us.

When your proposed legislation makes its way to the House of Commons, after the Supreme Court returns its reference, there will almost certainly be a very public and determined effort by some religious groups to persuade MPs (including many Liberals) to defeat it. Their arguments will probably focus on two key themes: (a) Defence of Marriage, and (b) Freedom of Religion.

With respect to "Defence of Marriage" it's quite obvious that marriage needs no defence, when there are now so many more couples seeking to enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of legal marriage. Yes, the definition of eligibility will be expanded, but that shall serve only to make the institution more popular and stronger, not one bit weaker!

"Freedom of Religion" is a notion that is sometimes, and erroneously, interpreted to mean "the freedom to have our religious beliefs trump yours." True Freedom of Religion (i) allows all individuals to choose their own religious affiliation, if any, and (ii) allows each religious/faith group to abide by its own principles and beliefs. In the case of Equal Marriage, we would respect the right of some other faith groups to not support or perform such marriages, and we would expect that they show our denomination the same respect for our wish to follow our deeply held beliefs in this matter.

Please do not be deterred or swayed from your purpose of seeing this legislation through to Final Reading. If you counter the negative arguments with the same reason and eloquence you have recently displayed, you should be successful. All lesbian and gay, transgender and transsexual Canadians will thank you and respect you, as will all Canadian Unitarians.

Sincerely, and respectfully,



Elizabeth Bowen
President, Canadian Unitarian Council

AFFILIATIONS

International Council of Unitarians and Universalists
Unitarian Universalist Association
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
International Association for Religious Freedom

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