

Same-sex marriage support a sign of love, acceptance and devotion to God

+ Add to list

By Rev. Brad Braxton

May 16, 2012

The author is a contributor to The Washington Post's faith leader network.

As an African-American theologian at a research university in Texas, a heterosexual ally of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people, and the Senior Pastor of a progressive, [socially diverse Christian congregation](#) in Maryland, I applaud President Obama's recent [endorsement of marriage equality](#). Same-sex couples should enjoy the privileges and bear the responsibilities of committed, covenant relationships just like heterosexual couples. Additionally, Christian congregations should [bless same-sex marriages](#) as a fulfillment of the church's pastoral task and an endorsement of God's eternal devotion to abundant life and holy love.

Enabling [constructive encounters](#) with diversity is a primary pastoral task of religious congregations. Apart from diversity, the pursuit of truth becomes an idolatrous affair of a community worshipping its limited perspectives, and the practice of love becomes egotistical self-adoration. By welcoming diversity in the embodied presence of others — in this case LGBT persons and couples — [congregations](#) enhance their capacity to offer truth and love.

The door leading to godly truth often swings on the hinges of [social diversity](#). Even the Bible was the result of complex debates spanning thousands of years and involving many languages, diverse cultures, and a host of political decisions about which books to admit and omit. The [plurality of voices](#) in scripture reveals a clear biblical message—sacred truth demands diverse perspectives. In his book “Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World”, the pastoral theologian [Emmanuel Lartey](#) celebrates diversity's role in truth-making: “Truth, knowledge, and justice are not attained in solitary thought....Truth involves...a basic act such as engaging in dialogue with the Other....To practice truth is to welcome the Other.”

Similarly, the pastoral task of “making love” requires an affirmation of diversity. The phrase “making love” should not be reduced exclusively to erotic activity. Making love is the mission of the church. The Apostle Paul's beautiful love hymn reminds the church of its love-making mandate: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal....Love is patient; love is kind....Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:1, 4, 8). This hymn entices believers to embrace genuine love — the compassionate concern for others that transcends sheer self-interest and removes the fear of people who differ from us.

Imagine how much more *care-full* Christian congregations would be if they caressed people with Paul's gracious words about love in 1 Corinthians 13 instead of battering them with his ungenerous words about gays and lesbians in Romans 1. Furthermore, our neglect of another biblical "love note" has diminished our love life: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

In her book "All about Love: New Visions," the cultural critic [bell hooks](#) observes: "Fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination....When we are taught that safety lies always with sameness, then difference, of any kind, will appear as a threat. When we choose to love we choose to move against fear — against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect — to find ourselves in the other." Diversity is crucial for pursuing truth and making love. Consequently, there is no more pressing pastoral task than teaching people how to encounter diversity without the fear and fanaticism that terminate dialogue and destroy difference.

In my experience, familiarity with loved ones or LGBT persons who are open about their sexual identity (i.e. "out" LGBT persons) significantly contribute to the development of more [inclusive perspectives](#) regarding [sexual differences](#). While academic study facilitated my journey toward inclusive theology, the decisive moments involved friendships with "out" LGBT persons who challenged and expanded my theological and cultural boundaries. Warm relationships, not cold logic, transformed me.

For example, at the covenant ceremony of two lesbian friends in Atlanta in 1996, the presence of grace and holiness in that ceremony and later at their dinner table was undeniable. Additionally, during my first pastorate in Baltimore, a gay friend and parishioner accepted my invitation to join the church's leadership team. His anointed leadership and winsome personality transformed the congregation's worship life and community outreach. Witnessing his powerful ministry, I realized that right "heart orientation," not straight sexual orientation, is God's requirement for service in the church. I now also firmly believe that what makes a marriage "sacred" in God's eyes is not the gender of the couple but the couple's ability to generate sacred love that is the antidote for the hostility and hate that fill our world.

As a professor of ministers in training, I will continue to teach students to embrace inclusive love. As the Senior Pastor of [The Open Church](#) in Baltimore, I will continue to encourage congregants to be radically open to the sacred beauty of social diversity. This means that when I preside at the altar at The Open Church, that altar is open enough to also bless same-sex couples as they journey along their pathway toward God, the ultimate source of life and love.

Rev. Dr. Brad Braxton is the founding Senior Pastor of [The Open Church](#) in Baltimore, Md. and effective June 1, 2012, the Lois Craddock Perkins Professor of Homiletics at [Southern Methodist University](#).

 **7 Comments**