**Love is Love: Why Marriage & Adoption Should Be Legal for All People**

As of August 29, 2012 eight states have legalized gay marriage, with Maryland signing legislation legalizing the act on March 1, 2012 to be effective January 1, 2013. Since Massachusetts made gay marriage legal on May 17, 2004 there has been an outcry from the conservative sector regarding the decay of the moral fiber of America. But not just moral decay; the change in legislation was to have marked the end of traditional family values, with power-hungry leather-clad gays running amok in the streets, bent on turning a nation of God-fearing heterosexuals into depraved, amoral deviants.

Ironically for the religious right, what *has* happened is that Massachusetts and the other states that legalized gay marriage have actually seen a decrease in the divorce rate in their states. The legislation seems to have led not to the predicted and expected anarchy but instead to a stabilizing force in marital values and rightly so. The desire among gay couples to have the same rights as straight couples has been a prevailing force for decades. Love, stability, family; these are not just perks and benefits belonging to male-female couples, and they should not be the sole property of heterosexuals. Everyone is entitled to the same rights of equality given us by the framers of the Constitution.

There is an attitude among detractors of equal marriage laws that the only reason for marriage is for procreation. If this were truly the case there would be laws in place preventing infertile couples from being able to marry. Fertility tests would be a common precursor to issuance of a marriage license. This “logic” should be seen for what it truly is – a thinly veiled cover for bigotry and discriminatory attitudes toward those who don’t “deserve” to marry.

Protecting the rights of the members of gay and lesbian relationships is yet another compelling reason to institute equal marriage laws in every state. As it stands now, individual states can create their own laws regarding partner recognition and benefits but this does not translate to the more lucrative Federal benefits that many gay and lesbian couples are being denied. There have been far too many instances in which a partner dies or becomes critically ill or disabled and all decision making is taken away from the healthy or surviving partner, as well as the lack of survivor benefits. Healthcare coverage, something heterosexual married couples take for granted, is yet another benefit denied gay and lesbian couples because of the lack of nationwide equal marriage laws being enacted.

Then there are those detractors who would cite the “immorality” of the government for making them spend their tax dollars on issues about which they do not agree. This too is a cover for bigoted attitudes. The government currently spends millions on the Defense budget, something which many people consider immoral. Yet there isn’t the same level of outcry being heard about military spending on an unjust war in the Middle East as there is about a couple who are in love and want to spend their lives together and oh, by the way, just happen to be the same sex.

Achieving total equality in marriage is only the first hurdle though. Within most loving couples exists the desire to share and expand that love with a family. As equal marriage rights increase so too should adoption laws. The rights of gay and lesbian couples to adopt children should be an absolute given. To those opponents of such measures, consider the statistics. Children raised by two mothers have actually been shown to perform better scholastically and to be more well-adjusted than their peers in “traditional” family settings, while children raised by two fathers have shown to perform just as well scholastically and to be as well-adjusted as their more “traditional” peers.

Yet there seems to be a preponderance of doubt surrounding the adoption issue. Many states have legislated preferential adoption laws for heterosexual couples or even for singles wanting to adopt. This is an archaic attitude; surely children will always be better off with more people to care for them, yet states such as Michigan and North Carolina have yet to grasp this concept, as it is easier for a single person to adopt a child in these states than it is for a gay or lesbian couple.

The time to step out of the Dark Ages and into the enlightened times in which we are supposedly living is now. Equal marriage laws and equal adoption laws are the right, moral and just things to support. Love is love; parenthood is parenthood, regardless of sexuality. These two positive institutions are basic human rights to which everyone has a right, not just heterosexuals. Supporting politicians and organizations that promote equality, as well as educating people to overcome prejudice and ignorance are the most important steps that we can take to ensure equal rights for all people to love whom they choose to love and to be able to express that love by being committed, by being recognized and acknowledged and by being allowed to become a whole, loving family.