



PRESS RELEASE

CONGREGATION KOL AMI SAYS COURT RULING TO UPHOLD PROPOSITION-8 IS A SET-BACK FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS RIGHTS FOR EVERYONE

--Rabbi Denise L. Eger, President of the Pacific Association of Reform Rabbis, Says the Ballot Box Does Not Determine the Make-up of Families—

West Hollywood, CA – May 26, 2009 -- Congregation Kol Ami, a Reform Jewish congregation serving the diverse community of West Hollywood, today declared a day of mourning to mark the State Supreme Court Ruling denying marriage equality to gay and lesbian partners in California. The Court ruled to uphold Proposition 8, passed in November 2008, narrowly defining marriage as between a man and a woman. The decision overturns the Court's own ruling a year ago that said the state Constitution requires equal treatment of gay and lesbian couples.

"Civil rights should be determined by law not religious doctrine. When courts allow the government to affirm one religious view over another, all religious beliefs are in jeopardy," said Rabbi Denise L. Eger, spiritual leader of Congregation Kol Ami and president of the Pacific Association of Reform Rabbis. "We respect the beliefs of those people whose faith teaches marriage is between a man and a woman, and we respect their rights to practice those beliefs within their religious institutions. However, our faith teaches marriage is open to gay and lesbian couples. Where is the respect for our beliefs, and if our faith can be trampled by the government, whose beliefs can be trampled next?"

The Court let stand the approximately 18,000 marriages for same-sex couples that have already been licensed. Nevertheless, Congregation Kol Ami says as long as marriage is a civil institution licensed by the state, it is a right that must be available to all citizens. The Congregation says California is now an apartheid state—where some gay and lesbian couples, 18,000 of them, are married, and the rest can no longer obtain this right and responsibility.

Rabbi Eger added, "We must change history. Five states (Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Iowa) and the District of Columbia have all affirmed that equal protection means equal access for both same and opposite sex couples to both the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage. The Supreme Court of California ruled as such last May. California was subject to a campaign of deceit, lies and distortions by the Yes-on-8 political machine, and the ballot box is no place to take away these rights."

The Congregation expressed sorrow for the families, friends and colleagues of gay and lesbian couples who had weddings planned. The Congregation will continue to perform religious weddings in accordance with Reform Jewish teachings, and will join interfaith efforts to return the issue to the people of California during the next election cycle.

Information about planned meetings, protests and rallies can be found on the Congregation Website, www.kol-ami.org.

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