

Same-Sex Marriage Bill Signed in a Church

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Last Friday, two historic events occurred. A signing ceremony for DC's same-sex marriage law and a blizzard that blanketed the Northeast and left everyone in the capital physically isolated except for the almost-too-frequent weather updates on TV and Radio. Ironically, the two events bore a strange similarity.

Their similarity was the level of local media coverage along with the real sense of isolation that most citizens felt. We either trust in both these situations that "big brother" is looking out for us or we become concerned and questioning.

Concerning the snowstorm, my one-year-old, 4-wheel drive proved to be a great investment. I was at the mercy of no one. Owning a vehicle like this left me feeling in control and safe despite the 15 plus inches that fell around my apartment. Concerning the city council decision, thousands of people like myself felt that they were simply at the mercy of the city government. Although I had no immediate vehicle to ride like the one I referenced concerning the snowstorm, the feeling of helplessness was only temporary. I reminded myself that even though DC sometimes runs like a banana republic or third world jurisdiction, the democratic process has built in checks and balances available for the people.

After the signing ceremony, several television stations asked me the obvious questions: How did you feel? What are your next steps? The first question was easy to answer. I felt that the people of the District had been disenfranchised and that the biggest real losers in this political drama could possibly be the children of the next generation. I was not upset or angry, but I was definitely disappointed in the leadership of the city. Intellectually, I was not surprised. Emotionally, I was appalled at the cynical staging of the signing. It was more like a PR stunt. Holding the signing in a church when the council, with the exception of Marion Barry and Yvette Alexander, had ignored the voices of both prominent African-American churches and the powerful Roman Catholic Archdiocese seemed disingenuous at best.

I could not help but think of the hypocrisy of the city council that had the audacity to call their new law, DC Marriage Equality and Religious Liberty. This terminology has become the typical way such laws are introduced around the country.

The proposed law gives anything but religious liberty. For Bible believing congregations, the law undermines the very foundational concept of marriage. In fact thousands of people around the city found the gesture and symbolism of using a church as being the ultimate insult. It is obvious to anyone who has just cursorily looked at it. Naturally, the lawmakers cite 200 hundred clergy (many from the same churches) as a sign that there is some kind of major debate over marriage in Christian circles. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The words of Pastors Dennis and Christine Wiley of Covenant Baptist Church printed in the Sunday Washington Post tell the true story of religious freedom and same-sex marriage in DC. "Our church is the

first and only traditional black church in the District of Columbia to perform same-sex unions. We conducted our first two union ceremonies, one gay and one lesbian, in the summer of 2007. The rapid political developments that followed in our nation and our city have made us optimistic that by the summer of 2010, same-sex nuptials will be not only blessed by churches such as ours, but also sanctioned by law in the District.”

In the folklore of our city, especially the church community, they remember the days that Bishop McCollough of the United House of Prayer had enough clout to come out of his prayer closet and give a midnight endorsement that changed the direction of a city wide election; placing David Clarke into council chairmanship. Others remember that the city council wanted to move the Bible Way Church from their prominent New York Avenue location by invoking eminent domain. After Bible Way Church, who were also the local organizers of Martin Luther King, Jr's 1963 March on Washington, fasted and prayed, the city suddenly repented of its actions and decided to create what is now known as the Bible Way bend that takes commuters onto I-395.

The lesson the church must take from the boldness of the city council is that we must be prayerful activists. In a democracy, both are needed.

What's next?