

*Bishop Fitzpatrick sent the following letter about marriage equality to the Governor, the President of the State Senate and the Speaker of the State House of Representatives. It was also sent as an email to all the Senators and Representatives.*

September 2, 2013  
The Birthday of Queen Lili‘uokalani

The Honorable Neil Abercrombie, Governor of Hawai‘i

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, President of the Senate,  
and Members of the Senate

The Honorable Joseph M. Souki, Speaker of the House of Representatives,  
and Members of the House

Hawai‘i State Capitol  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Aloha Governor Abercrombie, Senator Kim and members of the Senate, and Speaker Souki and members of the House of Representatives:

I write this morning having just walked the few yards between Washington Place and my office on the second floor of the Cathedral of St. Andrew. I was at Washington Place to offer the pule for Queen Lili‘uokalani’s birthday (historically, the Episcopal Bishop was the Queen’s pastor in the last years of her life). As I left Washington Place and looked up at the Capitol, I was reminded again of the important responsibility on your shoulders. Thank you for your service to the people of Hawai‘i.

I write as the Episcopal Bishop of Hawai‘i regarding the important discussion before you regarding full civil marriage benefits to same-sex couples. I also write as a citizen and as a Christian pastor. I appreciate that the Governor has provided State legislators a marriage bill drafted by the state Attorney General that can be the basis of legislation to allow for marriage of same-sex couples in Hawai‘i. I hope that marriage equality will soon be a reality in our Islands.

I am a signatory of the “Religious Leaders Support the Freedom to Marry in Hawai‘i” statement recently issued by interfaith leaders of our State. In the statement, we affirmed that “the freedom of every citizen to practice his/her religion is based on the principle of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of each individual.” As a citizen of Hawai‘i, I think the extension of the right to marry to all consenting adult couples is an important evolution in our common life as a civil society and an acknowledgement of our broadened understanding of the human condition. It is because marriage is a public institution sanctioned by the state and afforded unique legal protection that the extension of this right to same-sex couples is an issue of justice. Thank you for your leadership in working to extend this right in Hawai‘i.

As a Bishop of the Episcopal Church, I am part of a Christian tradition that has been engaging the social, cultural and theological issues of inclusion for some time. For more than thirty years, the Episcopal Church (including the Diocese of Hawai‘i) has been responding to the call to seek and serve Christ in its members who are gay and lesbian. In 1976, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirmed that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.” Since then, we have been in a Churchwide discernment process about how we live out that resolution. Some congregations and their clergy have welcomed same-sex couples and offered liturgical blessings of their relationships, and some dioceses have developed guidelines for such blessings. In Hawai‘i, clergy have been allowed to officiate at and bless Civil Unions since January 1, 2012 in our churches. The General Convention of The Episcopal Church held in Indianapolis in July 2012 authorized the use of *Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be A Blessing*, a teaching and liturgical resource for such blessings.

Finally, I would like to share my reflections as a Christian pastor. I have been ordained for twenty-seven years and have now been Bishop of Hawai‘i since 2007 (before that I was the executive officer for the previous Bishop of this Diocese). Same-sex couples have been part of nearly every congregation I have served in those years. Now as Bishop, I am blessed to serve with clergy in same-sex relationships. The households of these couples have often included children from previous relationships, adopted children and grandchildren. These families have their share of stress and conflict, but no more than other families. These families have nurtured healthy, well-adjusted children. This may be because the families have been formed in an environment of faithfulness, mutuality and acceptance. That, I hope, can be true of all couples and families. These couples and families have helped me to see marriage as the legal union of two adult, competent persons who are bonded in a permanent, sexually exclusive friendship. Further I have concluded that when, in addition, a couple makes a public act of commitment before God and the fellowship of Disciples, seeking God’s blessing on the relationship that this can be an honest expression (in addition to that of voluntary celibacy) of the Christian moral standard of human sexuality. As you are leaders in civil society and of the government, I entrust you with setting the course ensuring a full and equal “legal union” for all the citizens of our State.

I come from a Christian tradition that values Scripture, Tradition and Reason. We tend not to instruct our members on how to vote or even how to respond to elected leaders. Frankly, most Episcopalians would find such overt direction rather insulting. We don’t always agree on this issue or on others. I strive to teach members of the Episcopal Church to reflect theologically on any presenting issue, seeking to respect the dignity of every human being and loving our neighbors as ourselves. I also know too well that Christians from other traditions will not agree with what I have written and will, in fact, find it disheartening. For that, I am saddened.

With this in mind, and understanding that all may not agree, I ask that you act together to make marriage equality a reality in Hawai‘i as soon as possible.

Please know that this is sent with my respect for your service to our community and with my prayer:

*Almighty God our heavenly Father, send down upon those who hold office in our State of Hawai'i the spirit of wisdom, charity, and justice; that with steadfast purpose they may faithfully serve in their offices to promote the well-being of all people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Faithfully yours,

Robert L. Fitzpatrick,  
Bishop