

**RELIGIOUS LEADERS
OPPOSED TO
AMENDMENT 2**

FLORIDA CLERGY FOR FAIRNESS

October, 2008

A Statement of Opposition to Amendment 2

As clergy members from a broad spectrum of religious traditions we hold diverse views regarding marriage. However, we are united in our opposition to amending the Florida Constitution to define marriage.

We share a serious concern that proposed Amendment 2, which will appear on the November 4 ballot would infringe on religious liberty. We believe that marriage decisions should be left to couples, their clergy, and their religious beliefs — not the State of Florida.

Thoughtful people of faith can and do disagree on the issue of marriage. Florida's many religious traditions reflect this diversity of opinion, as do we who sign this letter. But we respect the right of each religious group to decide, based on its own religious teachings, whether or not to sanction marriage of same-sex couples. It is surely not the government's role to prefer one religious definition of marriage over another, much less to codify such a preference in the Florida Constitution. To the contrary: the great contribution of our Constitution is to ensure religious liberty for all.

Some argue that a constitutional amendment is necessary to ensure that clergy and faith groups will never be forced to recognize marriages of same-sex couples against their will. This argument is unfounded. Such coercion is already expressly forbidden by Article I, Section 3 of the Florida Constitution, which requires church-state separation and enshrines the right to the free exercise of religion. This is all the protection of religious autonomy — and of religious marriage — our state needs.

Our nation's founders adopted the First Amendment and our state's founders adopted the same protections in our Constitution precisely because they understood the dangers of allowing government to have control over religious doctrine and decisions. It is this commitment to religious freedom that has allowed religious practice and pluralism to flourish.. If this freedom is to be maintained, we must respect the rights of faith communities to apply their own religious teachings and values to the issue of marriage. It is surely not the business of the Florida Constitution to assert control over the doctrine and practice of our faith communities.

Amendment 2 would undermine religious liberty. Florida's religious communities do not support this amendment. As leaders of these communities, we pledge to vote no on Amendment 2 and urge you to join us.

Among signatures: The Rev. Richard T. Nolan, Ph.D.