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Statement to the Press

It is my privilege to join Sen. Leach, and millions of other people of faith in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in supporting Senate Bill 935 which would grant full and equal marriage rights to gay and lesbian citizens in our state. Sen. Leach has shown clarity of moral vision and deep courage of conviction in introducing this important legislation to remedy an injustice in our society and he has my unwavering support of his leadership.

As a person of deep personal religious conviction and the leader of a community of faith, I believe that this bill challenges us to live up to the highest ideals of our American democracy and plumb the depths of our hearts – the depth of our spirits – to act in the name of love and justice.

I understand that some religious voices in opposition to this bill argue that marriage is between a man and a woman, its purpose is the procreation of children, and its social standing in our culture is based on the Bible. I honor marriage, support family values, and hold the Bible in high regard. However, I believe that we can take the Bible seriously without taking it literally.

The great intellectual idea that Judaism introduced to western civilization is the idea of a just society; a society that keeps covenant with God by treating its neighbors with dignity and respect. The Book of Leviticus, oft cited by opponents of gay marriage, instructs us “you shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor . . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

And it is love that lies at the core of the Christian message . . . not love for some people, but for all people. I believe that we are called to embody – through our sometimes flawed, frail, and faltering human lives – a Great Love that embraces all humanity, all of the world . . . God’s love. It is an unconditional love that enfolds all people, not just those of a particular religion or sexual orientation, and it is an enduring love that will not let us go; a love that beckons us toward healing, hope, wholeness, and holiness.

The bill before the Senate is about making ours a more just society by granting full human and civil rights to all our fellow citizens. These citizens are parents of children, they are our co-workers, in some case they are our flesh and blood family members, but – in every case – they are our neighbors, and we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and to treat people as we would wish to be treated ourselves.

Every congregation that I have ever served as a minister has had gay and lesbian members. Among them have been some of the most stalwart and faithful lay-leaders with whom I have ever labored in ministry. I can tell you that they want no special treatment, no special protections, they just want to be able to create, support, and enjoy happy family lives . . . and they want the state to provide their families with the same legal protections that every other family enjoys. Friends, I want that for them too.

Some who speak out on this issue will invoke God, even as they deliver messages of fear. They will tell you that society will collapse if this bill becomes law. Do not believe them. We have nothing to fear in acting justly in the name of love. In fact, that is precisely what faith calls us to do.

Fellow citizens, I ask you to join with me in supporting Senator Leach and Bill 935 and in so doing, I invite you to help me – help us all – make Pennsylvania a more just and more loving society.