

OPINION

Many Traditions are Oppressive and Unjust

Same-sex couples should be able to get married

BY REV. JAMES MOOS

"Tradition! Tradition!" sang Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof. He struggled to maintain family and religious traditions while outside influences encroached. In many ways, the current debate over marriage equality is a struggle over the meaning of tradition.

Recently President Obama publically stated his support for marriage equality. In an interview he said: "At a certain point I've just concluded that for me, personally, it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."



The President's personal support came on the heels of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals overturning of California's Proposition 8, thus preparing the way for the return of same sex marriage in that state. The court declared: "Proposition 8 served no purpose, and had no effect, other than to lessen the status and human dignity of gays and lesbians in California."

Polls now show that a majority of Americans are in favor of same sex marriage. While justice advocates give thanks that the tide is turning in favor of marriage equality, opponents redouble their efforts. Most often, they seek to uphold what they term "traditional family values." Which tradition are they speaking of? Certainly not the Biblical tradition which contains multiple patterns of marriage and family life, none of which bear close resemblance to June and Ward Cleaver of Leave it to Beaver fame. Polygamy, for example,

was practiced by many of the "giants" of the Biblical narrative.

Neither can it be said that the nuclear family is the "traditional" family. Throughout most of history and in many cultures today, the extended family is primary. Moreover, arranged marriages are more deeply rooted in "tradition" than unions based on romance—consider the "matchmaker" in Fiddler.

While traditions cannot be lightly dismissed, we must recognize that many traditions are oppressive and unjust. Slavery, male-only clergy and the exclusion of persons with different abilities were once "traditional" values and practices. It took long, hard efforts to overcome these barriers to equality and, in each case, there is still much work to do.

To label something as "traditional" has no reference to it being just. So too with what opponents of marriage equality refer to as "traditional family values."

The core values of our faith include

love, justice and an affirmation of the dignity of all persons. The Still Speaking God calls us to judge even our most cherished social norms in their light. That is what Jesus did when he critiqued and overturned rituals and practices that had been passed down from the time of Moses. Much to the dismay of the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus called into question the most sacred of traditions when they violated human dignity. Such is still our calling.

Marriage equality is not a denial, but an affirmation of family life. Does it challenge commonly held understandings of what constitutes a family? Yes. As Tevye discovered, however, sometimes we must let go of even our most entrenched traditions if we are to remain faithful to God and to one another.

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Summer Vacation and Empty Stomachs

Going hungry once school lets out

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Summertime can be a carefree, relaxing season filled with cookouts, backyard picnics, and trips to the ice cream truck.

But for too many kids, summer vacation means having an empty stomach. Child hunger and

food insecurity often peak during the long, hot break. At a time when food insecurity is so high, an overwhelming majority of American children who receive free or reduced-price meals at school go hungry once school lets out.



The federally funded Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program provide nutritious meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer months. Unfortunately, it's

"falling increasingly short of meeting the needs," according to the Food Research and Action Center.

Schools, local governments, sports programs, and private organizations that serve eligible children can all feed kids in summer school programs. But in July 2010, just 2.8 million children received lunch through the summer programs on an average day, the Food Research and Action Center found. That's only 15 low-income kids for every 100 who received lunch on an average day during the school year. By that measure, only one in seven children who needs summer food is getting it.

There simply aren't enough programs available to serve all the children who need them. The continuing fallout from the Great Recession has only made this worse as budget cuts have led many communities to slash funding for summer schools and summer youth programs, making opportunities for summer meals even more limited.

Some programs don't run for the whole summer, and there aren't enough eligible programs providing robust activities and services in addition to meals

that draw families in. Adding programs and services and keeping sites open longer could both reduce childhood hunger and help many communities create desperately needed jobs — a win-win. This should be a priority in communities across the country.

Even where summer feeding programs are in place, there isn't always enough outreach to let all eligible families know about them. In addition, these programs tend to be available for shorter and less regular hours than a normal school day, which limits participation. Transportation often isn't provided, so making these programs available where hungry children are is important. Some programs have had success providing mobile meals. That can be especially helpful in rural communities.

Many organizations that provide summer activities for children may not even realize they're eligible for funding to serve meals. Others find they would be able to participate with just a little help from local foundations or community donations to cover extra expenses like refrigerators or coolers. Sometimes the amount of

paperwork required to run a site is a barrier. Small programs may have special difficulty running sites — for example, a church-based program serving 15 children may not have the same infrastructure as a school running a summer school lunch program. These kinds of obstacles shouldn't be standing in the way. We should be using these programs as effectively as possible to enable more sites to provide meals for needy children this summer — and helping many fewer children to go hungry.

How is your community helping hungry children this summer? Encourage civic and philanthropic leaders to get involved. Encourage sites to stay open longer during the summer and help get more eligible kids to participate in the summer programs that can keep them from going hungry.

Now is the time to act. Hunger and poor nutrition are linked to physical, mental, and dental health problems — and poor educational outcomes — that don't end when summer starts.

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