

Testimony of

Pastor Daniel de Leon, Sr

March 3, 2004

Pastor Daniel de Leon, Sr.
Alianza de Ministerios Evangélicos Nacionales (AMEN)
Pastor, Templo Calvario, Santa Ana, California
General Presbyter, Assemblies of God

Thank you Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Pastor Daniel de Leon, and I am here to represent the largest Hispanic Evangelical organization in the country, AMEN (Asociacion Evangelica de Ministerios Nacionales). AMEN is comprised of over 8,000,000 members, representing 27 denominations and 22 Latino nations. I am also the Pastor of the largest Hispanic Evangelical Church in America, Templo Calvario, in Santa Ana, California.

AMEN is a leading advocate on issues that concern the Hispanic community. On many issues, we work closely with our Catholic brethren. We are certainly working together on the issue we are discussing today - the institution of marriage, understood throughout history and across diverse religions and cultures as the union of one man and one woman. We have been a member of the Alliance for Marriage since its inception.

When I turned on my television a few weeks ago, and saw what was happening in San Francisco, I couldn't believe my eyes. As I sat there, several things came to mind.

First, I could not understand how an elected official could ignore and violate the laws of our state, and get away with it. I also could not understand why the courts would not stop this - why they would refuse to require an elected official to comply with the law of his state, and to respect the will of the people as expressed in our laws.

Second, it wasn't just that officials and judges were ignoring the law. It was much worse than that. They were ignoring a law that is so fundamental to society - and in particular, of great importance to my community, to the people who I counsel. They were ignoring the importance of the institution of marriage, as the union of one man and one woman.

Just a few years ago, Californians voted to reaffirm that marriage in the state of California is between a man and a woman only. Hispanics in particular voted overwhelmingly to uphold the traditional institution of marriage. This is one institution, even though imperfect, that has withstood the test of time and has proven to bring a sense of stability to society for time immemorial.

The institution of marriage is designed for children, not for adult love. Adults can love in many ways - between brother and sister, between grandparents, uncles, aunts, between friends and loved ones. But marriage is for children. I am so saddened that we have forgotten that. And I am even more saddened that marriage is drifting further and further from what it is supposed to be all about - children. Adults seem to care more and more about one thing, themselves. This is one of the reasons why 50% of marriages wind up in divorce. We must strengthen marriage - not weaken it. And I fear that, if we start to abolish marriage laws in our nation, we will go further down the path of teaching people that marriage does not matter for the well-being of children, it only matters for the pleasure of adults.

I am not here because I want to be here. There are many problems in my community, and I should be there working on them, not here far away in Washington, D.C. But I have flown all the way here from California, because I need to be here, to defend the most basic institution of society for the good of all, on behalf of my community. Because without marriage, we have no hope of solving the other problems we are facing back home.

I live everyday in the front-lines of Urban America, where the ills of society are magnified greatly. People like myself, who provide a service to our community, are often the ones that have to "pick up the pieces" when marriages and families fall. In my 30 years of counseling, I have often dealt with grown children that still harbor hurts and deep seated frustrations because they did not have a mother and a father.

I know that there are good people trying to raise children without a mother and a father. Perhaps it is the single parent. Or the grandparent or aunt and uncle. Or the foster parent. They do their best, and we admire and respect them for that. But at the same time, we want the very best for children - and that is a mother and father, and an institution that encourages people to give children both a mother and father.

I want to say something about civil rights and discrimination. My people know something about discrimination. The institution of marriage was not created to discriminate against people. It was created to protect children and to give them the best home possible - a home with a mother and father.

Some people talk about interracial marriage. Laws forbidding interracial marriage are about racism. Laws protecting traditional marriage are about children.

To us in the Hispanic community, marriage is more than a sexual relationship. It is a nurturing, caring and loving relationship between a man and a woman that is to remain intact "until death does do us part." Children are born into this loving relationship with a great sense of anticipation. We love our children and we love children as you can tell by the numbers!

Marriage between a man and a woman is the standard. A child is like a twig that is planted in the soil of our society that requires two poles to have the best chance of growing strong and healthy. Those two poles, if you will, are the parents, Dad and Mom. Very different and at times even opposites but necessary for a balanced form of living.

Furthermore, marriage is a moral and spiritual incubator for future generations. Our children learn from their parents not only how to make a living but more importantly, how to live their life. This is not readily learned by a simple form of transference of knowledge but rather through the experience of daily living. Children learn from observation. As the home goes, so goes society.

I believe that we need to send a positive message to our children and their children. That we cared enough about the most basic institution of our society, marriage between a man and a woman, that we passed a Constitutional Amendment to preserve it for future generations. This is not, and must not be, about party politics. This must be seen as our struggle as a social family to bring stability to a divided house.

The President is right when he said that, "On a matter of such importance, the voice of the people must be heard . . . if we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever, our nation must enact a Constitutional Amendment to protect marriage in America."

Thank you very much.