

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Religious Leaders Gather in Springfield in Support of Civil Unions Bill Faith Petition to lawmakers signed by more than 300 clergy members**

**SPRINGFIELD** - Equality Illinois, the state's largest organization advocating full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, hosted an interfaith gathering of major religious leaders from across the State in support of civil unions.

The gathering took place in the State Capitol and came during the General Assembly's veto session, as the Legislature is considering the proposed Religious Freedom Protections & Civil Unions Act, which would provide legal recognition to same-sex couples.

"People of faith are among the strongest supporters of LGBT equality," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, "because they believe in natural equality of all human beings. This assembly of esteemed leaders from a broad range of religious backgrounds just underscores that fairness is universal and all human beings are equal in the eyes of the Creator."

The assembled religious leaders delivered a strong message of support for civil unions and rebutted misinformation spread by the bill's opponents regarding its impact on institutions of faith. Attendees included clergy from a wide array of major religious denominations – including, among others, Evangelical Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Jewish, and United Church of Christ.

"Clearly, the mainstream religious community stands with lesbian and gay people in our quest for justice and fairness under the law, " said Rick Garcia, Director of Public Policy. "Some use the name of religion to oppose the civil unions bill not out of a desire to uphold traditional teaching, but to uphold and promote anti-gay sentiment."

Equality Illinois also delivered to lawmakers the Faith Petition in support of civil unions, signed by more than 300 ordained clergy, representing more than

270 religious institutions and seminaries in nearly 80 cities across the State. "I am positively inspired that clergy across a broad spectrum of denominations and faiths all over Illinois so wholeheartedly support equality and civil unions," said Caroline Staerk, Field Director.

Today's religious assembly was one of a series of faith-focused events in support of civil unions. Earlier this year, Equality Illinois hosted the region's first Equality Prayer Breakfast, attended by about 100 clergy, lay and community leaders. Public servants (such as state legislators) also attended the Prayer Breakfast, and were the subject of the Prayer for Those in Public Service, led by Rabbi Asher Lopatin of Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation, an Orthodox Jewish synagogue.

"It is our task to fight discrimination of our time," said Rabbi Michael Siegel of Anshe Emet Synagogue, a Conservative Jewish congregation during the Prayer Breakfast. "We must ensure that that members of GLBT community are no longer as treated as strangers in our land. It is *avodah kodesh* – holy work."

"Marriage is more than a piece of paper," said the Very Rev Joy E Rogers, Dean of the Saint James Cathedral, an Episcopal congregation, during the Prayer Breakfast. "It says something about how society values your life, your love, your relationships."

"I am straight, Christian, a mom and a pastor; and I support marriage for same-sex couples," said Rev. Suzanne Anderson-Hurdle of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

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**Equality Illinois was founded to secure, protect and defend the civil rights of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender Illinoisans. It is one of the Midwest's largest gay civil rights organizations.**