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Rev. Chris Glaser is the author of "As My Own Soul: The Blessing of Same-Gender Marriage." Selected as one of Atlanta Pride's grand marshals this year, he is the pastor of Virginia Highland Church in Atlanta, which offers a free Marriage Equality series on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. through Oct. 25. For more information, go to [www.vhchurch.org](http://www.vhchurch.org).

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# Marriage equality's spiritual side

## Let's not make the same mistake as our opponents

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Oct 02, 2009 | By: [Chris Glaser](#) and | [COMMENTS](#) | [SHARE](#) | [RSS](#)

While doing research for a book on same-gender marriage, I attended Jonathan Rauch's book signing at Outwrite Bookstore for "Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America." When asked what he thought the American public's single greatest reservation about marriage equality was, he said it was marriage's association with a sacred source — even among those who are not particularly religious.

That's why our push for marriage equality should not leave out spiritual considerations. To our opponents who have often put on airs of being "holier than thou," we must be prepared to say our identities as God's children and our loving relationships are just as sacred as theirs.

And it doesn't matter if our marriages have had the blessing of religious or civil authorities — in much of Western tradition, it was understood that newlyweds married themselves. In Christian circles that meant that marriage partners were, in effect, celebrants of their own sacrament, unlike other sacraments.

While Roman Catholicism recognized marriage as a sacrament, the Protestant Reformation did not, looking to the developing nations of Europe to regulate the institution. The subsequent Enlightenment enhanced this separation of marriage from religion, affirming that marriage was a contract between the marriage partners.

So, just as all people "are created equal," an Enlightenment ideal, I believe all marriages must be considered equal. To paraphrase the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a marriage should be judged by the quality of its character not the gender of its partners. When it comes to U.S. law, marriage equality should be a "no-brainer."

YET WE have to also speak to the heart of legislators and the electorate. We have to tell our stories about the holy dimensions of our love. Throughout more than 30 years of ministry and activism, I have officiated at many same-gender marriage ceremonies. Each time I counseled the couple that the ceremony was just another step in their relationship, not a magic wand that would transform them or their marriage into loving "happily ever after."

But then I had a ceremony with my partner in my home congregation in Atlanta and my eyes were opened. Uplifted by the prayers and well-wishes of family and friends and spiritual community, I was transformed: I recognized more deeply the sacred depth of our relationship as well as his sacred worth, as if for the first time. Now I understand why many think of marriage as a sacrament.

A sacrament is a visible and tangible sign of an inward and invisible reality. Lovemaking itself may be a sacrament, revealing the inward and invisible reality of the love the lovers have for one another, surely, but also sometimes a deeper sense of being loved, period. In a period of feeling unloved, a friend made love with me and I awoke the next morning feeling loved, loveable, and more loving.

A woman attending a workshop on the church and homosexuality explained to me she had no religious background, but in lovemaking with her lover she got in touch with a spiritual realm she had never before known. "Because spirituality has to do with God," she said, "I came here to find out about God."

SOMETIMES we are as hindered as our opponents in affirming the sacred connection between our sexuality and spirituality. While serving a largely LGBT congregation in West Hollywood, we held a safer sex workshop in the sanctuary. The presenter from AIDS Project Los Angeles, the son of a minister, expressed reservations about talking about sex in a sacred space, especially from the pulpit.

The feeling was apparently shared by those attending, who seemed to offer their questions and comments in a

more delicate way than they might have otherwise. Yet Western religious tradition affirms a "hands-on" God who personally shaped our bodies, knitting us together in our mother's wombs.

Until we have the audacity to believe and declare that our sexuality and our marriages are sacred gifts — either from God or the universe — we can never hope to persuade those who associate marriage with a sacred source.

Let's not make the same mistake as our opponents, trying to separate spirituality from sexuality. Both are part of who we are. Both deserve their time in the public square of ideas regarding marriage equality.