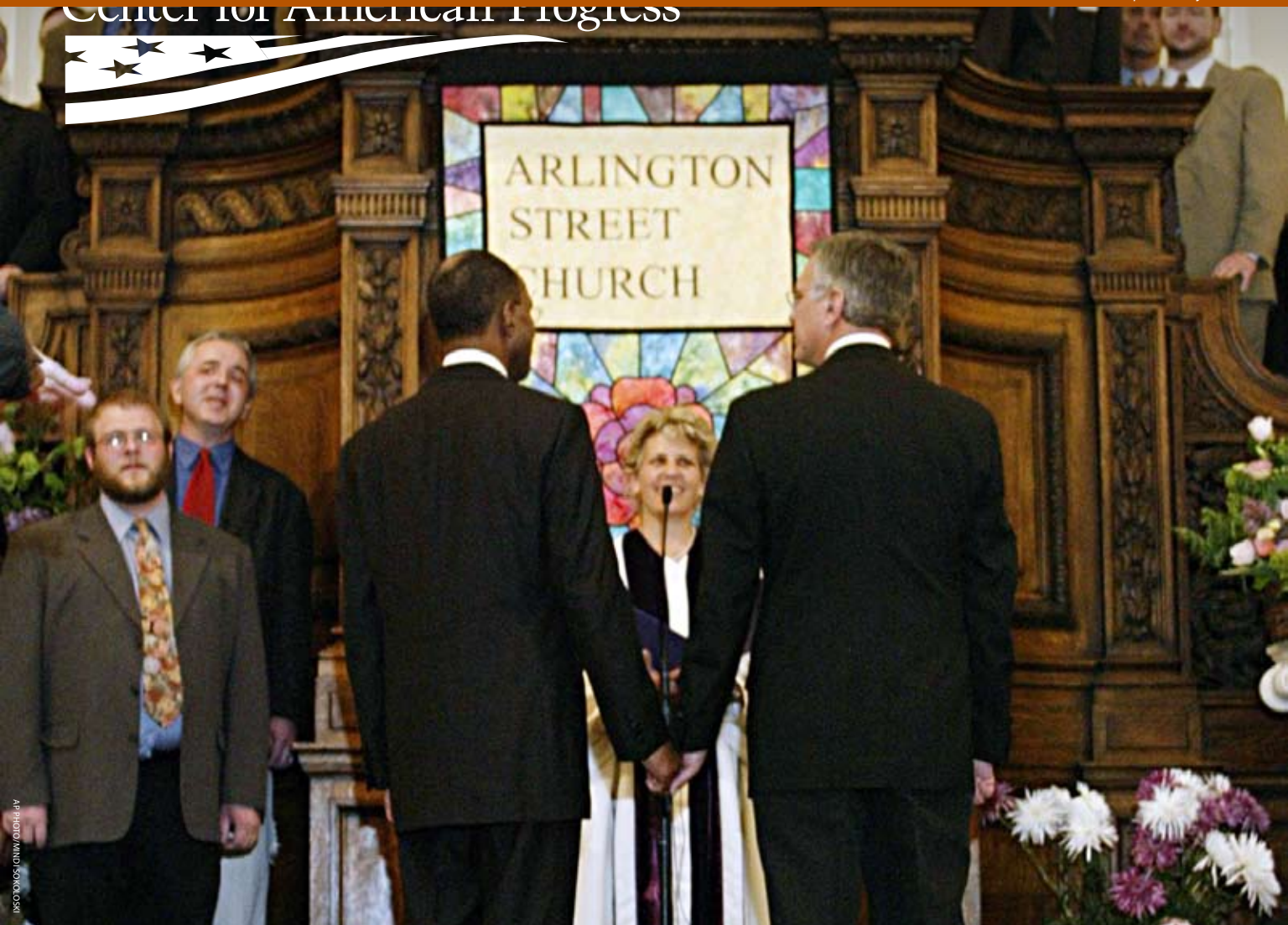


CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS



The Faithful Divide Over Wedding Vows

A Profile of Michigan's 2004 Battle Over Marriage Equality

Jonathan Duffy and Sally Steenland May 2009

Center for American Progress



The Faithful Divide Over Wedding Vows

A Profile of Michigan's 2004 Battle Over Marriage Equality

Jonathan Duffy and Sally Steenland May 2009

Introduction and summary

On November 2, 2004, voters in Michigan approved a state constitutional amendment that prohibited same-sex marriage. The amendment, known as Proposal 2, passed with nearly 60- percent support and came after vigorous efforts by advocacy groups and faith communities on both sides of the issue.

Supporters of Proposal 2 raised more money and waged a stronger campaign than their opponents. Proposal 2 supporters also relied heavily on religious arguments, while their opponents tended to frame their arguments mainly in secular terms, such as issues of civil rights and social justice. Supporters also launched a late barrage of spending, mailings, and sermons. Their efforts were successful, and the proposal passed. Exit polls showed that religion played a significant role in the outcome.

Since 2004, there have been several consequences to passage of Proposal 2. One has been the denial of health care benefits to same-sex partners in civil unions. Although Proposal 2 supporters claimed the proposal was limited to marriage and would not take away health benefits, in fact it did.

A review of the battle over Proposal 2, the alliances it shaped, and the efforts and tactics involved not only provides insights into the ballot-initiative process, but, more importantly, may help illuminate similar campaigns in the future. The arguments, organizing strategies, and communications messages that worked, or didn't work, for Proposal 2 in Michigan can serve as lessons in future struggles. This paper will explore those strategies so that progressives in Michigan and other states can learn from the experiences in this battleground over marriage equality.

Background

Prior to Proposal 2, Michigan state law contained two prohibitions of same-sex marriage: Public Acts [324](#) and [334](#) of 1996. Respectively, they said that marriage between two individuals of the same sex is not valid, and that marriages between individuals of the same sex performed in other states will not be recognized. In addition, the federal [Defense of Marriage Act](#), also passed in 1996, placed similar restrictions on the recognition of same-sex marriage.¹

Despite these laws, conservative officials and activists within Michigan decided in 2003 to seek to codify the ban on same-sex marriage in the state's constitution. The move came as a number of judicial and executive decisions elsewhere in the country kept the issue of gay rights and, more specifically, same-sex marriage bubbling in the American political agenda. They included the U.S. Supreme Court [striking down anti-sodomy laws](#), the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court [overturning that state's gay marriage ban](#), and the mayor of San Francisco [issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples](#).

The 2004 presidential election also played a role. Political analysts argued that same-sex marriage-ban ballot proposals would ensure a higher conservative voter turnout, which would aid former President George W. Bush in his reelection bid. Consequently, Bush supporters sought to get such initiatives on November ballots wherever possible. Many analysts saw Michigan's Proposal 2 as a reaction to these political forces.

Getting Proposal 2 on the ballot

Efforts to enact a constitutional ban against same-sex marriage in Michigan began in the state legislature. Republican legislators introduced amendments in both chambers to prohibit recognizing same-sex marriages or any similar unions, but could not gain the two-thirds support required to present the amendments to voters. Responding to failure in the legislature, supporters of the ban turned to collecting signatures to put the proposal directly to voters.²

By now, it was late spring 2004. The deadline for collecting signatures was July 5. The measure required 317,757 signatures for certification by the Board of State Canvassers for a place on the November ballot.³

Two ballot committees formed early in the campaign and dominated the signature drive process. They were Citizens for the Protection of Marriage, or CPM, which had strong financial support from the state’s seven Catholic dioceses, and the Coalition for a Fair Michigan, which relied on supporters of lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender rights, among others.⁴ CPM supported Proposal 2; CFM opposed it.

In addition, the state’s faith communities also mobilized around Proposal 2. Although most faith communities supported Proposal 2, there was also opposition, sometimes within the same faith traditions, which led to conflicting views. In the end, CPM collected more than 500,000 signatures in a notably short amount of time, and the proposal was certified for the November ballot.⁵

Proposal language

The official language of the ballot read: “The proposal would amend the state constitution to provide that ‘the union of one man and one woman in marriage shall be the only agreement recognized as a marriage or similar union for any purpose.’”⁶

The wording served as a major source of controversy. Opponents argued that the broadness and ambiguity of the language would do more than ban same-sex marriage, and would also result in the denial of benefits for domestic partnerships. Proponents disputed this argument and regularly claimed that the proposal was only about defining marriage, not benefits for civil unions.

Election results

On Election Day, voters overwhelmingly adopted Proposal 2: 58.6 percent (2,698,077) to 41.4 percent (1,904,319).⁷ Exit polling by CNN showed that more than 60 percent of both Protestant and Catholic respondents voted in favor of the amendment.

Those of other faiths and those claiming no religion registered support in the mid-30 percent range. Support among Jewish voters was much lower, at 14 percent. CNN also found that 82 percent of those who attend church more than weekly voted yes, while 58 percent of monthly churchgoers and 35 percent of nonchurch attendees favored Proposal 2.⁸

Motivating constituencies

Individuals on both sides of Proposal 2 created ballot committees on the initiative. In total, Michiganders formed eight ballot committees—seven in support of Proposal 2 and one in opposition. The two principle committees were Citizens for the Protection of Marriage and the Coalition for a Fair Michigan. Between them, they accounted for nearly 90 percent of the \$2,784,643 raised in the campaign.⁹

The eight ballot committees were not alone, however, in their efforts on Proposal 2. Indeed, the faithful throughout the state made significant efforts through their various faith traditions in supporting and opposing the initiative. No side of the debate received the unanimous support of any faith community. Even within faith traditions, unanimity of opinion did not exist.

Citizens for the Protection of Marriage

Citizens for the Protection of Marriage was the dominant ballot committee in support of Proposal 2.¹⁰ Formed originally to collect signatures to get the proposal on the ballot, it transitioned quickly into the election. Prominent members of Michigan’s Citizens for Traditional Values, a conservative, family-oriented organization, and other conservative Michigan residents formed CPM.¹¹

CPM’s funding contributed greatly to its strength. It raised \$1,626,582, including more than \$1 million from the state’s seven Catholic dioceses. Other donors included the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, and the Michigan Family Forum.¹² By the third week of October, CPM claimed strong grassroots support, citing more than 400 individual donors.¹³ Of these individual donations, the most significant contribution came from Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, whose family has extensive ties with Michigan’s Republican Party, and the Family Research Council.¹⁴

Of the money raised, CPM spent an overwhelming portion on the Sterling Corporation, a Lansing consulting firm with mainly Republican clients.¹⁵ Sterling Corp.’s website describes it as a “firm specializing in ballot campaign management.”¹⁶ CPM also paid \$110,000 to Public Opinion Strategies, a national Republican polling firm based in Alexandria, Virginia.¹⁷

The high level of organization that characterized CPM in the signature drive continued during the general campaign. CPM also maintained noticeable visibility in both local and national coverage. Local coordinators from the signature drive worked in all 83 of Michigan's counties. CPM maintained a website that distributed information to supporters and allowed for online donations. Early in the campaign, it focused on voter registration before turning to a public education and awareness effort.¹⁸ CPM also funded a statewide radio and television campaign in major metropolitan areas of Michigan.¹⁹

Throughout the campaign, CPM presented its argument carefully. It avoided explicit anti-gay rhetoric. Rather, it branded Proposal 2 as pro-family and pro-marriage, referring regularly to families and “man and wife.”²⁰ In its ads and interviews, CPM responded to criticism of the amendment's broad language, offering assurance that the amendment was only about marriage and would not remove benefits. Throughout the campaign and especially towards the end, their opponent's arguments forced CPM to regularly address the scope and intentions of the amendment.²¹

CPM's television ads spoke directly to the question of eliminating benefits for civil unions:

*Proposal 2 isn't about benefits; it just puts the definition of marriage in our constitution. Judges and politicians couldn't change it; only voters could... One man, one woman. Vote yes, Proposal 2.*²²

CPM also often cited the risk of “activist judges” overturning the state's current ban on same-sex marriage.

While CPM did not have an outright religious component, religion and religious individuals played a significant role in its activities. The Catholic Church contributed significant financial support. CPM's chairwoman, Marlene Elwell, had significant ties within Michigan's religious communities.²³ A devout Catholic, she founded Catholics in the Public Square, which was created in 2003 as a group of lay Catholics whose objective is “to equip Catholics in responding to the issues of the day, thereby having an impact on the culture rather than having the culture impact us as Catholics.”²⁴ Elwell's biography on the CPS's website addresses the faithful's involvement in Proposal 2:

*The bedrock of this effort was Christian citizens. They were heard in America's democratic process. And now marriage, biblically defined, has been secured for the generations behind us. Together we created a legacy to leave for our children.*²⁵

CPM also specifically targeted religious communities in its efforts. During the signature drive, for instance, CPM volunteers collected signatures before and after church services outside numerous places of worship.²⁶ CPM also distributed 1 million flyers in support of Proposal 2 at Protestant churches throughout Michigan.²⁷

Coalition for a Fair Michigan

The Coalition for a Fair Michigan was the only ballot committee that opposed Proposal 2. CFM also formed early in the campaign and worked during the signature drive, and then transitioned into the November election.²⁸ Raising more than \$854,200,²⁹ CFM claimed over 1,200 financial supporters,³⁰ but many of these donations were not itemized.

Further, CFM filed neither detailed information about contributors, nor required periodic reports. Of donations that were itemized, individuals and organizations supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights made up the largest segment, with significant support from the [Human Rights Campaign](#), the [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#), and the [Triangle Foundation](#).³¹ Of its total funds, CFM spent over \$600,000 on TV spots. In attempting to run a lean campaign, the group focused on television ads, rather than radio spots and direct mail. Throughout the campaign, its primary concern was message delivery.³²

CFM maintained a website, using it to distribute information and raise funds.³³ It created a [Yahoo Group](#) that served as an outreach and announcement tool and included more than 120 members.³⁴ The organization made efforts to reach out to editorial boards and received mostly positive coverage in local and national media. CFM also collaborated with a religious group, the Religious Coalition for a Fair Michigan,³⁵ to reach out to faith communities. In post-election coverage of the campaign, analysts described CFM as a “short-lived political committee formed with one specific purpose.”³⁶ While it made great efforts towards marriage equality, the coalition was formed around a specific campaign, as opposed to LGBT groups in Michigan that were more movement-focused and had been in existence longer.

In arguing for Proposal 2’s defeat, CFM largely focused on the proposal’s overly broad language, which threatened to remove existing benefits from same-sex domestic partners, including taking away health insurance from children in those families. This message was more dominant than a broadly aimed moral message about Proposal 2. CFM also regularly emphasized that three laws had already banned gay marriage in Michigan, and so the Proposal was unnecessary. The goal of the coalition was specific and targeted—getting voters to reject Proposal 2—rather than a more ambitious goal to change hearts and minds on the issue of marriage equality.³⁷

CFM was a secular organization, but it did work with and reach out to numerous faith communities. The group organized four press conferences throughout Michigan at which numerous religious leaders opposed the ballot initiative.³⁸ Similarly, CFM worked to establish relationships with faith leaders, such as Rev. Wendell Anthony, pastor of one of Detroit’s largest United Church of Christ churches and president of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP, to garner opposition to and soften support of Proposal 2.³⁹

The Catholic Church

Of all the faith traditions, the Catholic Church was the dominant player in the campaign. The state's seven dioceses were the major financial contributors to Citizens for the Protection of Marriage.

Furthermore, the Church's leadership and its public policy arm worked diligently for passage of Proposal 2. Despite this official stance, however, even certain Catholic groups, Catholic clergy, and individual Catholic parishioners opposed Proposal 2.

Support

The Michigan Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state's seven dioceses, coordinated the official efforts made by the Catholic Church in support of Proposal 2.⁴⁰ At the time of the November 2004 election, the MCC was chaired by Cardinal Adam Maida.⁴¹ It employed a number of tools in the campaign, including the pulpit, publications, and mailings.

Cardinal Maida and the MCC worked to reach Catholic voters directly, distributing an eight-minute video to all Catholic parishes that urged a "Yes" on Proposal 2.⁴² "From the beginning of human memory, marriage has always been understood as the union of one man and one woman," Cardinal Maida said on the video. "Let us do our part here in Michigan to preserve that sacred understanding and definition of marriage."⁴³

Church officials strongly encouraged showing the video during services. Accompanying the video were additional materials that suggested talking points for homilies and answers to frequently asked questions.⁴⁴ In addition, *FOCUS*, a publication of the MCC, dedicated the three issues leading to the November election at least in part to the issue of same-sex marriage and passing Proposal 2.⁴⁵ The Church also sent a mailing on Proposal 2, entitled "Between One Man and One Woman," to all 596,000 registered Catholic households in the state.⁴⁶ The mailing went out on October 15, just two weeks before the election.⁴⁷

Similarly to CPM, the Catholic Church presented its Proposal 2 arguments in a pro-family and a pro-marriage light, versus an anti-gay one. Both Cardinal Maida's video and the language in *FOCUS* evoked what the Church considered to be the traditional image of marriage.

The Church regularly cited “the common good” in its arguments, going so far as to say that a “redefinition of marriage must be seen as an attack on the common good” and that the Church cannot “be intimidated by those who see our defense of the common good as simply mean-spirited, narrow-minded, or intolerant of other people’s supposed rights.”⁴⁸ The Church also cited the risk of “activist judges” overturning current laws in their arguments.⁴⁹

In disseminating these arguments and materials, the Church had the notable advantage of preexisting avenues, institutions, and frameworks through which it could reach parishioners and voters. Few other actors in the campaign had such an advantage.

Opposition

The MCC and Cardinal Maida were not the sole Catholic voices speaking on Proposal 2. While opposing voices may not have had the strength and organization of the MCC, they voiced their views. On October 24, for example, just a week after the MCC’s “Between One Man and One Woman” mailing, 80 Michigan Catholics, including 20 Catholic priests, released a signed statement opposing Proposal 2. The statement said the signers “must respectfully dissociate ourselves from the [Catholic conference’s] advocacy of Proposal 2” and that the wording of the amendment “appears to create serious and undue hardship for a whole class of citizens, and thus violate Catholic social teaching.”⁵⁰

Notably among the signers was the auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Detroit, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton. A familiar progressive faith voice in Michigan, Bishop Gumbleton not only signed the letter, but he also gave public interviews in which he voiced his opposition.

“In my own opinion, I think it’s an overreaction to the issue,” he said in an interview with *Between the Lines*, a Michigan-based LGBT publication. “The text as I’ve seen it is too open-ended, and people who are living as partners would be denied medical benefits, the right to enter the room if someone’s dying, that sort of thing. I think it’s a cruel overreaction against homosexual people, and I think it’s unnecessary.”⁵¹

Other Catholic opposition to Proposal 2 came from Catholics for the Common Good. CCG, for example, staged a protest in response to an organized prayer meeting at which some Catholics gathered to pray that Michigan voters would uphold heterosexual marriage. At the protest, Anthony Kosnik, a CCG member, life-long Catholic, and a professor of Christian ethics, told the *Washington Post*, “My God is a God of love and compassion ... Jesus said nothing about homosexuality at all, but he did talk a lot about love of neighbor.”⁵²

Other faith traditions and organizations

In addition to Catholics, a range of other faith traditions was also drawn into the debate over Proposal 2. Among them were African-American clergy and congregations, Evangelicals, Episcopalians, the United Church of Christ, and groups such as the Religious Coalition for a Fair Michigan and Concerned Clergy.

Support

African-American clergy and congregations found themselves at a strange crossroads over Proposal 2. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* explained: “Detroit’s influential black pastors, historically liberal and Democratic voters on social justice issues, want Proposal 2 to pass, reflecting the African-American community’s traditional values about marriage. They find themselves in unique agreement with the conservative, Republican-oriented Michigan Family Forum and Family Research Council.”⁵³ The Council of Black Pastors in Detroit and Vicinity voted in strong support for Proposal 2. Similarly, Rev. Levon Yuille, head of the National Pro-Life Black Caucus, endorsed Proposal 2 and worked to collect signatures.⁵⁴

In mid-October, more than 300 pastors from the Detroit metropolitan area gathered to sign an “Open Letter to the Citizens of Michigan” that declared marriage as the union of one man and one woman. At the signing ceremony, a number voiced their reasoning. Marriage “is the foundation of our families, and ultimately the foundation of our society,” they said. The “word of God is clear about the sanctity and unique union between a man and his wife.”⁵⁵

Evangelicals heading independent fundamentalist congregations also provided significant support for Proposal 2. Conservative evangelicals from Western Michigan were major financial supporters, for example.⁵⁶ Similarly, mega churches that were in support of Proposal 2 were very effective in disseminating information and campaigning for its passage.⁵⁷

Opposition

A group called The Religious Coalition for a Fair Michigan, which described itself on its website as a group of “people of faith working to defeat the Michigan Marriage Amendment,” actively worked on the campaign.⁵⁸ Organized by Michael Gibson-Faith of

the Quaker organization The American Friends Service Committee, RCFM worked to highlight religious opposition to Proposal 2.

The group used language that focused on the banning of same-sex marriage as a moral and social justice issue, especially to persuade progressive congregations and those in the ‘moveable middle.’⁵⁹ For instance, campaign materials read: “This amendment would intentionally cause harm to thousands of Michigan families and would eliminate existing rights and laws in Michigan that help strengthen families.”⁶⁰

More than 30 congregations and religious groups and more than 100 individual clergy members were among RCFM’s ranks.⁶¹ These members included individuals not typically found advocating for LGBT rights or speaking out on political matters.⁶² Other RCFM efforts, while their extent and success were unverified, included distributing bulletin inserts, organizing a sermon blitz during September and October, organizing candlelight vigils, and raising funds.⁶³

The Concerned Clergy of Western Michigan, a coalition of ministers that works toward openness and acceptance of gays and lesbians in churches, was active in the battle over Proposal 2 as well. The group ran ads and billboards that called Proposal 2 “unequal, unfair, and unjust.”⁶⁴ Concerned Clergy actively engaged the supporters of Proposal 2. They organized a debate with Proposal 2 supporter and co-author Gary Glenn and participated in a media debate with former Republican State Representative Harold Voorhees, a supporter of Proposal 2 and founding member of Citizens for the Protection of Marriage.

Concerned Clergy also targeted swayable churchgoers who were under the assumption that the Bible and their church were unanimously opposed to marriage equality. In its message, Concerned Clergy focused on Proposal 2’s unfairness and the risk of children losing health insurance coverage through the revocation of domestic partner benefits.⁶⁵

In all, estimates by the media registered more than 300 clergy members and congregations statewide in opposition to Proposal 2.⁶⁶ These groups and organizations often cited the language of the amendment and its uncertain impacts as the reasons for their opposition. The state’s four Episcopalian Bishops, the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, and local leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America all opposed Proposal 2.⁶⁷ The United Church of Christ sent a mailing to all its churches urging a “no” vote. The Presbytery of Detroit approved a resolution against Proposal 2 and sent a letter to all its churches urging a “no” vote and volunteering toward that aim.⁶⁸

Although certain religious leaders didn’t publicly oppose Proposal 2, their silence, rather than vocal support, was helpful to the amendment’s opposition. According to some estimates, approximately 20 percent of Catholic churches did not show Cardinal Maida’s video supporting Proposal 2.⁶⁹ Similarly, a number of pastors in the black community failed to voice support for the amendment. As part of its outreach, Concerned Clergy of Western Michigan worked to gain support among religious leaders for defeating the amendment, and when some of those attempts were unsuccessful, they urged silence.⁷⁰

Post-election developments

It took only two days after the November 2, 2004 election for the worst-case fears of Proposal 2's opponents to be realized. As early as November 4, 2004, backers of the constitutional amendment said they planned to review the benefit policies of all public employees. The *Lansing State Journal* quoted Gary Glenn, one of the authors of Proposal 2 and president of the American Family Association of Michigan, as saying that any employers found to be violating the new constitutional amendment would be turned over to the state's attorney general.⁷¹

Litigation over the new amendment began with a state representative requesting Michigan Attorney General Michael Cox for a formal advisory opinion on whether providing benefits to the domestic partners of gay and lesbian employees violated the newly passed amendment. Cox, in a ruling that effectively carried the weight of law, found that such benefits were in conflict with the amendment.⁷²

But then a state trial court ruled that Proposal 2 did not prohibit public employers from providing domestic partnership benefits.⁷³ Next, the Michigan Court of Appeals in February 2007 reversed that decision and ruled that the provision of domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples was unconstitutional.⁷⁴ In May 2008, the Michigan Supreme Court in *National Pride at Work Inc. v. Granholm* affirmed the Court of Appeal's decision and ruled that the provision of health insurance benefits to same-sex domestic partners was unconstitutional.⁷⁵

The decision had significant, real-life consequences. At least 375 men and women who were Michigan public employees were in danger of losing health insurance benefits, according to the Associated Press.⁷⁶ The decision also had economic consequences. Officials at Michigan's public universities voiced concern that prohibiting same-sex benefits would make it difficult to attract and retain talented faculty.⁷⁷ Despite assurances of Proposal 2 supporters that the amendment would *not* affect civil unions, the truth is that Proposal 2 has very much affected civil unions by taking away health insurance and other benefits that had once been legal.

Lessons learned

There are a number of lessons that progressive advocates and faith communities can learn from the 2004 marriage equality campaign in Michigan. These lessons can provide helpful guidance in terms of strategy, messaging, outreach, and organizing concerning future LGBT struggles.

First, it is important for LGBT advocates and progressive faith leaders to work together, even before a ballot initiative campaign begins. It is far easier to plug into existing alliances than create them from scratch when a campaign is starting. Having an infrastructure in place is extremely valuable—it saves time, broadens outreach, and provides insider advocates within faith communities.

In fact, such relationships can be extremely valuable in preventing antimarriage equality efforts from qualifying for the ballot in the first place. Along with early financial support, a strong network of advocates and community leaders can research legal strategies and devise communications efforts—such as “decline-to-sign” campaigns—in order to head off a ballot initiative campaign.

In Michigan, for example, conservative faith groups worked actively to get signatures on the ballot, while progressive faith groups were less active in efforts to prevent the amendment from getting on the ballot.

Second, it is important to embed faith voices and messages within LGBT campaigns because they can break the antigay religious monopoly that claims to be the sole voice of morality on these issues. Faith language also broadens the values debate so that LGBT issues are not framed in terms of “moral values versus secular rights.”

Instead, religious values are on the side of LGBT advocates as well. The importance of a campaign staying on message must be balanced with the great worth of voices from various faith communities highlighting the moral and social justice aspect of marriage equality. A related lesson is that when antigay religious communities use biblical texts and teachings to argue their case, LGBT advocates should have their own religious messages to counter opponents’ claims.

In Michigan, supporters of Proposal 2 referenced the “sacred understanding of marriage” and “the word of God.” These references were not countered by opponents. In putting forth religious messages, each faith community should speak out of its own tradition to its community using its messengers, rather than “one-size-fits-all” themes and speakers.

Third, advocates should not write off certain religious communities as impossible to win or overlook any “unlikely” allies, be it the Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, or African-American churches. While some communities may have official pronouncements against same-sex marriage and campaign against it, almost always there are members within that community who by conscience have different views. In Michigan, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and lifelong Catholic Anthony Kosnik are examples of outspoken opponents of Proposal 2, despite the Catholic Church’s official stance and official actions toward its passage.

These faith members can become effective public allies because they prove that there are LGBT supporters within more conservative churches. They can help change the minds of fellow members by showing religious support for marriage equality. Related to that, even though some religious communities will never publicly endorse marriage equality, it is still a victory when these communities are silent rather than vocally oppositional. It is also important to note that some communities will put into effect “offline” strategies to create an undercurrent of support for marriage equality, even though they do not go public or on record as having done so.

Fourth, LGBT faith advocates and supporters must work within their denominations for full support of LGBT rights, including marriage equality and same-sex adoption. Denominations are national organizations with funding sources, communications arms, and a host of services that can be used in campaigns. It is far easier to work with a denomination than go to individual churches seeking support.

At the moment, the opponents of marriage equality enjoy the support of the Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, and many others, while marriage equality supporters have fewer denominational allies. The impact that the Catholic Church had on ensuring the passage of Proposal 2 in Michigan shows the importance of denominational support.

Fifth, the message of LGBT rights should be framed in a mainstream way so that all citizens feel connected to the issue. In addition, non-LGBT organizations, such as civil and human rights and faith groups, should be sought as campaign allies. For faith communities, it’s important to talk about LGBT rights and marriage equality in moral and religious terms, rather than shying away from that language. Campaigns for marriage equality also need to educate the general public about the difference between civil marriage—which confers certain legal rights and responsibilities on couples—and religious ceremonies, which are not affected by laws allowing same-sex marriage.

Sixth, it is important to have a robust on-the-ground organization and an effective media campaign, especially in larger states where much of the battle is fought over the airwaves. And advocates should gear up for intense opposition at the end of a campaign.

In Michigan, churchgoers were hit with a barrage of anti-same-sex marriage videos, flyers, and sermons the Sunday before going to the polls. It is also important to balance the goals of a campaign—to win the vote—with the goals of a movement, which are more long term. In addition, financial support is essential in order to run an effective, professional campaign.

Seventh, it is crucial to quickly rebut inaccurate arguments and misleading statements from antiequality forces. In Michigan, Proposal 2 supporters denied that the vague wording of their proposal would take away existing legal benefits from partners in civil unions and their families, despite serious concerns to the contrary. They convinced voters that their argument was right—but it was not, and benefits that had once been legal, such as health insurance for children, were revoked. Instances where this “bait and switch” tactic has been used should be highlighted in future campaigns that deploy similar deceptive practices.

Finally, LGBT faith advocates should learn from and find strength in the current atmosphere in America surrounding marriage equality. From the recent court decision in Iowa to the historic legislation in Vermont, faithful individuals have been active in advancing marriage equality. From these cases, just like from Michigan, lessons can be derived.

Similarly, one can see an attitudinal shift in the public.⁷⁸ Certainly, Michigan in 2004 is not the same as Michigan in 2009. Individuals who worked to oppose Proposal 2, LGBT faith advocates, professional campaigners, and others have expressed confidence that a Michigan battle today over marriage equality would be different. While the past cannot be rewritten, hope can grow from these struggles as our nation moves closer to its promise of justice and equality for all.

Endnotes

- 1 Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency, "November 2004 Ballot Proposal 04-2: An Overview" (Lansing: 2004).
- 2 Glen Staszewski, "The Bait-and-Switch in Direct Democracy," *Wisconsin Law Review* (17) (2006): 17-73. James Penning and Corwin Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront." In John C. Green and others, eds., *The Values Campaign: The Christian Right and the 2004 Elections*. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006).
- 3 "Signers Seek to Block Homosexual 'Marriage,'" *The Washington Time*, June 17, 2004, available at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/jun/17/20040617-120823-9699r/>.
- 4 Sue O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments" (Helena: The Institute on Money in State Politics, 2006).
- 5 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 6 Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency, "November 2004 Ballot Proposal 04-2."
- 7 "Michigan Department of State Election Results: State Proposal-04-2," available at <http://miboecfr.nicusa.com/election/results/04GEN/90000002.html> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 8 "CNN Election 2004 Results: Ballot Measures/ Michigan Proposal 04-2 / Exit Polls," available at <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004//pages/results/states/MI/02/epolls.0.html> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 9 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 10 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 11 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 12 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 13 Dawn Wolfe, "Catholic Church Biggest Prop. 2 Donor," *Between the Lines Newspaper*, October 21, 2004, available at <http://www.pridesource.com/article.shtml?article=9947> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 14 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 "The Sterling Corporation: What We Do—Ballot Campaigns," available at <http://www.sterlingcorporation.com/> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 17 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 18 Tom Szczensy, "Controversial Gay Marriage Ban on Ballot," *The Michigan Daily*, September 27, 2004, available at <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/controversial-gay-marriage-ban-ballot> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 19 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Dana Houle, Interview with author, Washington D.C., April 8, 2009.
- 22 Staszewski, "The Bait-and-Switch in Direct Democracy," p. 23-24.
- 23 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 24 "Catholics in the Public Square Overview," available at http://www.catholicsin-thepublicsquare.org/aboutus_history.html (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 25 "Marlene Elwell, Founder of CPS," available at http://www.catholicsinthepublicsquare.org/aboutus_founder.html (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 26 Robert Delaney, "Cd. Maida: Vote 'Yes' on Prop. 2," *The Michigan Catholic*, October 2, 2004, available at <http://www.aodonline.org/AODOnline/News++Publications+2203/Michigan+Catholic+News+12203/2004+The+Michigan+Catholic+News+13851/041007+Vote+Yes+on+Prop+2.htm> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 27 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 28 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Wolfe, "Catholic Church Biggest Prop. 2 Donor."
- 31 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments."
- 32 Dana Houle, Interview with author, Washington D.C., April 8, 2009.
- 33 Website no longer hosted. Available, in part, through Internet Archive at <http://web.archive.org/web/20040921162939/www.coalitionforafairmichigan.org/> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 34 "Fair Michigan Yahoo Group," available at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FairMichigan/?v=1&t=search&ch=web&pub=groups&sec=group&slk=2> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 35 Website no longer hosted. Available, in part, through Internet Archive at <http://web.archive.org/web/20041016004402/www.afsc-fan.org/rcfm.htm> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 36 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments," p. 36.
- 37 Dana Houle, Interview with author, Washington D.C., April 8, 2009.
- 38 MIRS Capitol Capsule, "Religious Leaders Speak Out Against Proposal 2," October 19, 2004.
- 39 Dana Houle, Interview with author, Washington D.C., April 8, 2009.
- 40 O'Connell, "The Money Behind the 2004 Marriage Amendments," p. 35.
- 41 Delaney, "Cd. Maida: Vote 'Yes' on Prop. 2."
- 42 Donn M. Fresard, "Catholic Church Openly Supports Prop. 2," *The Michigan Daily*, October 21, 2004, available at <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/catholic-church-openly-supports-prop-2> (last accessed April 3, 2009).
- 43 Alan Cooperman and David Broder, "Churches Key to Mich. Fight on Gay Marriage," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2004, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3847-2004Oct27.html> (last accessed April 3, 2009).
- 44 Delaney, "Cd. Maida: Vote 'Yes' on Prop. 2."
- 45 Michigan Catholic Conference, "On the Sanctity of Marriage . . .," *FOCUS* 32 (1) (April 2004). Michigan Catholic Conference, "The Issues, The Candidates and Your Vote 2004," *FOCUS* 32 (2) (July 2004). Michigan Catholic Conference, "Proposal 2: Defending One Man and One Woman in Marriage," *FOCUS* 32 (3) (September 2004).
- 46 Daniel Smith, Matthew DeSantis, and Jason Kassel, "Same-Sex Marriage Ballot Measures and the 2004 Presidential Election," *State and Local Government Review* 38 (2) (2006):78-91.

- 47 Cooperman and Broder, "Churches Key to Mich. Fight on Gay Marriage."
- 48 Michigan Catholic Conference, "Proposal 2: Defending One Man and One Woman in Marriage," *FOCUS* 32 (3) (September 2004).
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Dennis Coday, "Clergy Oppose Gay Marriage Ban," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 5, 2004.
- 51 Wolfe, "Catholic Church Biggest Prop. 2 Donor."
- 52 Cooperman and Broder, "Churches Key to Mich. Fight on Gay Marriage."
- 53 Patricia Montemurri and Marisol Bello, "Proposal 2: Marriage Ban Divides, Unites Religions," *Detroit Free Press*, October 30, 2004, quoted in Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 54 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 55 Citizens for the Protection of Marriage, "Hundreds of Metropolitan Detroit Area Pastors unite on the definition of Marriage and encourage a YES vote on Proposal 2," *CPM Press Release*, October 12, 2004, available at <http://www.catholicsinthe-publicsquare.org/pmy-release041012.html> (last accessed April 3, 2009).
- 56 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 57 Rev. Doug Van Doren, Phone interview with author, Washington D.C., April 14, 2009.
- 58 Website no longer hosted. Available, in part, through Internet Archive at <http://web.archive.org/web/20041016004402/www.afsc-fan.org/rcfm.htm> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 59 Michael Faith, Phone interview with author, Washington D.C., April 21, 2009.
- 60 Bulletin Insert, The Religious Coalition for a Fair Michigan.
- 61 "Religious Coalition for a Fair Michigan: See our supporters," available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20041016154110/www.afsc-fan.org/rcfm6.htm> (last accessed April 1, 2009).
- 62 Dana Houle, Interview with author, Washington D.C., April 8, 2009.
- 63 "Religious Coalition for a Fair Michigan Statement," Campaign document.
- 64 Penning and Smidt, "Michigan: A War on the Homefront."
- 65 Rev. Doug Van Doren, Phone interview with author, Washington D.C., April 14, 2009.
- 66 Cooperman and Broder, "Churches Key to Mich. Fight on Gay Marriage."
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Michael Gibson-Faith, Message regarding "Update on the Religious Groups about Proposal 2," posted on September 30, 2004, available at <http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/group/FairMichigan/message/401> (last accessed April 3, 2009).
- 69 Dana Houle, Interview with author, Washington D.C., April 8, 2009.
- 70 Rev. Doug Van Doren, Phone interview with author, Washington D.C., April 14, 2009.
- 71 Stacy Range, "Proposal 2 Supporters Taking Aim at Same-Sex Benefits: Judges Likely to Decide Fate of Ban on Gay Marriages," *Lansing State Journal*, November 2, 2004.
- 72 Staszewski, "The Bait-and-Switch in Direct Democracy."
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Todd Heywood, "Couples with Kids Join ACLU in Condemning Supreme Court Decision on Domestic Partner Benefits," *The Michigan Messenger*, May 5, 2008, available at <http://michiganmessenger.com/1210/couples-with-kids-join-aclu-in-condemning-supreme-court-decision-on-domestic-partner-benefits> (last accessed April 3, 2009).
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 The Michigan Daily, "From the Daily: Cox's Crusade Must End," *The Michigan Daily*, November 12, 2007, available at <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/daily-coxs-crusade-must-end> (last accessed April 3, 2009).
- 78 CBS News Poll, "The Debate Over Same-Sex Marriage," March 12-16, 2009, available at http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/poll_040309.pdf (last accessed April 17, 2009).

About the authors

Sally Steenland is the Senior Policy Advisor to the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative at the Center for American Progress.

Jonathan Duffy is a senior political science major at Kent State University and an intern with the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative at the Center for American Progress.

Center for American Progress



About the Center for American Progress

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values.

We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

FAITH AND *Progressive Policy*

About the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative

A project of the Center for American Progress, the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative works to identify and articulate the moral, ethical, and spiritual values underpinning policy issues, to shape a progressive stance in which these values are clear, and to increase public awareness and understanding of these values.

The Initiative also works to safeguard the healthy separation of church and state that has allowed religion in our country to flourish. In all its efforts, the Initiative works for a society and government that strengthen the common good and respect the basic dignity of all people.