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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### RELIGIOUS LEADERS AROUND THE STATE SUPPORT CIVIL UNIONS STATEWIDE GAY RIGHTS GROUP HIGHLIGHTS RELIGIOUS SUPPORT

**CHICAGO** - Equality Illinois, the state's largest organization advocating for full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, released a database of ordained clergy standing in support of civil unions and who are expressing interest in officiating at such unions when the new civil union law takes effect on June 1.

Equality Illinois also condemned as homophobic and intolerant anti-civil union protest that is being planned by the so-called Illinois Family Institute. The organization's CEO Bernard Cherkasov called on religious leaders and people of faith everywhere to denounce attempts to delegitimize same-sex relationships.

"As a straight, Christian clergy person, I think it is imperative that I continue to speak out in favor of civil unions and gay marriage." – said Rev Suzanne Hurdle of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. "While I respect everyone's right to their own opinion, particularly on religious issues, I do not believe that discrimination of any kind should be tolerated in Illinois or anywhere in the United States. For those in the religious community who are against civil unions, that is their right. However, it is not their right to withhold equality, liberty and justice for all because of their religious beliefs. Furthermore, it is important for the people of Illinois to know that there are many, many faithful, Bible-believing Christians who support civil unions and believe they will strengthen families in Illinois and the communities in which the families live."

Equality Illinois' list of clergy interested in performing civil unions contains hundreds of names around the state and was posted on the organization's website, [www.EqualityIllinois.org](http://www.EqualityIllinois.org). The list comes on the heels of the Faith Petition in Support of Civil Unions that the organization unveiled in November of 2010, and which was signed by over 300 clergy representing more than 280 religious institutions in nearly 70 cities and towns across Illinois.

"People of faith are among the strongest supporters of LGBT equality because they believe in natural equality of all human beings." –said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois in releasing the Faith Petition. "The fact that so many esteemed leaders from a broad range of religious backgrounds signed on to the Faith Petition just underscores the belief that fairness is universal and all human beings are equal in the eyes of the Creator."

Equality Illinois had launched its Faith & Freedom Initiative in April 2010 with Equality Prayer Breakfast, the first of its kind for the region, which included clergy from a wide array of major religious denominations – including, among others, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Conservative Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Jewish.

"It is our task to fight discrimination of our time," – said Rabbi Michael Siegel of Anshe Emet Synagogue, a Conservative Jewish congregation, at the Equality 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."

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**Equality Illinois was founded in 1991 to secure, protect and defend full equality for lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people. It is the State's largest LGBT advocacy organization.**