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Good morning. I'm Rev. Amanda Poppei, the Senior Leader of the Washington Ethical Society and a member of DC Clergy United for Marriage Equality. The Washington Ethical Society is a congregation of about 400 children, youth, and adults in Ward 4 with ties to two faith traditions: Ethical Culture and Unitarian Universalism. The traditions have distinct heritages and identities, but they share a core value, one that is at the heart of almost every world religion and that resonates with people who are spiritual and secular, wondering and faithful.

We believe in the inherent worth of every person, the idea that each person carries within them a divine spark—a spark of humanity—that makes their very being sacred. We believe that each person has a unique place in this world, different from all other people but somehow radically connected to each other, part of the same human family.

It is for this religious reason that I stand, and that the community and the movements I serve stand, for equal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer individuals. Because we know that our sexual orientation is only a piece of our identity, and that regardless of how we identify we are all people, sharing the same basic human rights to love, to be heard, to be honored for who we are.

Ethical Culture and Unitarian Universalism are also both essentially American religions, born or coming of age in a time of optimism about the human spirit in America. Both believe strongly in the democratic process, in the separation of church and state, in the rights guaranteed to every person in this country. I find myself deeply patriotic, moved by the advance of civil rights in this country and our ever-expanding inclusion of *all* Americans. And so it is for this patriotic reason, too, that I stand for marriage equality, for the rights of my gay brothers and sisters to marry whom they love.

I loved being a bride—the flowers, the white dress, the whole thing. I remember my wedding day, when my husband and I stood before our family and friends to make our vows to each other. I remember, too, my illness and hospitalization a few months before we were married, when we signed forms that we made up at home and my then-fiance clutched them in the hospital waiting room, terrified that he wouldn't be allowed in to see me after the surgery because we weren't yet married. I remember that night and know that I never want a loving, committed couple to experience that sense of disenfranchisement, lacking the legal ties that would allow them to be with their spouse in a moment of fear and need. I look at our beautiful daughter and know that I never want a parent to lose custody of their adoptive child because they aren't legally married to the child's parent. And I look at the silver ring on my finger and know that I never want someone to feel that they can't make the same commitment that I did to the person I love.

For all those reasons—religious, patriotic, and very personal—I stand for marriage equality in the District of Columbia, and I hope you will too.