

**Address to Shelby County Commissioners
Concerning Non-Discrimination Ordinance
Rabbi Micah D. Greenstein
June 1, 2009**

Honorable Commissioners: I am a two-time President of the Memphis Ministers Association, a rabbi, husband, father of three, and a resident of Shelby County for 18 years. What we have witnessed in recent days proves that whenever religion and politics mix, both suffer. Pastors who have never spoken up or appeared when the topic concerns our public education funding crisis or the welfare of children, the poor and left behind, suddenly show up to defend the firing of gays and lesbian citizens in Shelby County. ***My God, my God why have we forsaken You?!***

Saving souls is the business of some ministers, but your oath as elected officials is not to save souls. It is to protect rights. And not the rights of the majority but the rights of any minority who is the object of discrimination. This hearing isn't about special rights or a gay agenda, as distorters of the text before you incite, it's about an American agenda of protection from blatant discrimination no matter who you are. It's about the right to be free of intolerance and bigotry in Shelby County, including gay and lesbian people who earn their livings, pay their taxes, and give back to this community. I understand opposition to gay marriage, but it's beyond me how any of you could or would vote against equal protection for all people. And that's exactly what you would be doing in denying gays equal protection under the law.

Contrary to what a few politicians and pastors have been preaching, this ordinance isn't a gay issue anymore than racism in the sixties was a black problem. Discrimination then wasn't about black America; it's about what whites did to blacks in America. Similarly, anti-Semitism has nothing to do with Judaism; it's about what baptized Christians and others have done to Jews. My point? Gays should not be held accountable for this vote to stop discrimination against them – it's the rest of us who aren't gay who must overwhelmingly support this non-discrimination ordinance.

I am not the only clergyman who has been called a negro-lover (with a different "n" word) and a gay-lover. And it's true. I love people who are black and those who are brown and white and gay. After all, isn't this what good religion teaches? Isn't this the meaning of the prophet's plea: *"Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Why then do some deal treacherously every man against his brother?"*

Whether gay or straight, black or white, Jew or Gentile, all are children of God, created in the divine image.

In closing, the greater religious community and this County Commission must take a stand for non-discrimination and basic human dignity or be labeled a pious fraud. I urge you to vote for the rights of others and to tell your constituents the truth – that non-discrimination and equal protection for all is a fundamental right in this *county* and in this *country*. Thank you for listening and for your consideration.