



Ministers Hate Crimes Talking Points

- I firmly believe that as a pastor, I've been called by the Lord to speak on behalf of those who others have shunned. In this regard, I stand firmly in favor of the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (S.909), which extends equal protection under the law from hate crimes to gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Our gay, lesbian, and transgender brothers and sisters deserve the same rights, respect, and protection from discrimination as any other group in our society.
- None of our brothers and sisters should be forced to live in fear of retribution because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, or disability. But the reality is each year thousands of innocent Americans are victims of violent crimes merely because of who they are. The Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (S. 909) would direct federal resources to help local law enforcement fight violent hate crimes, and would let federal law enforcement step in when locals don't.
- This legislation protects freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Pastors will always be able to preach the gospel as their faith compels them. The first Amendment will always protect the right of every person to speak out against homosexuality if they wish. This legislation does nothing to change that.
- Remember, the issue at hand is this: All of our brothers and sisters should have equal protection from violence and discrimination under the law. Yet, instead Religious Right leaders choose to portray the hate crimes legislation as a "threat to religious liberty." They spread the lie that the churches will be silenced, and that church leaders and their supporters will be jailed for speaking out against homosexuality. The bottom line: This is all completely false. I urge my colleagues on the other side of this issue to stop bearing false witness against this legislation.
- It's important that we remember the key to our Christian faith – love. Christianity is not about how many people we can set ourselves against, not in how many people we can exclude based upon our particular notions of theology or church creed. What distinguishes us as people of God is our ability and willingness to love one another.