

20 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO ADVANCE THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

1. It's essential to believe in one's own inherent worth and dignity. That said, it is essential for GLBT individuals to release shame, and take the required life-enhancing steps OUT of the closet. It's dark in there! Step out to friends, to family, to co-workers, to community. NOW is the time.

2. It's essential to believe in one's own inherent worth and dignity. That said, it is essential for heterosexual individuals to courageously harness the privilege and step out to stand up for their GLBT loved ones who need support. Talk to friends, to family, to co-workers, to community. NOW is the time.

3. Inform yourself and others about the hateful and arguably unconstitutional law that went into effect in Virginia on 7/1/04: § 20-45.3 (Formerly known as HB 751)

Civil unions between persons of same sex:

A civil union, partnership contract or other arrangement between persons of the same sex purporting to bestow the privileges or obligations of marriage is prohibited.

Any such civil union, partnership contract or other arrangement entered into by persons of the same sex in another state or jurisdiction shall be void in all respects in Virginia and any contractual rights created thereby shall be void and unenforceable.

4. Don't let anyone say this law won't really take away civil rights. Explain that the language of this law is very broad and has room for many interpretations. It will be up to judges to enforce the law. Many judges are ultra-conservative and more are being appointed. Civil liberties are indeed in jeopardy.

5. Legislators in Virginia now plan to take §20-45.3 a step further by writing this discrimination into the state CONSTITUTION. Their intentions are to prohibit marriage equality, domestic partnerships, civil unions and other legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples (HJ586/SJ337).

This proposed amendment passed both houses with strong majorities in February 2005.

In order to amend the constitution, an identical version of the proposed measure must pass in the 2006 session before going to a state-wide voter referendum, possibly in the fall of 2006.

THERE IS MUCH WORK TO BE DONE! NOW is the time.

6. Develop a national awareness about the law (§ 20-45.3) and the proposed constitutional amendment (HJ586/SJ337). Email everyone in your address book. Spread the word beyond Virginia. Look what happened to the "Baggy Pants Bill" when it became an international joke! Make your notice short and sweet, and use your own heart-felt words, if possible.

7. Elected officials must hear from their constituents. Write to your state delegate/senator. You can email your delegate/senator directly by going to <http://legis.state.va.us> (Virginia). You can email your congressman/senator directly by going to www.visi.com/juan/congress (National).

Explain clearly what you'd like for him or her to support. Send thank you's when their vote is in support.

8. Don't wait until time for elections to inform voters. Get out the VOTE; locally, statewide, and nationally. Join like-minded efforts. NOW is the time.

9. Set up a showing of "A Love Story - In The Face of Hate." Use this tool to generate discussion: with friends in your home, or to a larger audience. If you want to set up a screening, visit www.sumoe.com for help.

10. Get these issues before the public. City papers, for example, want information. Submit important events; movies, concerts, book reviews, news stories, etc.

11. Use the tools you have. There are many positive and inspirational stories to be told. Find your own "Rosa Parks" and record the story any way possible: in song, print, movie. NOW is the time.

12. Join and/or make a donation to 3 GLBT organizations: on the local, state and national levels. Contribute that which you are able to give: be it time or money. NOW is the time.

13. Promote symbols of justice and equality; put a sticker on your car, wear a ribbon. It's important to be seen and counted. If the rainbow sticker is too "out" for you, perhaps display the HRC equal sign or the Equality Virginia logo. NOW is the time.

14. Don't let the Bible be used to demean GLBT existence. The Bible can, and has been, used to support many points of view. Over the years, much has been taken out of context and out of the time period. Here are a few examples:

Slavery is permitted (Lev 25: 44-45).

Non-virgin wives must be stoned to death (Deut 22: 13-24).

Adulterers must be put to death (Lev 20:10).

The aforementioned chapters also provide quotes that are often used against the GLBT. REFUTE the "abomination" quotes with other Biblical quotes. For more information, brochures are available from Metropolitan Community Church www.ufmcc.com.

15. Speak up when you hear homophobic slurs and jokes. Simply say "it offends me when you speak that way" or, "those type of words are really hurtful to me." Tell what it does to YOU instead of putting the speaker on the defensive with a comment like "you are so full of hate."

16. Give the "Love Story" DVD as a gift. Allow it to serve as a tool to inform, educate and activate. There are a lot of folks who care about human rights but are simply unaware of what is at stake.

17. Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper.

18. Don't forget the GLBT YOUTH. We must be aware of, and incorporate their needs in the struggle for equality. The youth are our future.

19. Ask your employer about health insurance for domestic partners. Never hurts to politely inquire. Put the issue in the forefront. NOW is the time.

20. To everyone, but especially GLBT couples, as best you can, get your papers in order, regardless of the law. Make sure these documents are in order if you are in a committed relationship: wills, deeds, powers of attorney, medical directives, even funeral arrangements.

NOW is the time.

