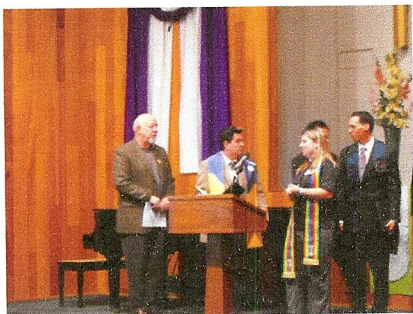


# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## O.C. religious leaders speak in favor of same-sex marriage

BY JAIMEE LYNN FLETCHER

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COSTA MESA—Leaders from a variety of religions and belief systems declared today that they will continue to fight for same sex couples to marry.

Although the 10 speakers outnumbered spectators at a press conference at Fairview Community Church in Costa Mesa, Christians, Pagans, Jews and atheists alike still pushed to get their message heard: overturn Proposition 8.

"Bigotry... and exclusion are not faith-based family values," said AJ Blackwood, a Unitarian Universalist seminary student.

The speakers are part of the Orange County Equality Coalition, a group that was formed when the ballot measure to ban gay marriage was introduced last summer.

Today's meeting was held in response to the California Supreme Court ruling on Tuesday to uphold voters' decision to define marriage as an institution between a man and woman in the state constitution.

Emotions on both sides of the aisle continue to run high since the initiative was passed in November - those against the proposition say they are fighting for human rights while the victors on the issue vow to protect traditional marriage.

"We're planning to continue our work with our strong and broad coalition to ensure that traditional marriage remains secure in the constitution," Ron Prentice, chairman of "Yes on 8," told a Register reporter during Tuesday's demonstration at the Santa Ana courthouse.

But those who support gay unions say they will not back down.

"We saw it coming, but it still hurt," said the Rev. Sarah Halverson of Fairview Community Church. "Every step we take is a step closer to equality."

Halverson added she feels religious groups have been unfairly lumped together with those opposing gay unions and they want to break free from this generalization.

"As people of faith, we didn't get a lot of voice," Halverson said.

Halverson married four couples in her congregation and another 15 couples outside her church from June 2008 to November. California saw 18,000 same sex unions in the six-month span, which the court ruled it would uphold.

The Rev. Jonipher Kwong of California Faith and Equality said there are 100 congregations in Orange County that support gay marriage.

"Progressive religious people will no longer stay quiet and in the closet," he said. "It doesn't take Miss California to find out this is not the type of country we want."