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Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie

SEASONAL Weddings|Travel STORY Sam Baltrusis

I Do’s & Don’ts

Arlington Street Church’s Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie serves up some sound advice on fostering a successful LGBT marriage

The secret to a successful lesbian or gay marriage? According to Arlington Street Church’s Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie, a Unitarian Universalist minister who has officiated a slew of both gay and straight weddings over the years, insists that the pre-nuptial counsel she gives to same-sex couples doesn’t deviate much from their hetero counterparts. However, the respected “marriage mid-wife” says lesbian and gay couples face a few potential stressors that need to be hashed out before tying the knot.

“Part of my work is to mid-wife marriages and it’s one of my favorite things to talk about,” she says from her stately second-floor office in the oldest church, built in 1861, in the Back Bay. “Wouldn’t it be interesting to talk about marriage as an institution and then talk about gay people and marriage?”

When she counsels potential lesbian, gay, and straight couples, Harvie says that she has a little fun with mnemonics before she recommends a walk down the aisle. “All of us are resting on a tripod with three legs in life: Friends, family and finance. If any one of those things are shaky, the tripod could fall. And, if two of those things are shaky, we’re really in trouble,” she explains. “Those are the three really important areas we bring into healthy, or unhealthy, relationships. When people come to me and talk about getting married, I want to hear about their friends, family and finance and how that’s working for them as individuals and as a couple.”

Harvie knows a thing or two about shepherding a successful partnership. She made history on May 17, 2004 when she married David Wilson and Robert Compton, the first of seven long-time couples who sued Massachusetts for the right to exchange vows in a state-sanctioned wedding ceremony. On May 20, three days later, Harvie became one of the 50 same-sex couples to legally get hitched in the historic sanctuary which sits on the corners of Arlington and Boylston Street. After exchanging vows with her wife Kem Morehead, she put on her ministerial garb

and continued to officiate ceremonies until the wee hours of the night.

Before signing off, Harvie says she quizzes potential couples on the five “ka” sounds of their relationship: chemistry, conflict, kids, cash and companionship. “This is regardless of the sex of the person of whom you’re marrying and regardless of your gender, but how is the chemistry? It’s more than just sex. Do you like how the person smells? Is this someone, no matter what, that you can curl up with in bed. It’s all about intimacy. Coming from the perspective of my faith tradition, I talk a lot about mystery and chemistry is something that can be mysterious. It’s chemistry of attraction. Chemistry of the long haul,” she says.

“We’ve seen couples talk about being attracted to their mates and we’re like, really? Thank God we’re not all attracted to the same person. It’s a mystery sometimes why we’re attracted to someone else. I love that piece and I enjoy getting couples to talk about that aspect of their relationship. Couples do need to talk about sex and if they can’t talk about their sex lives, it can be this big, black hole,” she continues.

Harvie says how couples quarrel can set off red flags suggesting a potentially unhealthy relationship. “Then there’s



Kem Morehead and Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie were married on May 20, 2004

conflict. How do couples fight and engage in conflict. Does this person always walk away mad? Do you really go at it or get physical with each other? Whatever way couples handle conflict, I want to know how that's going. Do they really

listen and take the other person's perspective into consideration," Harvie asks.

"The next thing is kids. I ask if a couple is planning to have kids or do they already have kids and how is that going. Sometimes I think it's more

complicated when the children are already there, but sometimes it's easier. So, the jury is still out," she says with a laugh.

The next "ka" sound is cash. "Do you have credit cards and how much debt are you bringing into the relationship? Is one person not making any money? Also, how do you spend it? Do you save or are you a big spender?" she questions.

The final mnemonic is companionship. "That's how you play together, worship, travel and relax," she says. "Do you enjoy each others' company? Are you just drinking buddies and, if so, that may not work out for the long haul. There has to be some texture in the relationship."

Harvie continues: "Those are the questions I ask every couple before they take the big leap regardless of their orientation. Then there's the

issue of what is specific to gay couples and the truth is, and this is when the interview gets short, there isn't anything except for having some sort of conversation asking if they are all the way out together in their relationship, especially with their friends, family and neighbors. Whether or not they're completely out in their lives can be a potential stressor in the relationship."

So, being out of the closet can make or break a same-sex marriage? "Yes, I've had at least one couple decide that they're not going to get married after meeting with me," she says. "I always say, 'what you see is what you get.' You can't make a relationship work if they're spectacular in every way and they're falling down drunk by 4 p.m. It may change. God willing, they may change. But, what's actually there is what you have to work with in



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a relationship. For those who come in with rose-colored glasses and think that someone [or their situation] will change once they get married, that's not going to happen."

In addition to being out, Harvie says gay couples need to hash out the details of whether or not the relationship is open or monogamous. "If they're both really there ... really there and not just when one convinces the other that this is going to be good times, I've seen couples make that work. Frankly, I don't know how they can find the time for an open relationship, but they both have to be all in with the idea," she says.

"One of my favorite couples for whom that works have a lot of rules. For example, if they're both in town, that would be a 'no.' When we're apart in two different cities, that's OK. There are lots of rules

including safe sex because you don't want to bring [an STD] into the relationship," she says. "It's my experience that guys genetically, on a cellular level because of where we came from, are not naturally monogamous. I believe that the benefits of monogamy have to be weighed in so that it becomes attractive. Do you really need to propagate the species everywhere you go? How primitive are you? At the same, if you have a spectacular sex drive and your partner doesn't, you need to navigate that in the relationship."

As far as fostering a successful long-term marriage, Harvie says it's important to keep it simple. "There was a study that came out not that long ago that said you can absolutely determine the long-term success of a marriage by the way in which people tell the story of how they fell in love." she

says. "I have people tell me their story and if it isn't a good story, then they may need to re-think things."

When Harvie and the team of three multi-faith clergy officiated the 50 same-sex weddings on May 20, 2004, she says the majority of the couples getting married had at least 10 years together. "We were making legal what was spiritually already a done deal. It was an interesting moment to see what it meant to turn up the heat on that institution and to be able to step into the light of all of the rights and responsibilities that come with legal marriage. What I felt that day and continue to feel in the early years of same-sex marriage is that because queer people have always been in committed relationships, we already know a lot of what it takes to make a relationship work in spite of not having the

legal opportunity to do it," she says with emotion.

"We're on the high-wire of intimacy, struggle/resolution and commitment/devotion because the world was telling us it wasn't OK for us to be together for many years. I strongly believe that same-sex couples have a lot to say about healthy relationships," she adds.

For a recent homily on marriage, Harvie reached out to several lesbian and gay couples asking for one-liners to help surmise the secret of a successful partnership. She got a few gems, including "Whatever makes you happy, dear," and "Don't rain on each others' parades." Her favorite came from a friend Susie who grew up in a large Italian family and has had a long-term relationship with her partner Clementine. Susie's words of wisdom? "Don't mess with the sauce." [x]



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