# AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BLACK AND HISPANIC COMMUNITY AND CLERGY GRAPPLING WITH THE GAY MARRIAGE ISSUE

May 9, 2012 By Angel Mason

## ’When an Angel Speaks’

(Special Commentary from Bishop Terry Angel Mason)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I greet you in the name of Jesus, Savior of the world and King that is soon to come!

I realize that many of you may not know me and, since you are called to lead God’s people, I realize that the first thing you will want to know is what my credentials are. While I am tempted to go into great detail about who I am, I must be cognizant of the fact that this letter will be printed in numerous publications, both nationally and internationally, and cannot be lengthy.

I am first a born again child of God and a Bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ. I have been saved since the age of five, was called into ministry at the age of eight, and was ordained and licensed by ordained ministers in a credible, non-denominational church in San Diego, California, where I founded my first ministry. While I know that many of you will want to know more about my background, I ask that you not focus entirely on that issue. Respectfully, I request that the focus be solely placed on the urgent matter that prompted this correspondence -- a matter that literally deals with what I feel are life and death issues that will affect not only clergy members and leaders, but those we minister to.

Beloved shepherds, the apostle Paul warned us in the epistle of II Timothy, Chapter 3, that in the latter days, “perilous times shall come.” I think we all agree that the world is experiencing exactly what he prophesied in the letter written to Timothy, his protÃ□Â□Ã‚Â©gÃ□Â□Ã‚Â©. Brothers and sisters, I realize that we come from many different backgrounds and that we are as diverse in our interpretation of scripture as the varieties of flowers on earth and stars in the universe. But there

are fundamental truths and basic tenants of the Gospel that I feel bind us in the spirit of unity. It is in that spirit that I address you.

God has given me an international platform as a columnist and author. As a result, I am ever careful to give Him the glory for making this possible because I know that if it were not for His favor and wisdom, I could never have achieved success on any level. In gratitude and service to Him, and because of the sincere concern I have for all of God's people, the LOVE OF CHRIST IN ME WON'T LET ME BE SILENT about the issues I am about to present.

As you know, this election year deals with many issues: contraception, the fate of Medicare and Medicaid, "Obama Care", the Citizens United decision, marriage equality, gun control, and laws (rightfully) in question like the "Stand Your Ground Laws" in Florida and many other states. This election will also serve as a referendum on whether or not the accomplishments of President Barack Obama have met the needs of the very citizens that voted him into office.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I know without a doubt that it was the Spirit of the Lord that inspired me to write this letter to you. Moreover, I believe that if you have the Spirit of Christ in you, then the Spirit of truth will confirm this in your hearts and minds.

Given the nature of what I do in the community as an HIV/AIDS advocate, civil rights activist and pastor, I am constantly in the presence of people from every walk of life. Their concerns and needs often pain my heart in a way that I could never articulate. On many nights, I find myself prostrate in the presence of God with tears in my eyes because I see people in such dire straits on a regular basis and admittedly this is somewhat disconcerting and overwhelming!

I have lived on the earth 55 years, and I must admit that I have never seen such disregard for human beings as I have in the last few years. Jesus said that this would be, yet, admittedly, I am still amazed at how we could even consider doing things, politically speaking, that would gut and obliterate social programs that house the homeless, feed the poor, provide medical assistance to seniors, and fund education programs for our children, youth and young adults.

While I realize that many of you have been speaking out on these issues, I also know that most of us have been sinfully silent. I've come to realize this as a minister that has traveled and spoken all across the nation. Now, just so you know, I am aware of what the laws say about the separation of church and state. I am aware of the restrictions that a 501 (3c) non-profit status places on religious institutions and congregations. I know that none of us can mount the pulpit and recommend to any of our parishioners who they should or should not vote for, even though many of us do it anyway!

However, Jesus made it absolutely clear that our heavenly mandate is to lead the lost to Christ, heal the sick, clothe the naked, visit those who are in prison, teach our children the statutes and precepts in God's word, and to lovingly care for our senior adults and widows in our congregations. Jesus also made it abundantly clear that these were mandates issued by God. I realize that many of you do a great job in many of these areas, but if we made an honest assessment of whether or

not we were adhering to God's orders, on a national and international scale, we would discover that we are greatly missing the mark!

Thousands of men and women are in our nation's prisons, but few of us have effective prison ministries. Countless youth, young adults and even senior citizens are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus and only a handful of us have even taken the time to set up a ministry to tend to these people because we feel unqualified to do it or because we prejudge these individuals. Moreover, more often than not, we shrug our shoulders and purposely look the other way because, consciously or subconsciously, we feel they got what they deserved. Thus, they end up being regarded as unworthy of any assistance our ministries could provide.

I urge you to find out what institutions in your city care for and offer services to the elderly, those suffering from HIV/AIDS and other life threatening illnesses. Ask if you can come and see how they run these programs and what your congregation can do to assist them. What is going to startle many of you is how many of your parishioners' faces you are going to see at these places. After you have visited these places, I guarantee you will not be so quick to mount your pulpit and foolishly bash these people and/or organizations, especially when you discover that many of them are doing a better job than you ever could, as they compassionately minister to the hundreds, if not thousands, in your congregation.

I would like to address a specific issue concerning senior members of our congregations. Sunday after Sunday, I watch elderly people struggle to climb the steps of buses in my city that shouldn't even be on the road because they are old and unsuitable to serve seniors and disabled persons. In sharp contrast, more modern and streamlined buses are assigned to rich, influential areas in our cities and neighborhoods. What is even more troubling is the fact that while many of us can afford van and bus ministries that would address these needs; we do nothing to help change the situation.

The result is that our seniors, who happen to be some of our most loyal and dedicated (tithers) and members, are forced to ride substandard buses filled with violent people, youth who use foul language and engage in drug use on the buses, and have absolutely no respect for the elderly. Furthermore, it is to our shame and our misplaced priorities that after church has concluded, many of these same seniors stand on bus stops while other parishioners pass them by in their Mercedes, Cadillac's, BMW's, or Chrysler 300's! To add insult to injury, the same parishioners wave at them and won't even stop to see if they can assist them with getting home!

I challenge each one of you to do something radical! Instead of pulling up to the church grounds in your 2012 Cadillac, BMW, Mercedes or Bentley, use public transportation to come to church for one week. I guarantee you that your entire perspective will change and that most of you will respond by making much needed changes in your ministry -- changes that will finally bring that growth and transformation that many of you have been praying for so desperately.

In 2008, many right-wing, prominent, and rich evangelicals infiltrated our ranks and convinced us to vehemently oppose Proposition 8. Over $65 million was spent to prevent same-gender-loving

people from getting married because it was said that this threatened the family unit and was undermining the institution of marriage. This issue galvanized pastors, bishops, priests and parishioners and the proposition was voted down by a narrow margin. Many of us flexed our spiritual muscles thinking we had done the Lord a great service after our elite, right-wing brothers and sisters quickly retreated to the safety of their culturally and religiously isolated ranks, never to worship with us again. Well, at least until they felt our support was needed when the next issue or controversial proposition came up.

I was amazed when this happened, and I will tell you why. Just think of what the body of Christ could have done with $65,000,000! If we were really concerned about saving marriages, we could have used that money to create national counseling programs where pastors could have been trained to minister to married couples and couples who are preparing to marry. Money could have been poured into already existing credible programs that are effectively providing counseling to our parishioners, creating stronger marriage relationships, and perhaps decrease the great number of divorces in the body of Christ.

Oh my brothers and sisters, I know that it is easy to blame gays for the conditions of our failed relationships, but the truth is when we stand before Christ -- and believe me when I tell you that all of us will -- there will be no one to heap the blame upon but ourselves! Incidentally, the proposition will soon be overturned and the money used to fight it will be a wasted investment!

Many of us were ecstatic when Senator Barack Obama was elected as the first African- American President of the United States, and we vowed to support him in every way. Yet, when we discovered he was a president who had purposed in his heart to ensure that all Americans would have equal rights, no matter what their religious convictions, age, gender, or sexual orientation, many of us bailed and joined the ranks of other prominent religious leaders, many of whom are used like puppets by right-wing politicians to do their bidding.

Now, here is the horrific reality, which I find amazing! Many of us, as leaders, are willing to support a political machine that will strip away social programs that meet the needs of over 70 percent of our parishioners. We do this because we don’t have a correct understanding of the office of “priest” and “king”. Barack Obama was not elected or ordained by God to operate in the office of priest/pastor, but rather the office of “king”, which biblically is synonymous with President of the United States.

Don’t misunderstand or misconstrue what I am saying, thinking I am suggesting that any elected official is to misuse his office, forget the mandate of God, disregard the needs of the people and act like a dictator. I am simply pointing these things out to you because it is evident to me that many shepherds don’t have a correct biblical understanding of these offices. All too often, they confuse the two or place expectations and demands upon the President of the United States that should never be placed on anyone who serves in this position.

Based on conversations I have had with parishioners, a substantial number of people feel that because the country now has an African-American President, many states have enacted voter

suppression laws that will prevent hundreds of thousands of African-Americans from voting in the 2012 election. While we cannot immediately reverse these laws, we can begin national campaigns to make sure that everyone in our congregation has appropriate identification documents that will ensure that they can vote.

Additionally, we can creatively arrange car pools so that voters can get to polling places. Recently, I heard it announced on television that many national organizations who are responsible for getting voters registered are totally abandoning all efforts because of voter suppression laws that place them in harm's way, legally speaking, or should I say, "illegal harm's way".

If we are honest with ourselves, most of our church calendars are filled with annual days that never address any of the issues that I have mentioned. Just imagine how grateful our congregants will be when we initiate a plan to help them obtain the proper identification so that they can vote this year. Since the vast majority of our parishioners already possess these documents, this effort will not be financially cumbersome or burdensome and it is not illegal. Additionally, it does not place our religious institutions in legal jeopardy in any way.

Year after year we diligently plan for the Pastor's Appreciation Day, the Annual Usher's Day, Youth day, Men's and Women's Day, and the list goes on. We have this down to a science, but now we must refocus our efforts and ourselves and come to understand that our very livelihoods are at stake. We cannot allow the few programs that meet our educational and medical needs, as well as other much-needed social programs, to be stripped away while the rich get richer and feel no obligation to the poor, working poor or the endangered middle class.

In conclusion, I wish to state that many of us worry about the moral decay of our nation, and because this is a concern, politicians use this as leverage to distract us. They know we think that the wrath of God will come upon our great nation because we feel that much of what the "ungodly" does is in direct opposition to the Word of God. The truth of the matter is that if our nation is destroyed and/or incurs the wrath of God, it will be because we pander to the rich, while totally disregarding those who are destitute and are in desperate need of our assistance! Tragically and ironically, even if we don't like what is being done by those in positions of authority -- still, we remain conspicuously silent!

Before you discount what I am saying, or disregard this letter, I ask that you act with the same resolve and urgency when you thought the institution of marriage was being undermined because there is a real Goliath on the battle field! This giant looks like us, knows all of our religious terminology, knows exactly how we think and knows how to use what we think and believe against us. And if we are not careful, he will cut off our heads, desecrate our people and deny us our civil rights, all to benefit him and deceive us. It is only after he has plundered our parishioners and made a mockery of our spiritual mandate - THAT WE WILL BE THE ONES TO BLAME FOR LETTING THESE ATROCITIES HAPPEN!

The choice is yours! The onus is upon us, the men and women who were called to shepherd God's flock. Will we step up, embrace and demonstrate the qualities of Christian leadership with which

we were gifted and protect our congregations, or will we stand indolently and apathetically aside while we bear witness to the politically-proposed evisceration of our poor, our youth, our seniors, and our already struggling and endangered middle class? Either way, I guarantee you that we will one day stand before our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and give an accounting for our actions or lack of actions. I cannot speak for you, but when The Prince of Peace asks me, “Did you feed and protect my flock?” I want to look Him in the eye with pride as I say, “Yes, Lord!”, and not hang my head in shame!

In His Service,

Bishop Terry Angel Mason, Global Author and Intl. Columnist

Terry Angel Mason has been featured in the following publications and/or news venues: (Lee Bailey’s) eurweb.com, The East County Magazine, Five (5) Magazine, Whosoever Magazine, SGL Weekly Magazine, Outword Magazine, The NBJC Newsletter, The Advocate, Frontier Magazine, Broadway World, The Windy City Times Newspaper, New Pittsburgh Courier, New England Informer, Our Weekly Magazine, Out Impact, The San Diego Gay and Lesbian News, The San Diego Gay and Lesbian Times, The San Diego Union Tribune, ME Magazine, POZ Magazine, The New Civil Rights Online Magazine, A&U Magazine, Religious Tolerance, Marriage Equality International, Homorazzi, BN&S News Commentary, Real Health Magazine, Q Magazine, MSNBC News Vine, ILGA, Out Military Online Magazine, Proud Parenting Web Magazine, Fuse Magazine, Echelon Magazine, The Bay Area Reporter, Connextions Magazine, and in many other publications.

To purchase Mason’s books, read breaking news stories, feature articles, interviews, or obtain more information about the author, visit his website at www.TerryAngelMason.com.

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