

Invocation for Stonewall Democratic Club  
30<sup>th</sup> Annual Stoney Awards  
February 4, 2006  
Rabbi Lisa Edwards  
Beth Chayim Chadashim (BCC)  
Los Angeles [www.bcc-la.org](http://www.bcc-la.org)

I always feel awkward when I'm asked to offer an invocation at an event that is not religious. Particularly when it's a political event, my impulse is to decline the invitation, being that I am a strong advocate of the separation of church and state.

On the other hand, as a religious person and a person of faith, I'm perhaps particularly sensitive to what can happen when the loudest voices of faith we hear in the public sphere are voices that use religion to frighten rather than comfort, to oppress rather than embrace, to inspire animosity rather than appreciation.

As a Jew, I know too well what happens when people look for scapegoats instead of common cause and joint solutions.

As a lesbian, I know too well what happens when people let fear and imagination take the place of learning and open hearts.

As a lesbian rabbi, I know too well what happens when religious people think religion ought to be a voice for stagnation rather than change. Not that I advocate change for its own sake, but change based on new-found wisdom and understanding.

So Stonewall Democrats, lest you worry, know that I'm not about to pray for us, not about to ask God to take our side over the side of those who would condemn our choices or deny us our rights. I'm not about to offer a *provocation* rather than an *invocation*, as I've heard too many other "religious voices" do, all the while claiming to speak in the name of God.

Instead, if the definition of an invocation is to call upon "a greater power" for help and inspiration, then tonight I want to invoke a different sort of "higher power" – one more suited perhaps to a roomful of Democrats – whether stonewall democrats or the garden variety. Tonight I want to encourage us by invoking "the greater power" that occurs when our country and state and community are blessed with the presence of leaders like the ones you have chosen to honor tonight – the whole lot of them. The *greater power* that comes into play when leaders come into leadership with open hearts and open minds, when leaders – like tonight's honorees – become leaders not out of a desire for power or fame or monetary wealth, but out of a desire to see this world become a gentler, safer, more humane one; a world in which all our *higher powers* – including elected officials, judges, *and* religious leaders – concern themselves foremost with making our world one filled with justice and caring, healing and peace.

Enjoy your evening, and let the leaders we honor tonight inspire us as we join them in their efforts.