

Would you like rage with that?

We only wanted a bellyful of McDonald's hash browns and biscuits as we waited in the drive-through line in Lugoff. What we got was an earful from the man in the car behind us. Spurred, on, I suppose, by our bumper sticker reading "Another Christian against Bush," our fellow fast-food aficionado began talking loudly through his open window. At first, we weren't sure what the man was going on about, and then the words struck us: "Bitch Communists!"

Now, I can certainly be accused of having some socialist leanings, especially when it comes to such things as health care and taking care of the poor, but I've never been called a Communist before. But, then, the *coup de grace*, "I'll bet you're goddamned lesbians, too!"

My partner and I looked at each other and laughed out loud. "Care to kiss me now?" I asked, grinning. We got our food and went on our way, ignoring our antagonist, who continued to bray behind us.

Our levity turned to fear a few minutes later on Interstate 20 as a car raced up from behind us and began to tailgate us. "Our McDonald's friend is back," my partner said, glancing nervously in the rearview mirror. The man tailgated us for a little while and finally turned off onto I-77.

The irony of the entire incident is that it happened as we were on our way to attend Senate hearings on a proposed constitutional amendment that would deny me and my partner the right to marry in this state. At those hearings we got another earful from our antagonist's ideological brethren, who called gays and lesbians everything but children of God.

As I reflect upon this incident, coupled with the anti-marriage amendment that is on its way to the ballot in 2006, that fear I experienced on the highway returns. Thanks to the anti-gay climate in our state and in this nation in general, the gentleman behind us felt emboldened to verbally assault two total strangers in a public place. He knew that he could berate us with impunity — with no fear of reprisal. In fact, such an incident certainly could have escalated if others had been so inclined.

A new report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs shows reported violence against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people in our nation rose by 4 percent last year. Murders were up by 11 percent. Certainly, the majority who oppose marriage equality for gays and lesbians will say they have no intention of fostering hatred or acts of violence, verbal or physical, against gays and lesbians. I'm certain that the majority who oppose us would not go out of their way to abuse us

in this fashion. But by putting such a divisive and politically explosive measure up for public vote, they are doing just that — inviting increased verbal and physical abuse on gays and lesbians by those who feel they are justified in dishing out that abuse and are doing the moral thing when they do so.

This amendment increases the animosity toward gays and lesbians and will keep many of my brothers and sisters in the closet, fearful not just for their jobs or their homes, but for their very lives. I suppose some people would welcome silence and invisibility from our community, but we will continue to speak out because a grave injustice is being perpetuated on us.

This amendment is mean-spirited and takes aim at a minority of



Candace Chellew-Hodge

Guest Columnist

citizens and singles them out for special discrimination. It dehumanizes us by defining us not as human beings but as somehow less than the rest of the population, not deserving of protection or equal status. When a group is dehumanized, its members become targets for harassment, abuse and stigmatization.

The Legislature has declared open season on the state's gay and lesbian citizens. Now, anyone who disagrees with our very existence has been empowered to openly and loudly speak out against our lives, and a few of them may feel free to launch more violent physical attacks upon us.

It's a sad day when our lawmakers see fit to put one group of people in mortal danger simply to advance their own political and moral posturing. When we ask, "What would Jesus do?" I can't imagine that the answer would be one that put any human life in jeopardy.

The Rev. Chellew-Hodge is the assistant pastor at Metropolitan Community Church in Columbia.

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