

# Influential Gay Rev. Dies at 68

By Michelle Garcia (March 1, 2011)



The Reverend Peter Gomes, one of the most prominent theologians in the U.S., died Monday in Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, succumbing to complications from a stroke in December. He was 68.

Gomes, who was gay, was the first black minister of Harvard's Memorial Church, according to Reuters. He was named one of the seven most distinguished preachers in America in 1979 by *Time* magazine. In his career, Gomes was awarded 39 honorary degrees, wrote several best-selling books, and taught classes for Harvard's school of arts and sciences and divinity school.

"To generations of Harvard students, he was a wise counselor and an admired teacher who presided at every commencement," Harvard president Drew Faust said in a statement Tuesday. "To many of his faculty colleagues, he was a cherished conversationalist and a steadfast advocate of Harvard's best traditions. But to me, and I suspect to many others, Professor Gomes was first and foremost a trusted advisor and a true friend."

Gomes spent the early part of his career as a conservative Republican, and he had participated in the inaugurations of presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. A gay bashing on the Harvard campus prompted him to come out in 1991. He changed his political affiliation in 2006 to support current Gov. Deval Patrick, a Democrat who became the first African-American governor of Massachusetts.

After coming out, Gomes became a vocal advocate for gay marriage and became known for his tome *The Good Book: Reading the Bible With Mind and Heart*, in which he wrote about how the Bible is used to discriminate, notably against gay people.

"If Jesus came today, the people he would be most interested in dealing with would be homosexuals, racial minorities," Gomes said in a 2007 interview on NPR, Reuters reports. Evan Wolfson, founder and president of Freedom to Marry and author of *Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People's Right to Marry*, told *The Advocate* that Gomes's contributions to the fight to legalize marriage equality were integral.

"In my book, *Why Marriage Matters*, I quoted again and again Reverend Peter Gomes's passionate eloquence in defense of the freedom to marry. 'Our whole constitutional history has been the enlargement of rights, not their restriction,' Reverend Gomes told Massachusetts state senators, manifesting his moral witness for justice as he did throughout his life his religious vocation," Wolfson said. "We need more voices like his, in the clergy and in the corridors of power, and his and he will be missed."