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Spencer Weiner / Los Angeles Times
Resident Patty DeFury hold a Bible at the Fresno rally in support of Proposition 8.

Thousands rally in support of gay marriage ban

The demonstrations in Fresno and San Diego follow a gathering of Prop. 8 opponents, who vow to press ahead.

By Tony Perry and Spencer Weiner
June 1, 2009

Thousands of supporters of California's ban on same-sex marriage rallied in Fresno and San Diego on Sunday in what organizers described as a celebration of traditional wedlock and a thank-you to the California Supreme Court for upholding their voter-approved measure.

The demonstrations followed Saturday's gathering of gay rights supporters in Fresno to renew efforts to reverse Proposition 8, which the high court let stand early last week.



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The dueling weekend rallies underscored the fact that, despite an election and a Supreme Court decision, the issue of same-sex marriage remains divisive in California.

In San Diego, about 200 Proposition 8

supporters were told to gird for what speakers said will be future political, legal and "culture war" battles.

Brad Dacus of the Sacramento-based Pacific Justice Institute urged the crowd outside the county administration building to be ready for "the next battle, the next battle and the next battle, without surrender."

In Fresno, about 3,000 demonstrators -- the same number who turned out the day before on the other side -- were told not to accept being called bigots because they support traditional marriage.

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"We know we've been called hate-mongers. That's not what we are," said Jim Franklin, pastor of Cornerstone Church, just after the rally.

"We are people who believe in our values."

Speaker after speaker in Fresno exhorted attendees to respect the religious underpinnings of traditional marriage.

As the rally broke up, about 25 gay rights activists surrounded a group of Christian Harley-Davidson motorcyclists who called themselves the Fresno Motorcycle Ministry.

The police intervened and the motorcyclists left peacefully.

Several San Diego speakers said that much of the political energy for the pro-Proposition 8 campaign came from the county's churches.

"Never let down," Ron Prentice, chairman of Protect Marriage.org, told the San Diego crowd.

"It's the will of God to protect marriage. . . . We will be victorious because God goes before us."

Among the speakers at the San Diego rally were Ron Nehring, chairman of the California Republican Party, and Will Prejean, father of Miss California Carrie Prejean, whose anti-gay marriage comments have caused controversy.

"We will stand united and we will win this battle," Nehring said.

The Rev. Jim Garlow, pastor of Skyline Church in La Mesa and one of the leaders of the pro-Proposition 8 forces, had special praise for the Latino and African American voters, whose support for the measure exceeded that of the white community.

Miles McPherson, a former pro football player and the founder of The Rock Church, urged the San Diego crowd to try to convert people who believe in same-sex marriage.

"Get in their face -- in a loving way," he said.

Same-sex marriage advocates also met in Fresno to plot the next step in their campaign to overturn Proposition 8. "It's going to be hard work," said Marc Solomon, marriage director of Equality California. "Public opinion hasn't changed that much. . . . But people are ready to work together."

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Perry reported from San Diego. Weiner reported from Fresno. Times staff writers Jessica Garrison and Gale Holland in Los Angeles also contributed to this report.

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