



COLLEGIUM OF OFFICERS

John H. Thomas
GENERAL MINISTER AND PRESIDENT

Edith A. Guffey
ASSOCIATE GENERAL MINISTER

M. Linda Jaramillo
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

Steven L. Sterner
LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRIES

Cally Rogers-Witte
WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES

March 10, 2008

To: Members of the Ohio State Legislature
From: Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ,
Conference Minister of the Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ

RE: Statement of Support for Equal Housing and Employment Act (EHEA)

In July of 1975, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, in a civil rights pronouncement, identified that there is a significant population in the United States whose civil liberties and right to equal protection under the law, are systematically and routinely violated. The General Synod recognized that discrimination related to sexual orientation in employment, housing, public accommodations, and other civil liberties, inflicts an incalculable burden of fear into the lives of persons in society and in the church whose orientation is toward persons of the same gender.

The constant fear of losing one's job and home, and the economic and social consequences of such a loss, creates suffering in human life. Living as presumed heterosexuals, same-gender oriented women and men are intimidated into silence, forced into lives of duplicity and deception, by the hostility of the majority society.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, together with their families, friends and allies, continue to work to free themselves from the fear which the reality of discrimination, particularly in employment and housing, inflicts upon them. Such persons are taking a moral stance against discrimination and the violence that it does to human dignity.

Today's introduction of the Equal Housing and Employment Act to the Ohio Legislature is an important step on the journey of securing full civil liberties and equal protection under the law for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens of Ohio, our sisters and brothers in human community,

Why would we as people of faith and leaders in the United Church of Christ voice our support for this legislation? Because, the religious community must bear a significant measure of responsibility for the suffering visited upon same-gender oriented persons, particularly the Judeo-Christian tradition. The negative attitude of several religious communities toward same-gender loving relationships has been used as a primary justification for denial and violation of civil liberties and the perpetuation of discrimination against such persons.

God is still speaking,

As people of faith, we repudiate this denial and violation of civil liberties and we stand against all such discrimination. We hold that, as a child of God, every person is endowed with worth and dignity that human judgment cannot set aside. Denial and violation of the civil liberties of the individual and their right to equal protection under the law defames that worth and dignity and is, therefore, morally wrong. Our faith requires that we respond to the injustice in our society manifested in discrimination and the denial and violation of the civil liberties of persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, and their families and loved ones.

The national offices of the United Church of Christ, with more than 200 employees, are in Cleveland, OH. Since coming to Cleveland, our personnel policies have offered equal employment opportunities to LGBT persons. The Ohio Conference, with 381 churches, 30 of which have declared themselves to Open and Affirming, indicating publicly the full inclusion of LGBT persons in the full life, leadership and ministry of the church. The life of our church, across its various settings, has been immeasurably enriched by the presence, generosity, gifts and abilities of LGBT persons. We can do no less than stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in support of legislation that addresses the injustice of discrimination they face in Ohio.

We are here once again to give voice to the mandate of the General Synod of the United Church of Christ--first adopted some 30 years ago and reaffirmed on numerous occasions since--to support the enactment of legislation at the federal, state and local levels of government that would guarantee the liberties of all persons without discrimination related to sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The Equal Housing and Employment Act being introduced today is legislation that will do just that. This legislation is long overdue and we call on the members of Ohio's legislature to support and pass this bill quickly so that the Governor may sign it into law as soon as possible.

Signatories:

Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ

*The Reverend John H. Thomas,
General Minister and President*

*Ms. Edith A. Guffey,
Associate General Minister*

*The Reverend Cally Rogers Witte,
Executive Minister for Wider Church Ministries*

*The Reverend M. Linda Jaramillo,
Executive Minister for Justice and Witness Ministries*

*The Reverend Stephen L. Sterner,
Executive Minister for Local Church Ministries*

and

Conference Minister of the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ

The Reverend Robert Molsberry