

A PRONOUNCEMENT: CIVIL LIBERTIES WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO AFFECTIONAL OR SEXUAL PREFERENCE

[Adopted by the Tenth General Synod, United Church of Christ, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 27-July 2, 1975. Vote: 546 Yes; 135 No]

The purpose of this Pronouncement is to make a statement on civil liberties. It is not within the province of this Pronouncement to make an ethical judgment about same-gender relationships. However, this Pronouncement may well serve to further dialogue that will clarify the ethical issues involved in human sexuality.

There is, in the United States, a significant minority of persons whose civil liberties, and whose right to equal protection under the law, are systematically and routinely violated. Discrimination related to affectional or sexual preference in employment, housing, public accommodations, and other civil liberties, has inflicted an incalculable burden of fear into the lives of persons in society and in the church whose affectional or sexual preference is toward persons of the same gender.

Most directly affected are the 10% of the population whose affectional or sexual preference, according to the research of Alfred Kinsey, is predominately towards persons of the same gender. Also affected is the one-third of the American population which Kinsey found to have had, at one time or another, an adult same-gender sexual experience. Public revelation of even a single experience often results in the presumption that a person is same-gender oriented and thus subject to social sanctions, including violations of her or his civil liberties. Even the civil liberties of persons whose affectional or sexual preference is a well-guarded secret are vulnerable. Inquiry by private investigatory agencies into the personal life of the individual is often a pre-requisite for employment. Draft records, insurance investigations, arrest records (even when charges have been dismissed or the defendant acquitted), and investigations instigated on the basis of anonymous accusation or rumor, all provide an employer, landlord, and other persons information used to justify discrimination.

Discrimination Causes Suffering

A 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. Such duplicity and deception, and their concurrent alienation, sometimes evolving into isolation and depression and culminating in suicide, are necessarily detrimental to the growth of the individual and to the growth of interpersonal relationships. Today, same-gender oriented persons, our sisters and brothers in human community and in Christian community, are struggling to free themselves from the fear which the reality of discrimination, particularly in employment and in housing, has inflicted upon them. Such persons are taking a moral stance against discrimination and the violence that it does to human dignity. They seek to secure protection for their full civil liberties and equal protection under the law. The church must bear a measure of responsibility for the suffering visited upon same-gender oriented persons since often the traditional Judeo-Christian attitude toward same-gender relationship has been used as a primary justification for denial and violation of civil liberties and the perpetuation of discrimination against such persons.

The Religious Perspective

Christian love for God and our neighbor in God impels us to cherish the life and liberty of all women and men. We proclaim a unity under God which transcends our division, and find in Christ our measure for being human.

As Christians, we seek to personify the liberating Gospel of Jesus the Christ and to follow his example in our relationships with others. This means that we try to have love and respect for each other—for individual well-being, quality of life, personality, dignity, and self-actualization.

The Christian churches have a long tradition of concern for human justice and civil liberties. From the days of the Hebrew prophets, we have been charged to pursue justice for all who are oppressed. In its most faithful moments the church has been recalled to the words of Amos: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies...But let justice roll down like the waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." (Amos 5:21,24) Insofar as the

church has been concerned for social justice, it also necessarily has been concerned for civil liberties. Historically, branches of the Protestant churches have been the most significant single influence in the rise of concern for basic civil rights in the Western world. The tradition of the United Church of Christ is a particularly rich heritage of such concern. First suffering the denial of liberty at the hands of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities in the Old World, our ancestors claimed these rights for themselves in the New World. Realizing that the rights of none were secure until the rights of all were secure, our ancestors-in-faith gradually extended their civil liberty concern to the whole of society.

In faithfulness to the biblical and historic mandate, 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 her or his right to equal protection under the law defames that worth and dignity and is, therefore, morally wrong. Our Christian faith requires that we respond to the injustice in our society manifested in the denial and violation of the civil liberties of persons whose affectional or sexual preference is toward persons of the same gender.

Affirmation of Civil Liberties

Therefore, without considering in this document the rightness or wrongness of same-gender relationships, but recognizing that a person's affectional or sexual preference is not legitimate grounds on which to deny her or his civil liberties, the Tenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ proclaims the Christian conviction that all persons are entitled to full civil liberties and equal protection under the law.

Further, the Tenth General Synod declares its support for 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 affectional or sexual preference.

Further, the Tenth General Synod calls upon the congregations, Associations, Conferences, and Instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ to work for the enactment of such legislation at the federal, state, and local levels of government, and authorizes the Secretary of the United

Church of Christ to commend this Pronouncement to the Conferences for distribution by them to their respective state legislators and representatives in the Congress of the United States.