



North Carolina Church Leaders and Clergy Deliver Nearly 30,000 Signed Petitions Against North Carolina's Discriminatory Marriage Laws

Local church leaders and clergy deliver nearly 30,000 signed petitions to Attorney General Cooper opposing Amendment One and the State's marriage laws that violate the First Amendment right to the free expression of religion

RALEIGH, N.C. (June 16, 2014) – On what is being termed “Marriage Monday,” North Carolina church leaders and clergy delivered two petitions to the office of State Attorney General Roy Cooper that call on him to cease defending Amendment One and the State’s other discriminatory state marriage laws. The United Church of Christ and other faith groups argue that the State’s marriage laws restrict the freedoms of religion and expressive association guaranteed in the First Amendment.

In 2012, North Carolina voters approved Amendment One, which limited a domestic legal union to a covenant between a man and woman. Under state laws consistent with Amendment One, it is a Class 1 misdemeanor for a minister to perform a marriage ceremony for a couple that hasn’t obtained a license, and such a license may not be issued to same-gender couples. A Class 1 misdemeanor is punishable by up to 120 days in jail and/or probation and community service.

“North Carolina is the only state the criminalizes clergy for performing religious marriage ceremonies without a state-issued license,” said Ms. Carol Williams-Swope, a member of Trinity United Church of Christ in Concord, N.C. “I’m not an ordained minister nor am I a member of the LGBTQ community, but I stand with the nearly 30,000 individuals that signed these petitions to urge Attorney General Cooper to protect the religious freedoms and equal rights of all North Carolinians.”

In late April 2014, the United Church of Christ, along with a coalition of interfaith North Carolina clergypersons and same-gender couples seeking to marry, filed the lawsuit, *General Synod of the United Church of Christ v. Cooper*, arguing that the State’s marriage laws restrict the freedoms of religion and expressive association guaranteed in the First Amendment. Case Plaintiffs now also include the Alliance of Baptists, the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and a host of Episcopalian, Jewish, Baptist, Unitarian, and United Church of Christ clergy.

“North Carolina marriage laws clearly violate the principle of ‘free exercise of religion’ upon which the United Church of Christ – and this country – is built,” said the Rev. Geoffrey Black, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ. “We are delivering more than the signed petitions of nearly 30,000 individuals; we are standing up for the rights of *all* Americans that deserve their full Constitutional rights of religious freedom and equal protection under the law.”

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About the United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ (UCC) is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,100 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American. The UCC's motto ("That they may all be one," (John 17:21)) and tagline (God is still speaking,) supports the Church's long-standing commitment to social justice issues and its extravagant welcome to all, no matter who they are, or where they are on life's journey.