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United Church of Christ Lawsuit Adds Plaintiffs, While Defendants Seek Motion for Stay in Case

The Alliance of Baptists, a national denominational body, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the oldest and largest rabbinic organization in North America, and individual clergy from a variety of faiths join *General Synod of the United Church of Christ v. Cooper* as Plaintiffs; Defendants file for motion for stay.

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (June 3, 2014) – As continued evidence that all people of faith have a shared interest in the protection of the First Amendment right to religious freedom, *General Synod of the United Church of Christ v. Cooper* added several Plaintiffs, including the Alliance of Baptists, a national denominational body, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the oldest and largest rabbinic organization in the country.

“By the joining the lawsuit in North Carolina, we are living deeply into our Christian values and offering a clear, Baptist voice for justice and religious liberty,” said the Rev. Dr. Michael Castle, president of the Alliance of Baptists. “It is also important that we stand with the United Church of Christ, our ecumenical partner in mission and ministry, in this bold action.” The Alliance of Baptists is also joined by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a national network of nearly 2,000 Reform rabbis, as well as a list of individual clergy from a variety of faith traditions.

The Defendants in the case, including North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper, have filed a motion for stay in the case, requesting that a judge make no ruling or hold any proceedings until the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals makes a decision in the case, *Bostic v. Rainer*—a federal challenge to the State of Virginia’s marriage laws based solely on 14th Amendment, equal protection rights.

“Encroachments on the liberties of religion and expression may only be justified by a showing of State interests that is paramount; one of vital importance. And the burden is on the government to show the existence of such interests,” said Mr. Donald C. Clark, Jr., General Counsel for the United Church of Christ. “Attorney General Cooper and the other defendants have made no such showing. The speculation they offer in support of their request for a stay is weak tea.”

On April 28, 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.

“The loss of First Amendment freedoms for even a minimal period of time unquestionably constitutes irreparable harm,” said the Rev. Dr. J. Bennett Guess, a national officer of the United Church of Christ. “Today, clergy are still at risk of being jailed for performing marriage ceremonies without a State-issued marriage license. By formally joining the lawsuit as Plaintiffs, both the Alliance of Baptists and the Central Conference of American Rabbis join the United Church of Christ in recognizing the unconstitutionality of North Carolina’s marriage laws, regardless of faith tradition.”

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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.

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