



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Earning a Living Without Fear

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) currently before the U.S. Congress is a measured, common sense solution that will ensure workers are judged on their merits, not on their personal characteristics like sexual orientation or gender identity.

There's a family in a local church I know, who have dedicated their lives to raising children someone else gave birth to, eight of them by current count. This family looks like America, as diverse as you can imagine, from toddler to teenager, boys and girls, and including a variety of races as well – African American, Asian, Latina, and Euro-American.

One of the parents is “stay at home” and the other is a school teacher. Their days are hectic, long, and increasingly complex as the children are in different schools and head in various directions for their activities. You would also be hard-pressed to find a family more engaged in their church. The parents are volunteer church school teachers, regularly serve on committees and they show up nearly every Sunday for worship and the other activities at their church.

A few years ago I asked if the parents would be interviewed for an educational video I was working on. “We’ll think about it,” they replied, but a few days later with much regret they declined. Why? As a couple with responsibilities for these children they said they could not risk the teacher parent losing her job if the school administration found out she is lesbian. Their situation is a reminder

that people don't necessarily have to lose their jobs to be adversely affected by employment discrimination, though there are those who *have* lost jobs, including teachers.

In a pronouncement supporting the civil rights of same gender loving persons, the United Church of Christ General Synod (1975) addressed the suffering that discrimination causes, "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..."

In a call for full civil rights and equal protection under the law, the General Synod went on to declare, "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."

That was nearly forty years ago, and although since then much progress has been made on civil rights in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, there are no federal statutes that prevent a person from being fired for being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). As a nation, we cannot tolerate arbitrary discrimination against millions of Americans just because of who they are. The Congress should pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act without delay because people who are LGBT should be able to earn a living, provide for their families and contribute to our society without fear that who they are or who they love could cost them a job.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,300 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

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