

Expand LGBT rights, affirm religious liberty

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As leaders of Christian communities of faith in Indiana we share a common concern for the free exercise of religion within our state and also for assuring that the rights and dignity of each individual are protected. The passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act last spring highlighted a very real tension between these two important values.

We cherish the strong affirmation of religious liberty and expression that is embedded in our state and federal constitution, including Article 1 of our state Bill of Rights which says in part, "No law shall, in any case whatever, control the free exercise and enjoyment of religious opinions, or interfere with the rights of conscience." Throughout the history of our state we have demonstrated capacity to affirm that essential freedom even as the blend of religious groups and the diversity of our population within our state have changed over time.

For the sake of clarity in our state law and within our public interactions, we believe that it is right and appropriate to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the state civil rights code that already contains protections based on race, age, gender, disability, military status and religion. Doing so will mean that all Hoosiers, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community will be assured the freedom to work, have a home, use public accommodations and business services with access to the same opportunities and same fair treatment all citizens enjoy. We believe that doing this is consistent with the value we share to be and continually create a hospitable and welcoming community for all. This is also consistent with our common Christian call and commitment to care for and serve our neighbor following the example of Christ. We believe that strengthening the anti-discrimination provisions of our state statutes does not weaken or diminish the opportunity for the free exercise of our religious faith grounded in our state constitution.

Therefore, as the General Assembly of our state reconvenes in January, we call upon all members of the faith community, the LGBT community, civic and business leaders to work with us, to support and encourage our legislative leaders and our governor to rise to the difficult but achievable challenge of adopting this change to the state civil rights code while reaffirming the free exercise of religious faith throughout Indiana.

Bishop Michael Coyner
Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church

Rev. Sara Dingman, Transitional Synod Executive
Synod of Lincoln Trails, Presbyterian Church USA

Bishop William Gafkjen
Indiana-Kentucky Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Phil Hart, Consulting Conference Minister
Indiana-Kentucky Conference, United Church of Christ

Rev. Richard Spleth, Regional Minister
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indiana

Rev. Alan Thames
Executive Presbyter, Whitewater Valley Presbytery, Presbyterian Church USA

Bishop Catherine Waynick
Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis