



UMC Advocacy Team -- February 2018 (2-1)

Religious Exemptions

SUMMARY OF POSITION: The United Methodist Church opposes legislation that provides religious exemptions that would permit anyone to discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons and others, denying them human and civil rights.

UNITED METHODIST OFFICIAL STATEMENT

1. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured. . . We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons. (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, “The Social Principles” paragraph 161f.)
2. The rights and privileges a society bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it indicate the relative esteem in which that society holds particular persons and groups of persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. “Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation—Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. (United Methodist Book of Discipline, “The Social Principles” paragraph 162j)

SUPPORTING FACTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

1. Religious freedom is an essential value in the United States. That’s why it is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Religious exemption is not synonymous with religious freedom.
2. Many of the world’s great religions state a fundamental rule. Christians call it the “Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Religious freedom to express one’s faith is important, but that freedom doesn’t give any of us the right to impose our beliefs on others. Religious exemption does impact people who believe differently.
3. The Iowa Civil Rights Act ensures everyone in our state is treated equally regardless of age, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, or disability. Weakening the protections the civil rights law provides with broad religious exemptions will harm Iowans and our state.
4. It is estimated that there are approximately 2.7 million LGBT adults aged 50 and older in the United States, 1.1 million of whom are 65 and older. LGBT older adults, like many older Americans in the United States, rely on a network of service providers as they age—for community programming and congregational meals, for health care, and for housing ranging from independent living to skilled nursing. Religious exemption laws jeopardize the security and safety of LGBT older adults at a time when they are most vulnerable and most in need. (<http://www.lgbtmap.org/dignity-denied-lgbt-older-adults>)
5. While much of the focus of religious exemption legislation arises out of the aim to be able to discriminate against LGBTQ persons, they are not the only people who could be and likely would be affected by such exemptions. For example someone could claim religious exemption to serve only
 - a. different sex married couples
 - b. Parents who use corporal punishment
 - c. Families who sign a specific statement of faithThey could also refuse to serve people
 - a. Of interfaith households
 - b. who don’t attend Christian worship
 - c. Are living together unmarried
 - d. Who support transgender youth and/or oppose so called “conversion therapy”