

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am the reverend David Gaewski, executive minister of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ, commonly referred to as "The Congregational Church". First I express my sincere appreciation for the work you do and for this opportunity to speak with you as the conference minister of one of Maine's largest Protestant denominations. In Maine our constituency includes 180 congregations and approximately 22,000 members. Our tradition is one that holds in highest regard the individual's responsibility to discern their own faith convictions. In this regard we are not hierarchical and as such no individual such as myself can speak on behalf of our conference or our denomination.

We are the successor body of the Mayflower Pilgrims and the settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony first in Salem, then moving to Boston. We claim the oldest religious society in continuous existence in Maine since 1639 founded in the town of York and spreading throughout Maine since that time. In 2005 we became among the first and largest of the Protestant denominations to declare our support of Marriage Equality for same gendered couples at the biennial gathering of our national General Synod. In 2006 the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ passed a resolution at our Annual Meeting in support of the Quality and Equality of Marriage.

We did that because many of us believe all people are created in the image of God and therefore are entitled to equal rights. This is a core value of this denomination as well as my own that the Gospel message of Jesus Christ is one of radical inclusivity. This value has guided us in our conversations, debate, and resolutions regarding marriage equality.

Personally as a man who for the past 24 years has been happily married to a woman of a different race than mine, I am painfully aware of history within our nation that would have legislated my own marriage as unlawful at one time. Those laws were influenced by both prejudice and misguided religious beliefs. Thankfully, there are very few today who would take the position that a mixed race marriage is immoral and should be legally banned. The same principles that legally ended the prohibition of mixed race couples to marry apply today to marriage equality for same gendered couples.

It is a core Christian commitment to ensure the dignity and safety of persons as well as the equality of all before our Creator God. It is on account of this core faith commitment that I speak in support of LD 1020 supporting marriage equality for same gendered couples in the great state of Maine.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.