

House State Government Committee
June 1, 2009
Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Resident Bishop of the West Ohio Area
of the United Methodist Church

Proponent Testimony
House Bill 176

As the bishop of 230,000 United Methodists in nearly 1,200 congregations dispersed throughout 58 Ohio counties I am writing today to urge the Ohio State Legislature to pass the Equal Housing and Employment Act, specifically HB 176. This legislation will ensure that everyone in Ohio has equal access to jobs and housing and would specifically prohibit discriminatory practices on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Last year, with the election of President Obama, the world watched with awe and hope as our great country, once again, demonstrated the dynamic strength and vitality of our Constitution – a Constitution whose basic tenets are that all people are created equal and, under the law, are to be treated equally. Our Ohio State Constitution enshrines these same ideals and inalienable rights. We are slowly, but unmistakably, moving toward the full equality and robust justice our forefathers and foremothers envisioned for every citizen of this country and this state. It is time for Ohio to take the next step in this steady march toward justice and liberty for all. *It is time for Ohio specifically and unequivocally to prohibit housing and*

employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. It is time for Ohio fully to protect its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens. It is time for Ohio to honor our Constitution and trust its inherent truths and explicit liberties. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said in reference to the United States Constitution: “It is time to take the thin paper and turn it into thick action.” With the passage of HB 176, we take another step of turning that thin paper into thick action – action that will protect the rights of Ohio citizens who have been discriminated against for too long.

United Methodists in Ohio, like United Methodists around the world, embrace a core set of values handed down to us from John Wesley, the founder of our evangelical, spiritual and social holiness movement. These core values are:

- Do no harm,
- Do all the good you can, and
- Stay in love with God.

These core values are expressed in one way or another by every faith tradition. These are the core values that inform The United Methodist Church’s unwavering affirmations that all persons are “equally valuable in the sight of God” and that “homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth.” These are the core values that motivate us to “work toward

societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained and strengthened.” We believe that “certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons... Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion or discrimination against gays and lesbians.” (Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, paragraphs 161.G, 162 and 162.H of The Book of Discipline, 2004)

This is the moment, out of our love for God and love for neighbor, to do no harm and to do good. House Bill 176 will do great good. It will put an end to the debilitating fear, deplorable discrimination and despicable harm currently experienced by many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens.

As people of faith, we United Methodists are in a position, and have the moral responsibility to do good. I call upon our state legislators to do the same: ‘to do good’ and to act now. It is time “to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.” (Micah 6:8) “It is time to take the thin paper and turn it into thick action.” It is time to pass HB176.