

Faith In America

Religion-Based Bigotry... Let's End It Now And Forever

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Press Release
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Iowa Judge Answers Call to Courage Ruling seen as victory against religion-based bigotry

RALEIGH, N.C. – The executive director of Faith In America, Jimmy Creech, said today that an Iowa district court judge's landmark ruling that affirmed the legal right of same-sex couples to marry is consistent with what a rapidly growing number of Christians believe about marriage equality.

Hanson in a 61-page document ruled that denying the 12 Iowan couples who filed the case a marriage license violates their due process and equal protection rights. Hanson's ruling says the Iowa state constitution does not allow any group to be discriminated against because of moral disapproval of another group. He cited the U.S. Supreme Court's Lawrence vs. Texas case that declared sodomy laws to be unconstitutional to establish his point.

He also included in his ruling reference to the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court case Loving vs. Virginia in which state laws banning interracial marriage were struck down. He argued that same-sex couples cannot be denied the right to marry simply because same-sex marriage has never existed in Iowa. Just because interracial marriage had never existed in Virginia prior to 1967, that didn't prevent the U.S. Supreme Court from ruling that the Lovings had been deprived of equal protection solely because one was black and one was white. He also noted that marriage as institution has evolved and that the centuries-old doctrine of coverture, "reigned in Iowa as elsewhere."

A Des Moines Register newspaper columnist investigated to determine how the ruling squares with Hanson's personal religious beliefs. According to the columnist, Judge Hanson is an active member of The United Methodist Church. Gregory Palmer, the resident bishop of the Iowa Area United Methodist Church, described Hanson as a "devout layperson," according to the column that appears on the Register's web site.

"Judge Hanson is an example of how an elected official can make a decision based on a sound and reasoned interpretation of the Constitution, even when it conflicts with his religious tradition or the teachings of his church," Creech said. "He demonstrates how public policy can and should be established for all citizens without the influence of narrow religious or sectarian beliefs of some other citizens." Creech was an ordained clergyman in The United Methodist Church for twenty-nine years.

"Because of our work over the last three years, we know there are devout people of faith across the country who no longer accept the fear and prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people that's being promoted by religious and political groups. These people understand how religion-based bigotry was misused in the past against people of color, women and religious minorities. They know it was wrong then and it's wrong now. They believe it's both un-Christian and un-American to use religion to cause harm and deny any group of American citizens their civil rights."

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Hanson's ruling included the plaintiff's testimony that harm is caused by same-sex couples' exclusion from a right enjoyed by other Americans. "Plaintiffs suffer great dignitary harm because the State's denial to Plaintiffs of access to an institution, so woven into the fabric of daily life and so determinative of legal rights and status, amounts to a badge of inferiority imposed on them and minor plaintiffs."

Creech said denying lesbian and gay Americans the right to marry is only one way they suffer harm and condemnation in America today. Lesbian and gay people are denied employment security, the right to adopt children, freedom to serve openly in the military and experience spiritual persecution because of a hostile social climate shaped by religion-based bigotry. "Such misuse of religion must be recognized as bigotry and must be rejected," Creech said. "I commend Judge Hanson for rejecting it in his ruling."

In May, Faith In America launched a five-city "Call to Courage" campaign in Ames, Iowa. The Ames campaign concluded with a Town Hall meeting attended by about 250 people. Many, identified as members of area churches, voiced strong support for full and equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens. "For them, there was no conflict of faith and justice. The pain and suffering caused by fear and prejudice disguised as religious truth could no longer be ignored or tolerated," Creech said. "We challenged Iowans to have courage to disavow and end religion-based discrimination against gay and lesbian American citizens. Judge Hansen had the courage," Creech said. "We hope all Americans will follow his example."

Faith in America Inc. is a civil rights advocacy organization whose mission is to end legal and spiritual discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people in America and to gain full and equal rights for those citizens. Faith In America is not a religious organization but works to educate Americans about the harm caused by religion-based bigotry against GLBT individuals. The organization in April announced a series of grassroots campaigns in five cities across America. In June, the organization lead a campaign in Washington, D.C. that included numerous other civil rights advocacy groups in honoring the 40th celebration of the Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court Decision that struck down all remaining bans on interracial marriage. More information can be found at www.faihinamerica.com.