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200+ Triad Clergy Stand Against Amendment One

New and established groups pass resolutions, plan rallies

GREENSBORO – Defying expectations that faith leaders will remain silent or support the proposed Amendment One, more than 200 clergy in the Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point area have been moved to fight the discrimination and legal harms that will be created by the amendment (also called the “Marriage Amendment”). The amendment, which seeks to limit legal recognition for committed partnerships solely to marriage between a man and woman, is on the May 8 North Carolina primary ballot.

“It has been uplifting and heartening to be part of a growing movement of faith leaders dedicated to fighting bias and bigotry and standing up for social justice in our region,” said Susan Feit, executive director of the National Conference for Community and Justice of the Piedmont Triad, which is collaborating with Greensboro People of Faith. “This move sustains North Carolina as a fertile ground for civil rights activism.”

On Tuesday, clergy at The Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity unanimously passed a resolution against Amendment One. This organization has more than 80 members from the Triad.

Another group called Interfaith Voice includes 20 interdenominational ministers who have been meeting in Winston-Salem for months. The group was started by Rev. Craig Schaub, minister at Parkway United Church of Christ. According to their resolution, “the amendment privileges one definition of family at the expense of all others. Jesus regularly recognized and constructed different ways to be family.”

The Winston-Salem groups will join together this weekend for a special service, Interfaith Prayer Service to Defeat Amendment One, at Green Street United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem on Sunday, April 29, at 7 p.m. They will also hold a Rally to Oppose Amendment One at Old Salem Square at Salem College on May 7, 6:30 p.m.

The group Greensboro People of Faith began meeting in January at Presbyterian Church of the Covenant. They made yard signs, started a Facebook page and participated in many forums and panel discussions. On April 16, some 50 ministers joined together at a

Rally Against Amendment One at College Park Baptist Church that drew 700 people. This Sunday, April 29, a forum, Concerns About the Potential Impact Of Amendment One, will be held at 7 p.m. at West Market United Methodist Church with Rev. Pam Strader and Professor Sonya Garza, Elon University School of Law.

This week, another group of 15 Greensboro clergy members released a statement, writing “after careful and prayerful consideration, we are persuaded that the proposed Amendment One to the N.C. Constitution would further impoverish and punish so many innocent people. Therefore, we have no choice but stand against this unnecessary and unjust amendment.” The 5,400-plus member Mt. Zion Baptist Church and its pastor, Bishop George Brooks, will host a prayer meeting and rally against the amendment on Sunday, May 6, at 4:30 p.m.

A full page ad this week in the Carolina Peacemaker features the clergy’s full statement. “We acknowledge that the issue of same-sex marriage is controversial, emotional, and a deep faith concern, around which there is not unity in the African-American community or within the Christian church itself,” the clergy’s statement adds. “Where one stands on the issue is a matter of conscience and faith, not a constitutional amendment.... We recognize that a more urgent issue is at stake – the civil rights and freedoms of minority groups.”

The Greensboro Jewish Federation, Temple Emanuel and Beth David Synagogue all oppose the Amendment, citing “our responsibility of one for another, for justice, for compassion, and for the inherent equality of all people.” This week, the Shalom Greensboro newspaper’s front page was fully devoted to explaining the harms of the Amendment. At the Greensboro rally, Rabbi Larry Milder remarked, “We know discrimination when we smell it, and this Amendment stinks!”

Several individual congregations have created resolutions against Amendment One, such as College Park Baptist Church, which states that they are “furthering our witness by joining with millions of Christians like us who believe that prejudice and discrimination is morally repugnant and contrary to God’s love.”

Other congregations belong to statewide organizations that have taken a stand against the amendment. The North Carolina Council of Churches represents 6,200 congregations with about 1.5 million congregants. According to George Reed, Executive Director, “It is crucially important that people of faith who oppose the marriage amendment go to the polls and vote against it. You might do it because, like the Council’s leadership, you believe that this is discrimination that doesn’t belong in the constitution. Or you might do it because you think gays and lesbians should have the right to marry. Or because you are concerned about children of unmarried couples, straight or gay, who could lose health care benefits. Or because it could scare off businesses looking at relocating to NC.”

Last week, The Bishops Diocesan of the three Dioceses of The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, which includes all 117 Episcopal congregations in the state, issued a joint statement in opposition to Amendment One. According to the letter, the bishops oppose the amendment “because we do not believe that the Bible or the Constitutions of our state and nation should be used to oppress, harm or restrict the human rights and dignity of any human being.”

These clergy groups have been working with many other community groups such as NCCJ, We Are NC and the Coalition to Protect NC Families. They have consulted and agree with legal professors from every North Carolina law school that the wording in the Amendment is flawed and will harm many families, including removing important rights from 200,000 unmarried couples in the state. The term “domestic legal union” has never been used in North Carolina law before or interpreted by its courts.

Rev. Dr. William Barber, President of the North Carolina branch of the NAACP, has worked alongside many of these Triad clergy, and he was the featured speaker at the April 16 rally in Greensboro. According to Barber, “a vote on the same sex marriage amendment has nothing to do with your personal opinion on same sex-marriage but everything to do with whether or not you believe discrimination should be codified and legalized constitutionally.”

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