

January 2015

As bishops of the Episcopal Church and citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we urge the state legislature pass the Pennsylvania Non-Discrimination Act (HB/SB 300).

The proposed law would prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations such as hotel lodgings or restaurant service against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. It would also preserve existing protections that insure faith communities have sole discretion in determining whom to hire and whom to include in their religious rituals.

Our support for the Non-Discrimination Act is rooted in our faith. Sacred scripture teaches us that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore must therefore be treated with dignity and respect. As Christians, we follow a savior who spent much of his earthly ministry among the cast off and the cast out, and we are called to advocate on behalf of the vulnerable and the marginalized. Jesus commanded us to love one another, and he listed no exceptions.

Were we not Christians, however, we would still support the Non-Discrimination Act. One does not have to profess a particular faith to understand that there is no justifiable reason to fire, evict or deny services to a citizen of our state based on considerations such as sex, race, religious beliefs or sexual orientation. It is simply unfair.

The Episcopal Church has struggled faithfully for more than three decades to reform its own discriminatory policies and practices toward LGBT people. In that struggle we have come to understand what was already obvious to some of our fellow citizens all along, that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are gifts to their family, their friends and their communities. We are richer for their presence in our communities, and it is past time for us to acknowledge that we share a common humanity and therefore must be equal in the eyes of the law.