



STATEMENT FROM THE REVEREND ART CRIBBS **United Church of Christ**

It is a great honor to be the voice to the United Church of Christ and the California Council of Churches today at this important event.

We understand ours to be a nation of liberty and opportunity for all. To an extent, this is most certainly true. We recently celebrated the election of our nation's first African-American president and first family. Our state is represented in the senate by two women and in the governor's mansion by an immigrant. However remarkable these achievements are, they do not mark the end of discrimination nor do they automatically ensure opportunity for all. For these reasons, the diverse people of California depend on our Constitution and the rule of law to ensure that we all receive equal protection and equal empowerment under the law.

Unfortunately, the very purpose of our state Constitution has been called into question as its guarantee of equal protection under the law is at risk. Proposition 8, passed last November by a slim majority of voters, took a fundamental right away from a targeted group. Most supporters of Prop. 8 would like to tell us it's only about marriage for same-sex couples, but in reality, Prop. 8 is about so much more.

By allowing voters to mandate government discrimination against one group, Prop. 8 opens the door to discrimination against almost any group of people in our state—including people of faith. Because of this problem, the United Church of Christ, my denomination, has joined more than 4,000 other houses of worship in asking the California Supreme Court to invalidate Prop. 8 on the grounds that it defeats the very purpose of our Constitution, which is to protect all people from harm and make sure the law treats everyone of us equally. The rights of one group cannot be determined by a simple majority vote.

As an African-American pastor in San Marino, I am particularly troubled by Prop. 8's impact on people who are hurt by its passage. I am reminded of the struggles black communities have faced and continue to face in this country. I am reminded of the damage a majority can and has sometimes inflicted against groups in the past. And I am reminded of the need we all have for equal protection under the law. When people who are most directly affected by Prop. 8 say they are harmed, I am compelled to listen and to act.

Nearly all groups have faced persecution—and religious groups are no exception. Prior to the Civil War, most enslaved African-Americans were forced to worship underground. Native Americans have not always been allowed to practice their religion. During the 1860s, members of the Mormon faith were driven out of Missouri by Governor Lilburn Boggs, who issued an executive order stating all Mormons "must be treated as enemies and must be exterminated or driven from the State... their outrages are beyond all description." Within one year, more than 10,000 Mormons had been displaced from their homes.

Such episodes remind us that, even in America, we sometimes fall into patterns of distrust and discrimination against some religious groups, particularly in times of crisis or war.

Even though discrimination still exists, today we look to our Constitution as a guarantee for every individual's right to worship and live freely. We look to our Constitution as solace, for we know that when discrimination occurs, we have an opportunity to fight using our right to equal protection as our sword.

Unfortunately, Prop. 8 gambles with this right—not just for same-sex couples who love each other and want to marry, but for all people. If the majority is allowed to one day take away one couple's right to get married, what can stop them from deciding that I can no longer preach or my children can no longer worship?

So much of the progress America has made can be traced to the promise of equality enshrined in our Constitution and the valiant men and women who have worked to ensure our nation lives up to her promise. I am praying the Supreme Court of California will invalidate Prop. 8, so every person can continue to believe in that promise.

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The United Church of Christ was founded in 1957 as the union of several different Christian traditions: from the beginning of our history, we were a church that affirmed the ideal that Christians did not always have to agree to live together in communion. Our motto—"that they may all be one"—is Jesus' prayer for the unity of the church. The UCC is one of the most diverse Christian denominations in the United States.