



# The United Church of Canada Saskatchewan Conference

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## MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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### **The Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada Supports Same-Gender Couples as it Opposes Discrimination By Marriage Commissioners**

Tomorrow is the opening day of the reference before the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal in the matter of Marriage Commissioners v. A Reference by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This is a reference from the Government of Saskatchewan in relation to proposed legislative options which would allow marriage commissioners as public servants to opt out of fulfilling their legal obligation to provide couples with civil marriage services if doing so would violate the marriage commissioner's religious beliefs.

The legislative options appear to have been proposed by the government as a response to recent decisions of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and, on appeal, of the Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench. Those decisions stated that a marriage commissioner does not have the right to refuse to marry a couple based upon the marriage commissioner's personal beliefs. In that case, a same-gender couple had been discriminated against by a decision of a marriage commissioner.

The Saskatchewan Conference of The United Church of Canada has publically supported same-gender marriage since 2003. In 2009, at its annual meeting in the Battlefords, delegates agreed that congregations within the Saskatchewan Conference "should not discriminate against any group of persons on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, disability, or status as divorced persons..."

The Executive of Saskatchewan Conference, at its meeting in December, 2009, affirmed that marriage commissioners should not discriminate against couples seeking legal marriage on the basis of sexual orientation. Marriage Commissioners are the only

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means of obtaining a legal marriage for those who choose to have a secular/non-religious marriage. As well, some couples who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, or queer (“GLBTQ”) may be denied access to marriage by their own denomination leaving them no choice but to seek secular non-religious services.

GLBTQ couples who wish to be married must have marriage commissioners available to them. This guarantee must be in place for all, even those living in rural or remote communities where choices may be limited.

Further, while the legislative options appear to have been proposed as a response to the specific decisions relating to discrimination against a same-gender couple, the proposed options would in fact allow a marriage commissioner to also discriminate by refusing to marry inter-racial or inter-faith couples or those who are divorced or beyond child-bearing years.

For all of these reasons, the proposed legislative options are discriminatory and should not be allowed.

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