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Attorney General of North Carolina Describes United Church of Christ Lawsuit as Complex and Significant

Defendant North Carolina Attorney General files motion for extension in lawsuit, characterizing Plaintiffs' claims in part as "complex issues of first impression and implicat[ing] significant public interest."

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (May 15, 2014) – Defendants in the case, *General Synod of the United Church of Christ v. Cooper*, filed motions for a 30-day extension of time to respond to the lawsuit today in U.S. District Court in Charlotte. The Attorney General of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, on behalf of himself and all Defendant District Attorneys, specifically characterized the Plaintiffs' claims as "complex issues of first impression" and arguments that "implicate significant public interest."

"North Carolina's marriage laws are unconstitutional, and we agree with Attorney General Cooper that these laws have significant impact on the general public," said the Rev. Dr. J. Bennett Guess, National Officer of the United Church of Christ. "The State's marriage laws criminalize clergy for performing their pastoral duties, and we believe that they should not be taken lightly."

On April 28, 2014, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, along with a coalition of interfaith North Carolina clergypersons and same-gender couples seeking to marry, filed this lawsuit, arguing that the State's marriage laws, including Amendment One, violate the principle of "free exercise of religion" upon which the church is built, and restrict the freedoms of religion and expressive association guaranteed in the First Amendment. The UCC is also seeking a preliminary injunction that would allow ministers to choose whether to perform a religious marriage.

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About the United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ (UCC) is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,100 congregations nationwide, including more than 150 UCC congregations throughout North Carolina.

Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American. The UCC's motto ("That they may all be one," (John 17:21)) and tagline (God is still speaking,) supports the Church's long-standing commitment to social justice issues and its extravagant welcome to all, no matter who they are, or where they are on life's journey.

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