

## Marriage Equality: The Time Has Come *published in the Coloardoan, June 2014*

In March 2013, the Colorado General Assembly passed SB-11, which enacted protections for thousands of committed same-sex couples in Colorado. It was a watershed event for human rights in our state. But what about human dignity? Civil unions are a great first step, but the time has come for us to affirm fully the dignity of committed same-sex couples in our state by lifting the ban on same-sex marriage.

For more than a decade, Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Fort Collins has been performing the solemn rite of marriage for same-sex couples. And while we solemnize and recognize these marriages as being valid, the state of Colorado does not. Our denomination's General Synod affirmed same-sex marriage in 2005.

I know full well that most churches in our community do not perform marriages for same-sex couples and have no plans to do so in the coming years. Though we have differing views, I respect their right not to perform a rite for anyone they don't think should marry. That is why the First Amendment of our Constitution is there: to protect the free exercise of religion. No one is going to force a Roman Catholic priest or an Assemblies of God pastor to marry a same-sex couple.

But what about churches like ours that already do perform same-sex marriages? What about the marriage rights of our gay, lesbian, and bisexual members? Doesn't the state infringe on their religious marriage by failing to acknowledge it? Our congregation has been a part of Fort Collins for 111 years, and our lineage stretches back to the Pilgrims in Plymouth, Mass. (hence our name)...We aren't newcomers on the scene, and as leaders in multiple social justice issues, we want to bear witness to the rightful place of same-sex couples in our society.

Interracial marriage was formerly illegal in many states. Women couldn't vote in most states until the early 20th century. "Separate but equal" was the law of the land until the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954.

Change happens in society.

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." So said the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The day I moved to Colorado in 1992, voters in our state passed Amendment 2 (subsequently overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court), which diminished the rights of gay, lesbian, and bisexual citizens. Twenty-one years later we passed the civil unions bill. Now the time has come to see the arc of the moral universe continue its bend towards justice and to affirm full marriage equality for same-sex couples in Colorado.

It is about love. It is about commitment. It is about human dignity. It is time.

*The Rev. Hal Chorpenning serves as senior minister of Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Fort Collins. [www.plymouthucc.org](http://www.plymouthucc.org)*