Aware Prepare Act
TOOLKIT and MEDIA PLAN for MCC CHURCHES
on President Trump’s Religious Discrimination Strategies
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on PRESIDENT TRUMP’S RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION STRATEGIES

2 February 2017

At this critical point, it is time for MCC to take a leadership role in our local communities.

Our work together as MCC Churches, Ministries, and Leaders:
BE AWARE – PREPARE – ACT

Toolkit includes:
1. Statement from the Global Justice Institute
2. Media Plan for hosting a demonstration or protest event
3. Sample Press Release
4. MCC Statement of Faith and Core Values
5. Current background on Religious Freedom and discrimination policies
6. Talking points for Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) Legislation with media or posting
7. Background and Points on Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) Legislation

MCC Media Contact (if needed): Linda Brenner: lindabrenner@MCCchurch.net

BE AWARE: Read the documents in this Toolkit. Keep your eyes on the news.

PREPARE: Below is a complete guide to how to launch a demonstration against religious exemptions for discrimination. Let us know if you are planning an event. We will contact national news outlets about this coast-to-coast action.

Use Toolkit materials to prepare for worship, public speaking, or posting.

ACT: It will likely be vital to implement a demonstration this weekend, preferably on Sunday, February 5th. Do what you can to stop the rollback of LGBTQ rights. Consider local groups to collaborate or partner with and contact them immediately to prepare together.
Dear Friends,

MCC denominational leaders are watching the news in anticipation of an Executive Order from President Donald Trump regarding the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which will allow legal discrimination based on religious exemptions (see pp. 10-11).

This Toolkit is a compilation of materials that we hope you and your church will find helpful to respond to RFRA. Watch the news so that you know when the Executive Order (EO) has been announced. Our best sources say the EO will be Saturday, 4 February. Regardless, we are setting Sunday, 5 February 2017 as an MCC national protest. If President Trump has not issued an Executive Order, then our focus will be to discourage one. If an EO is issued, our protest will denounce it.

The Global Justice Institute released a statement in the last 24 hours. Here is an excerpt: “... We also share concern that President Trump will, within a few days, sign an executive order that would create a religious exemption for those who oppose marriage equality or any ordinance providing protections for LGBT people based on their religious beliefs or moral conviction.

While supporting the right to freely worship as one chooses, the Global Justice Institute absolutely opposes any and all overly broad executive orders that give individuals and organizations permission to discriminate against people based on sexual orientation or gender identity as long as they maintain that to serve LGBT people violates their religious belief or moral conviction. As long as anyone can invoke their religious belief or moral conviction as a reason not to serve others, it is clear that the government is facilitating segregation and discrimination in public accommodations.” *

MCC leadership joins with the Global Justice Institute to encourage equality in all areas of humanity’s civil rights. MCC’s Core Values capture this spirit:

**Inclusion**: Love is our greatest moral value and resisting exclusion is a primary focus of our ministry.

**Community**: Our deepest desire is to offer a safe and open community.

**Spiritual-Transformation**: Providing a message of liberation from the oppressive religious environment guides our ministry.

**Justice**: Working to talk less and do more, we are committed to resisting the structures that oppress people and standing with those who suffer. **

This is the time for MCC to be the voice for social justice. Pray. Be Aware. Prepare. Act.

Contact Linda Brenner, Communications Director, if you need assistance: LindaBrenner@MCCchurch.net.
PREPARE: Steps to Stage Protest/Demonstration Event

Step 1: Gather by phone, skype, or in person a team of 3-5 “movers and shakers.”
Read together the background and talking points.

Step 2: Decide whether you can convene a group of MCC church members, and perhaps other religious leaders in your community, to stand on the steps of your courthouse or other official building to demonstrate for the rights and families of LGBTQ people—and against the establishment of conservative Christianity beliefs through religious exemptions that will allow discrimination.

Step 3: Send out the announcement to constituents to meet on the [location, i.e. courthouse steps] at [a specific time, i.e. 1:00pm] to stand against exemptions from the law when conservative Christians want to discriminate.

Step 4: Shape the press release for your local media—particularly TV stations if you hold your demonstration on a weekend. Template for the press release is below. Feel free to review with MCC Communications Director: lindabrenner@MCCchurch.net

Step 5: Identify leader for the event and identify 3-5 speakers. Each speaker writes a 1-page single spaced presentation and submits it with a 200-word or less bio and photo to you for inclusion in the press packet for the day of the event (this helps with keeping control of time as well). (Speakers should keep copy of presentation for protest.) Add the list of speakers to your press release—or say “TBD” (To Be Determined). Look for public figures who would interest the media—make sure they are well-informed and well spoken.

Step 6: Call your local newspaper and ask the receptionist who would cover an LGBTQ religion story if you don’t already work with a reporter. Talk to the reporter, collect their phone number, name, and email – SAVE in a spreadsheet and email them the press release pasted into the body of the email (no graphics or logos).

Step 7: Call your local TV station and ask for news desk. BRIEFLY say, “I am pitching an LGBTQ Religion story about a demonstration that is happening at [1pm on Sunday at the Courthouse]. Get the news desk email and send the press release pasted in the body of the email (no graphics or logos).

Step 8: Send your press release to all supportive parties—LGBTQ community groups, churches, synagogues, mosques, ACLU, NAACP, etc. Advertise your event on social media. Consider creating a Facebook group to easily communicate with one another. Use the hashtags #HolyResistanceMCC and #BeMCC.
Step 9: **Send reminder to all participants the day before.** If you are comfortable, share a number with people so they can contact someone on the ground the day of. *Send out ideas for making or printing out signs to hold along with any songs or chants you hope to use.*

Step 10: **Call journalists and TV news desks again to confirm your event is on their calendar**—particularly call TV stations if your event is on a weekend. Weekend new crews are often looking for stories. Some stations also have an online form for reporting stories which should be filled out in addition to calling.

Step 11: **Create press packet:** A stapled set of papers that includes 1) the press release (updated with list of speakers and contact information is good), 2) presentations (each one-page typed speech), 3) bios with photos

Step 12: **Identify one person** who will look for journalists/media at the event and hand them the press packet, welcome them, and assist them as needed.

Step 13: **Implement event.** Take pictures. Post on Social Media using #HolyResistanceMCC, and #BeMCC

Step 14: **Watch for news coverage.** Set up your DVR if you have it. Alternatively, try to record TV news with a video camera on your phone. That way you can document and post quickly.

Step 15: **Follow up with thank you notes to everyone who made this possible.** Send an email to any journalist who covered your story. Praise them for covering, correct any errors, and thank them again. (The positive sandwich of feedback.)

Step 16: **Write a summary of your experience and send to MCC Director of Communication,** Linda Brenner lindabrenner@MCCchurch.net. Send pictures to post on MCC’s Facebook page with #HolyResistanceMCC and #BeMCC (Make sure people who can be identified in the photos give permission to share and post them.)
MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: 3 February 2017

Contact:  

MCC Church to Demonstrate Against Discrimination in the Name of Religion
Trump poised to grant conservatives freedom to discriminate based on religious beliefs

Community faith leaders are joining Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) in a nation-wide demonstration on the [steps of the Courthouse] on Sunday, February 5, to let President Trump know that religion is no excuse to discriminate or to be above the law of the land.

“In the first two weeks of Trump’s presidency, many of us have been taking action to protest Trump’s travel ban that targets Muslims, his suspension of women’s reproductive health care globally, his plans to build a wall on the Mexican border, and so much more. The chant, “No wall! No ban! Sanctuary for ALL!” has been ringing out across the nation. Today, MCC stands for LGBTQ people who are refugees, who need reproductive health care, and who know that 70% of the nation agrees that discrimination against LGBTQ people is wrong,” (PPRI 2016 survey) said, Rev. [_______] “It is time to say NO to so-called religious exemptions that allow people to discriminate at will against whoever seems to offend their religious beliefs. We say NO to the establishment of extremist Christianity in the United States. We say YES to respect for all people. YES for freedom to love and marry and protect your family—regardless of whom you love. YES to loving homes for foster and adoptive children without discrimination against same-sex couples. Join us on the [steps of the courthouse] to say NO to discrimination and YES to human dignity.”

Who: NAMES OF SPEAKERS AT WITNESS (EACH ONE 3 MINUTES LONG – 1 SINGLE SPACED PAGE)
What: WITNESS TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL IN RESPONSE TO EXECUTIVE ORDER FOR RELIGIOUS EXEMPTIONS (reword if Executive Order has not been announced)
When: February #/, 2017
Where: NAME AND ADDRESS OF COUNTY/CITY COURTHOUSE OR OTHER APPROPRIATE PLACE
Why: People of faith must speak out for the rights of all people.

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Founded in 1968, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) has been at the vanguard of civil and human rights movements by addressing issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, economics, climate change, aging, and global human rights. MCC was the first to perform same gender marriages and has been on the forefront of the struggle towards marriage equality in the USA and other countries worldwide. MCC recognizes a state of need around the world in the areas of human rights and justice. As people of faith, MCC endeavors to build bridges that liberate and unite voices of sacred defiance. MCC leads from the margins and transforms.
MCC Statement of Faith

Preamble

Metropolitan Community Churches is one chapter in the story of the Church, the Body of Christ. We are people on a journey, learning to live into our spirituality, while affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities. We don't all believe exactly the same things. And yet in the midst of our diversity, we build community, grounded in God's radically inclusive love for all people. We are part of an ongoing conversation on matters of belief and faith, shaped by scripture and the historic creeds, building on those who have come before us. Our chapter begins when God says to us: "Come, taste, and see."

Our Faith

"Come, taste, and see." Jesus Christ, You invite all people to Your open table. You make us Your people, a beloved community. You restore the joy of our relationship with God, even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation. We are each unique and we all belong, a priesthood of all believers. Baptized and filled with Your Holy Spirit, You empower us to be Your healing presence in a hurting world.

We expect to see Your reign on earth as it is in heaven as we work toward a world where everyone has enough, wars cease, and all creation lives in harmony. We affirm Your charge to all of humanity to care for the land, sea, and air. Therefore, we will actively resist systems and structures which are destroying Your creation.

With all of creation we worship You—every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. We know You by many names, Triune God, beyond comprehension, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who invites us to the feast.

Amen.

MCC Denominational Core Values

Inclusion Love is our greatest moral value and resisting exclusion is a primary focus of our ministry. We want to continue to be conduits of faith where everyone is included in the family of God and where all parts of our being are welcomed at God’s table.

Community Offering a safe and open community for people to worship, learn, and grow in their faith is our deep desire. We are committed to equipping ourselves and each other to do the work that God has called us to do in the world.

Spiritual-Transformation Providing a message of liberation from the oppressive religious environment of our day or to those experiencing God for the first time is what guides our ministry. We believe that when people are invited to experience God through the life and ministry of Christ, lives will be transformed.

Justice Working to talk less and do more, we are committed to resisting the structures that oppress people and standing with those who suffer under the weight of oppressive systems, being guided always by our commitment to Global Human Rights.
The White House [decided] Tuesday [January 31] to keep the Obama administration protections extended to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender workers, a statement said, apparently responding to reports that the orders would be reversed.

A draft of a potential executive order that began circulating in Washington over the weekend called for overturning then President Obama’s directive barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in the federal workforce and by federal contractors. ...

The draft order included multiple provisions, such as possible exemptions that would allow adoption agencies and groups receiving federal funds to deny services to LGBTQ Americans based on their beliefs. The White House statement did not address those possible changes.

Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said ... “Claiming ally status for not overturning the progress of your predecessor is a ridiculously low bar. LGBTQ refugees, immigrants, Muslims and women are scared today, and with good reason. Donald Trump has done nothing but undermine all of our equality since he set foot in the White House. ... Right now the government is still considering executive actions that allow government employees, taxpayer-funded organizations or even companies to discriminate.” [Corrected quote] ...

The issue of gay rights is particularly fraught for Vice President Pence, who as governor of Indiana, signed a controversial measure expanding religious liberties in a way that gay rights groups said opened the door to legalized discrimination. A national outcry over the bill led Pence and the state legislature to weaken the measure.

The executive order Obama signed in 2014 had two parts. It expanded protections in federal hiring, which already barred discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, to also include gender identity. And it required all companies doing business with the federal government to have explicit policies barring discrimination against gay and transgender workers.

The move was significant because it applied to 24,000 companies that collectively employed about 28 million workers — representing about a fifth of the U.S. workforce.

But the order drew sharp criticism from religious leaders — including many who were Obama’s allies at the time — because it did not provide an exemption for religious organizations that contract with the government. Many faith-based groups, including Catholic Charities USA, receive federal grants to assist people with housing, disaster relief and hunger, and expressed concern about the precedent it could set for other forms of federal funding.

The first amendment states: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

MCC is fighting to prevent the establishment of religion —of right wing, extremist Christianity. A religious exemption is redundant—and is specifically designed to provide a cover for discrimination—not religious freedom.
PREPARE & ACT: METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES
Talking Points on Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) Legislation – updated 1 February 2017

• Religious Freedom is the freedom to worship and the freedom FROM religions that want to control you or the country—freedom of religion does not include the freedom to discriminate in the public arena.

• Religious Freedom is a right—but freedom from other people’s religion is foundational to this freedom.

• Religion has long been used against women and minorities! God knows, sincerely held religious beliefs can be wrong! In a democratic society, those beliefs should not be made law or enforced by the government or police.

• We all value religious freedom, but some Christians think they should be free to impose their beliefs through laws that restrict women’s reproductive health options, or on LGBTQ bodies through job discrimination, so-called “bathroom bills,” and attempts to restrict or roll back our marriage and family rights.

• In Metropolitan Community Churches, we know that some Christians are not really concerned about everyone’s freedom of religion. Often, they have disparaged us in the name of religion. We stand with LGBTQ persons to ensure the rights of all people.

• In 2009 conservative religious leaders released the Manhattan Declaration, which said they would not cooperate with any laws that compelled them to recognize same-sex marriages or enable abortions—but many faiths do support these rights and conservatives will do anything to undermine them.

• Today, religious people are asking for waivers from obeying laws that support equality and civil rights, not because they can demonstrate any harm to themselves, but because they believe their religion is more important than the U.S. Constitution or rights of others.

• The Constitution of the United States is enough to protect everyone’s religious freedom. Why do we need religious exemptions so people can discriminate? We don’t!

• If religious people want to discriminate, the burden of proof is on them to show how limiting and eroding the civil rights of others is core to their religious faith.

• Religious freedom is still a constitutional right and we will defend that to the end. But religious freedom should do no harm. It should never be an excuse to discriminate.

• The free exercise of religion does not include discrimination. It is wrong to fire someone because they are LGBTQ (just like it is illegal for most employers to fire an employee
because of their race, gender, national origin, ability, religion, or age). The idea that discrimination is acceptable if religiously motivated undermines both religion and human dignity.

- Firing an employee simply for being LGBTQ is bad for business. Most big corporations ban discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity because they don’t want to lose qualified employees, and lawsuits are expensive.

- In more than half the country it is still legal to fire someone for being LGBTQ. Pew Research found that about 20% of LGBTQ adults reported unfair treatment from an employer. The Williams Institute found the rate of discrimination is similar among LGBTQ persons, women, and people of color.

**MCC’s Hashtag:**

#HolyResistanceMCC

#BeMCC

**Slogans for Consideration**

Just Say No to Religious Discrimination

Don’t Do It! Don’t Allow Religious Discrimination

Discrimination in the Name of Religion is a Sin

Sincerely Held Prejudice is Still Prejudice
BE AWARE: BACKGROUND AND POINTS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT (RFRA) LEGISLATION

Adapted from “Protect Thy Neighbor” by Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Both progressives and conservatives supported Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) when it was enacted in 1993, but much has changed. The 1990s broad coalition saw RFRA as a way to protect religious liberty after the Supreme Court weakened constitutional protections in Employment Division v. Smith. Since then, RFRA has been used to justify discrimination and other harms to third parties. Many of RFRA’s original supporters now oppose enactment of these laws.

• Courts Have Changed the Way that RFRA Works: In 2014, the Supreme Court decided in Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores that a corporation was a person and could hold religious beliefs and deny employees insurance coverage for contraception. The Hobby Lobby decision is so broad that it could be used to deny healthcare, justify discrimination, and threaten public safety.

• The Federal RFRA Is Being Invoked to Justify Discrimination in Hiring: In 2007, the Bush Administration issued a legal memorandum to say that RFRA allows faith-based organizations to ignore federal laws prohibiting hiring discrimination by recipients of federal grants. This memo remains federal policy today and applies to multiple grant programs. According to this policy, RFRA allows a faith-based organization to take taxpayer funds to run a shelter for domestic-violence victims and then refuse to hire qualified employees to run that program based on their religion. Some are attempting to extend the memo’s reach even further: immediately after President Obama signed an executive order prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating against LGBTQ employees, some cited this memo to argue that RFRA exempts religious groups from this non-discrimination protection. States should not adopt a statute that could lead to similar justifications for discrimination.

• RFRA is Being Used to Justify Other Forms of Discrimination: More and more entities are trying to use RFRA to ignore laws prohibiting discrimination and protecting public health. These arguments have not yet succeeded, but the decision in Hobby Lobby has increased the likelihood that a court will accept them or that a government official will adopt them as public policy.

• Refusal to Serve Certain Patients: The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention joined with the Bishops, National Association of Evangelicals, and others to argue that RFRA entitles them to an exemption from the provision of the Affordable Care Act that prohibits sex discrimination—a provision that protects women and LGBTQ patients.

• Refusal to Provide Government-Funded Healthcare Services: The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Association of Evangelicals, and others have argued that RFRA allows them to take federal grants to perform government services and then refuse to provide solf services under that grant to which they object. Specifically, they have argued that they have the right to take taxpayer money to
serve unaccompanied immigrant minors—many of whom have been sexually abused—but refuse to offer these young women information, referrals, or access to reproductive healthcare. This argument could be used to withhold virtually any type of healthcare.

- **Other Uses of the Federal RFRA to Harm Others**: Attempts to go beyond discrimination and the denial of healthcare include refusing to offer counseling to patients in same-sex relationships; avoiding ethics investigations; obstructing criminal investigations; shielding religious organizations from bankruptcy and financial laws while denying compensation access to health clinics to victims of sexual abuse. In states where RFRAs mirror the federal RFRA, the statutes have been invoked to avoid licensing requirements and resist lawsuits over sexual abuse by clergy members. Most of these attempts were unsuccessful, but most were also decided before the Supreme Court decision in Hobby Lobby, which could tip the scales in favor of those misuses of RFRA.

- **In the 1990s, Congress Rejected a Second RFRA Law Because it Lacked Non-Discrimination Protections**: In the early 1990s, some landlords refused to rent apartments to unmarried couples on religious grounds and brought lawsuits, in some cases under RFRA, to obtain exemptions from laws prohibiting housing discrimination. These cases led many groups to reassess their support for RFRA. Indeed, after the Supreme Court held in 1997 that RFRA could not apply to the states, Congress attempted to pass a new bill, the Religious Liberty Protection Act, that would have applied the RFRA standard to the states, but it failed to pass because of concerns that the law would be used to justify discrimination.

- **State RFRAs and Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric**: Today, many who support state RFRAs intend for them to be used to supersede non-discrimination laws and laws that ensure access to healthcare. Most new state RFRAs are accompanied by anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. And proponents of these laws refuse to accept amendments that would prevent the laws from allowing discrimination.

- **RFRAs Could Cause Unique Problems at the State Level**: Unlike the federal government, the states have sole authority to pass laws in areas such as family law and professional licensing—areas where religious exemptions could be particularly troubling. The states also have the primary authority to pass criminal laws, another area where granting religious exemptions may be especially dangerous.


[4] Listecki v. Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors, 780 F.3d 731 (7th Cir. 2015) (arguing that RFRA should shield Archdiocese from bankruptcy laws that would make more funds available to pay victims of sexual abuse).


[8] Thomas v. Anchorage Equal Rights Comm’n, 165 F.3d 692 (9th Cir. 1999), (holding that the First Amendment allowed landlord to ignore housing non-discrimination provision), vacated on other grounds, 220 F.3d 1134 (9th Cir. 2000) (en banc); see also Smith v. Fair Emp’t & Housing Comm’n, 913 P.2d 909 (Cal. 1996) (arguing same under RFRA); Swanner v. Anchorage Equal Rights Comm’n, 874 P.2d 274 (Alaska 1994) (rejecting landlord’s claim on both First Amendment and RFRA grounds); Attorney Gen. v. Desilets, 636 N.E.2d 233 (Mass. 1994) (ruling that state constitutional provision allowed the discrimination).