

Office for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns
Health and Wholeness Advocacy
Wider Church Ministries
United Church of Christ

November 20, 2006

A Pastoral Letter and Prayer for Transgender Day of Remembrance

Dear Friends,

In this nation and world, where there are many strides being made for the civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, many struggles also remain. According to law enforcement sources, an average of one transgender individual is murdered each month in the United States (<http://equalitymaryland.org/hateviolence.htm>). In the midst of such tragedy, it is more important than ever to lift up the Transgender Day of Remembrance.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance is held on November 20th each year to remember those who have died from anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. For people of faith, this day is an opportunity to proclaim again the good news of each person's truest identity as child of God, and that God calls each of us to live out our lives in the truest, most authentic way. We are likewise reminded of the ways in which we fall short of God's call, allowing prejudice, lack of understanding and fear to get the best of us, resulting in injustice and oppression, bigotry and hatred which can result in violence, even death.

It was Rita Hester's murder in 1998 that motivated the creation of "Remembering Our Dead," a web project (www.rememberingourdead.org) dedicated to immortalizing the names of transgender persons who have died. A candlelight vigil was held in response in San Francisco in 1999 and is seen as the first Day of Remembrance event. Since then, events have been organized in numerous cities in the U.S. and around the world. On Transgender Day of Remembrance we remember, share our stories, raise awareness, and express our love and respect in the face of so much indifference and hatred.

The guiding principles behind the Transgender Day of Remembrance are instructive:

- Transgender lives are affirmed as valuable.

- It is up to us to remember these people, since their killers, law enforcement, the media, and so many others often seek to erase their existence.
- We can make a difference by being visible, speaking out, educating and organizing around anti-transgender violence, and that can effect change and stop the flood of violence against transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals.

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ has affirmed such values over the years in policy statements and actions. In the summer of 2003 at the 24th General Synod in Minneapolis the General Synod adopted the resolution, “Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People within the United Church of Christ and Supporting Their Civil and Human Rights” (see: www.ucc.org/lgbt/statements/htm). The resolution encourages the welcoming of transgender people into membership, ministry, and full participation; and to learn about the realities of transgender experience and expression, including the gifts, callings and needs of transgender people, and engaging in appropriate dialogue with transgender people.

As the eighth annual Transgender Day of Remembrance is observed this year, let us all find ways in each of our settings to embrace these principles, to affirm the positive work that is being done on behalf of the rights of people who are transgender, and to live out Jesus’ mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22: 39).

Grace and peace,

Rev. Michael D. Schuenemeyer
Executive Health and Wholeness Advocacy
Minister for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns

Rev. Lori Tisher
Intern Health and Wholeness Advocacy

A Prayer for Transgender Day of Remembrance

God of creation, Source of life,
we behold your newness with each new day.
We watch how the seasons transition
 from winter to spring to summer to fall
 and then the cycle is renewed.
Your creative process of life
 is ever before us in all its diversity
 and human life is no exception.

As we observe Transgender Day of Remembrance,
we pray with thanksgiving
for those whose lives have been cut short
by fear, hatred, and violence
 because they were perceived to be different,
 because they had the courage to live their lives
 with integrity and openness,
because they did not conform
 to someone else's view of how they should live.

We remember and give thanks
 for the seasons of their lives,
 for the love and friendships they shared
 and the ways in which their living
 has been a gift to us all.
Be present to those of us who are grieving,
 may your peace rest on us.
Be present to those of us who are angry,
 may the power of your love inspire and embolden us
 to use our anger to dismantle hate,
 the fear of difference and all that incites violence.
And send us out into the world
 with the wisdom and guidance of your Spirit
 and with evangelical courage
 that we may work in solidarity with one another
 to build your community of welcome, justice and peace.

We pray in the name of the Christ, who transforms the world. Amen.

Prayer by Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer,
Transgender Day of Remembrance, 2006