

Members Lay and clergy of the Northern Plains Conference
Date: November 10, 2010

Dear Friends in Christ:

As I begin this pastoral letter I want to thank Rev. Dorothy Borden, pastor of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Argusville, pastoral on the staff of the Congregational United Church of Christ in Valley City and Co NPC Youth Director, for calling us to live our faith as we would respond to a tragedy that is unfolding around us.

The suicides of the past months by young people have underlined the injustice that is taking place in communities throughout the country. Young people who are bullied, who are harassed, teased and otherwise vilified, can find themselves in some very dark and lonely places and tragically some come to believe that they have no alternative but to take their lives. Bullying takes place when one youth abuses another over a period of time. There are six factors that define bullying, they are; An intent to harm, Intensity and duration, A powerful abuser, A vulnerable victim, A lack of support for the victim and The reality that the entire episode of bullying has consequences. In this country one in five primary school age children are bullied and if we only count the LGBT community the portion bullied jumps to nine out of ten. With the advancement of technology we have new opportunities to abuse one another. Cyber bullying, using cell phones, instant messaging, texting, blogging and social networking, is now a part of the reality our children face.

In the face of this unfolding tragedy, North Dakota is one of only five states that do not have anti-bullying laws on the books. Statistics show that such laws do make a difference in helping to protect vulnerable youth.

In cooperation with the Mission and Outreach Committee of the Northern Plains Conference, I am asking congregations of the NPC, their members, lay and clergy, to take the following steps; Seek out your respective state legislators and encourage them to work on and vote in favor of anti-bullying legislation in the 2011 biennial, (a listing of state legislators can be found on the web site). Encourage our churches, institutions and communities to pass resolutions addressing and combating bullying on the local level. Speak with community leaders to address ways to combat bullying. Stand with the victimized youth when you observed bullying.

Bullying does not have to be a part of the "growing up" experience of our youth. We can stop it. We can stand with the victims. To rely on the conventional wisdom and "Let children work it out" is to turn our back on the most vulnerable among us and ignore the abuse they are enduring.

We need to call our schools, churches, communities and governments to action so that we might confront this injustice. The victims of bullying do not have the power to stop this tragedy from unfolding but we as people of faith must. Let us take the stand to which our faith calls us.

If you have questions or wish to talk more fully about bullying please do not hesitate to call the Conference Office at 701 255 1104.

Namaste

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United Church of Christ