



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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Dear Family of the United Church of Christ,

The Council of Conference Ministers, the Officers of the United Church of Christ, and the UCC Open and Affirming Coalition join together in this pastoral letter addressing the legal attacks on people of transgender or nonbinary experience across the United States.

We greet you in the name of the God of compassion and justice.

As leaders in the United Church of Christ, we want every person of transgender or nonbinary experience to know this: **you are beloved by God**. No earthly power can separate you from God's love. God created you perfectly: your gender identity or expression is God's gift to you and the world.

Yet, across America, laws and executive orders are criminalizing the lifesaving treatment that transgender youth need to complete their journey to wholeness and, at the same time, are depriving parents of the right to make medical decisions for their children. These laws, enacted or proposed in states across the country, are part of a broader campaign to reverse basic rights for LGBTQ+ Americans. Alabama, Arkansas, and Arizona already ban medical care for trans youth. In Texas, the state government has defined gender-affirming care as "*child abuse*." Fifteen states have banned participation by transgender youth in school sports. Six states have adopted "*don't say gay or trans*" laws that have erased any mention of LGBTQ+ people from school life.

The harm done when governments seize control from parents of their freedom to provide care for their own children is obvious. Even more dangerous is the message states are sending to transgender and nonbinary youth: "*Your lives don't matter*." **Suicide is an epidemic among LGBTQ+ youth** and has been for years. When politicians stigmatize children and teenagers who simply wish to live their lives with integrity, the cost of mental suffering is egregious. The ripple effect of this stigma and discrimination reverberates throughout the whole community.

Jesus said: "*I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly*." (John 10:10) The lives of trans and nonbinary people are precious. They are God's beloved children, our siblings, created like all of us for a life free from hatred and recrimination. **The church cannot be silent** while our trans and nonbinary youth and their parents are subjected to abuse and exposed to public defamation.

And so we are not silent. To our transgender and nonbinary siblings: we offer you our encouragement, support, and love. We will remain at your side as long as others threaten your



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dignity and worth. We honor your courage and your faith. **The world needs you not as others want you to be, but as you truly are.**

To the congregations and ministry settings of the United Church of Christ: We ask you to surround persons of transgender or nonbinary experience and their families and loved ones with compassion and care. **Do not be silent when this wave of persecution threatens human life.** This is a time to love – not behind closed doors but out in the open, with word and action. Your visible witness demonstrates that all who struggle against defamation and hatred have a home in the United Church of Christ.

As Pride month begins in many states, we are reminded that “coming out” is a powerful moral force that transforms lives. This is true not only for LGBTQ+ people but also for churches. This is a time when congregations are called to **come out** to show the world that love is stronger than hate.

With every blessing,

The Council of Conference Ministers,
Officers of the United Church of Christ,
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