



Our Transgender and Intersex Family, Friends, Coworkers, and Neighbors Will Not Be Erased

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The soul of our nation hinges on living the values that honor the worth and dignity of every person and the willingness to defend the liberty and justice of all. That is why a New York Times story published on Sunday, October 21st of this year is so disconcerting. The Times reported that a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) memo they obtained that contains information on efforts to narrow the definition of a person's sex under Title IX to being male or female, unchangeable, and determined by the genitals that a person is born with.

There are an estimated 1.4 million transgender and gender non-conforming persons living in the U.S. and about 1.7% of the population (about the same percentage as people with red hair) has differences in development of sex characteristics, also known as intersex. People who are transgender and people who are intersex are our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors and they deserve the same dignity, respect, and equality under the law as every other American. The United Church of Christ has recognized the inherent dignity of all and we are committed to fighting this and any attempt to marginalize these beloved children of God. Our renderings of scripture and faith oblige us in all times and circumstances to do no other.

Make no mistake, the policies proposed in the HHS memo are a cruel and pernicious attempt to undermine the dignity, worth and rights of transgender and intersex citizens. Even if it is only a trial balloon, it is stigmatizing and demeaning and thereby causes harm to persons of different gender identities and expressions, as well as persons with difference sex characteristics and their families.

As a Christian, I am mindful that Jesus understood there is diversity beyond the binary of male and female when he talked about eunuchs (Matthew 19:12) offering acceptance. There is also the story of Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37), an act of inclusion, not invisibility. The Apostle Peter declares in Acts 10 that he is convinced that God shows no partiality. Yet this harmful effort to narrowly define sex and gender is right out of the legislative agenda of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, seeking to enact the policies promoted by the religious right including organizations such as the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), the Family Research Council (FRC), and the American Family Association, all of which have been designated as Hate Groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The irony should not be lost that the same political leaders who so vociferously argued that government should not impose itself on people in such an intrusive and invasive way, is arguing to take control of decisions between doctors, patients and parents of minor children. It is vital to send a message to our elected officials that the policy proposed in this memo is wrong, scientifically unfounded, causes harm and fails to serve the common good. It is also a stark reminder that elections matter and the importance of letting our voices be heard at the ballot box. By casting our votes in the November 6 mid-term election, we have an important opportunity to elect officials who will honor the God-given worth and dignity of every person and deliver the message that our transgender and intersex family, friends, coworkers and neighbors will not be erased.

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