



Church of the Brethren

“...For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matthew 25: 35-36).

When we read this passage of scripture in Matthew, we are reminded that in God’s eyes, there is no distinction between the way we treat the image of God found in human sisters and brothers, and the way we treat God. Making an object of another human being is objectifying the Holy Spirit present within that person. What we allow to happen to another person, we allow to happen to God.

What then shall we do when a child of God is abused, harassed, or bullied?

The nature of bullying has changed rapidly in recent years. With advances in technology, bullying can now reach beyond the confines of school buildings and class schedules into public forums on the Internet.

Recent news stories reveal the extent of bullying based on perceived sexual orientation, but a child, youth, or even an adult may become a target of bullying for any number of reasons, including body image, ethnic heritage, socio-economic status, or lack of a particular skill.

Brothers and sisters, when young people turn to suicide to escape from the emotional and psychological torture of bullying or harassment in their communities, we Christians must recognize our inadequate efforts to protect the image of God in each person. To follow Jesus, to be examples of another way of living, our Church of the Brethren faith communities must be places of safety, refuge, and opposition to bullying, both in our theology and in our practice.

Our response to bullying, at its base, is a response to violence. Bullying, for any reason and in any manner, is inconsistent with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As disciples of Jesus, we must acknowledge that a lack of response to bullying perpetuates violence. This cycle of violence is particularly offensive to us in the Church of the Brethren. Our tradition names violence as sin because of our understanding of Jesus’ teachings as well as our historical experience of suffering theological and political prejudice, and the resulting physical violence. As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to be living examples of another way of treating each other.

In our life together as the Church we should be of one mind that preventable violence and death is an offense to the Creator and Spirit of Life. When young people take their own

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lives because of the inability to be seen by others and to see themselves as beloved children of God, it is time for repentance. As Christians, we are called to be aware of the impact and potential violence of any words and actions that may contribute to prejudice and hate. In our naming and repenting of violence we, as the people of God, offer to the wider culture a proclamation of the grace and peace of Christ.

To support congregations in their efforts to be safe, healing places for those caught in the cycle of bullying, a number of resources are offered by the Church of the Brethren's Congregational Life Ministry and Witness and Advocacy staff. These resources are available at www.brethren.org/nobullying.

As you offer the peace of Christ to those with whom you minister, may the love of God grant you courage, and may the Holy Spirit empower our church communities to be places of safety and nurturing love.

In the name of the One who took up the children in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10: 16),

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stanley Noffsinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Stanley J. Noffsinger
General Secretary