

Resolution to Ban the Practice of Conversion Therapy

Summary by Alice Rauch

“Dear God, please forgive me if I in any way have denied another’s humanness.” This has been a part of my prayer life for many years. I am not even sure where this part of my prayer of confession came from, but I paused and heard it anew as I prayed in the last few days. I had the privilege of being a delegate to the UCC General Synod for my first time. During the week of virtual synod, we worshiped God, shared in educational seminars, and learned about the work of the UCC on behalf of the church. Then, over the weekend we gathered as Penn Central delegates at a hotel in Lancaster, PA while we connected virtually with delegates all over the country. It was a wonderful experience, and I am grateful to have been a part of this history making (first virtual) UCC General Synod.

As I reached the “denied another’s humanness” part of my personal prayer of confession after Synod I somehow prayed these words with new meaning. I realized that so much of the work that is done during the Synod is about recognizing the ways in which we can support and protect the humanity of all.

I was a part of the committee for the resolution to Ban Conversion Therapy. For those who are not familiar, Conversion “Therapy” is being used in some circles to attempt to make someone who is LBGTQAI+ become straight and/or conform to gender norms. I learned a lot about this practice and its damaging effects on the mental health and wellbeing of people who are often forced to participate. Our discussion was prayerful, compassionate, and productive. We ended up with a resolution that was conscientiously worded and designed to support the process of banning Conversion Therapy in any ways we can – through advocacy, education, and acts of care. The Resolution of Witness was approved by a Synod vote of _____

The biblical foundation for this work is (as stated in the resolution):

“The biblical tradition affirms that all human beings are made “in the image of God.” (Gen. 1:27) The church’s witness affirms that “in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith” and that “all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 26-28) We are therefore to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Lev. 19:9-18 and Matt. 22:40) and act with empathy towards all others (cf. the “Golden Rule” in Lev. 19:18 and Matt. 7:12).

The capacity to love and seek love is God’s gift to all human beings. Love is a reflection God’s inner life as Trinity—the three divine persons whose love cannot not be contained but is poured out in God’s acts of creation and redemption. Human love in its many expressions is therefore God’s design for humanity, and is offered to all without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. The psychological and spiritual damage inflicted by “conversion therapy” on LBGTQ+ people, especially youth, violates the image of God that is embodied in every human being, harms our neighbor, and denies to others the grace we claim for ourselves.”

I am praying again ... “please forgive me If I have in any way denied another’s humanness.” I continue praying, “remind me, oh God, of the beauty and diversity of your creation and help me (us) to see and value all people.” And I continue praying some more ... “Gracious God, help me (us) to be courageous in advocacy, striving to ban conversion “therapy’s” practice. Help me to share the deeply held, faithfully discerned belief that God’s love and God’s church should be a safe space for all people – yes all people –

expressing hospitality and being in mutual ministry in ways that celebrate the beautiful variety of gender identities and relational expressions that are expressed by God's beautifully created humanity."

Praying is an important part of our work. There is more work to be done along with the praying. How can we put this resolution into action?

Here are a few possibilities:

- 1) Find out about the laws that are in place in our state. Right now Conversion Therapy is legal for adults in all 50 states. There are a few states that have outlawed Conversion Therapy for minors. Washington DC is the only place in the United States in which 100 percent of the population is protected.
- 2) Watch the educational intensive provided by PFLAG:
<https://vimeo.com/569979373/067f56a0a7>
- 3) Connect with the "Trevor Project" and learn more - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-involved/trevor-advocacy/50-bills-50-states/about-conversion-therapy/>
- 4) Connect with Mental Health providers in your area to learn about the kinds of supports that are in place for people who have been wounded by Conversion Therapy.
- 5) Consider starting a Support Group (such as PFLAG) with your congregation.
- 6) Access the Power Point of the implementation conversation which is available at shorturl.at/akmB5
- 7) Consider connecting with the Open and Affirming Ministries of the UCC and the Mental Health Network
openandaffirming.org mhn-ucc.org

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn more about how we can be a voice of justice in our world and be a witness of compassion and wholeness through working to ban Conversion Therapy. I pray that we can as congregations, other ministry settings, and people of faith make a difference through prayer and action.

Blessings and peace!

Rev. Alice Rauch