Saving Lives with Sexuality Education

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My friends’ lives are at stake.

From retired clergy to the best friend of teen relatives, to the grandchildren of friends, my beloved are being targeted by legislation designed to make people afraid of them.

I strongly believe faith leaders and communities have a responsibility to dismantle shame and stigma about bodies and relationships. It saves lives.

Florida leaders, however, are stoking stigma by prohibiting classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity to students in kindergarten through grade 3. A new policy calls for the revocation or suspension of teaching licenses for any K–3 teachers who teach students about these topics.

In addition, the Florida Board of Medicine and the state Board of Osteopathic Medicine approved a rule banning transgender minors from receiving gender-affirming care, which stands contrary to the recommendations of several professional organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the American Psychological Association. While the ban includes some exceptions for young people already receiving nonsurgical care, doctors who violate the new rules face losing their medical licenses.

These actions codify discrimination and create unsafe environments for many young children to discuss their family members and for many teachers to be authentic about their lives.

Studies show that LGBTQ students who do not have affirming school environments are at a higher risk of attempting suicide.
Additional research done with Harvard Medical School shows that access to gender-affirming care like that now banned in Florida is associated with lower rates of suicide ideation in transgender young adults.

At a moment in time when many feel helpless about the growing number of movements placing legislative restrictions on medical care and education, we must band together and take the actions we can to protect those who are vulnerable to such vicious medical and educational discrimination.

The United Church of Christ has a long history of providing comprehensive, inclusive, faith-based sexuality education in partnership with the Unitarian Universalist Association through the Our Whole Lives and Sexuality & Our Faith ministry. Our denomination remains committed to providing training and developmentally appropriate materials throughout the lifespan for congregations and other organizations to be able to engage in crucial conversations about sexuality in the context of their faith.

Providing space in our faith communities to have these conversations helps reduce biased attitudes, which are at the base of the Pyramid of Hate developed by the Anti-Defamation League. Genocide is at the top of the pyramid, and while not all biased attitudes lead to genocide, all acts of genocide have roots in biased attitudes. Our Whole Lives saves lives.

Nurturing health and wholeness includes actively and intentionally teaching about the sacredness of our bodies, our relationships, and our communities. I call on people in Florida to demand these actions be rescinded and to help put an end to punishing teachers for teaching about the diversity of humanity and doctors for providing medical care. I stand in solidarity with and affirm my LGBTQ+ siblings in Florida, throughout the country, and throughout the world. You were created in the image of God and are beloved.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Rev. Amy Johnson is the Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice for the United Church of Christ.
The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.