Clergy Against Bullying:
A Faith Alliance to Stop Bullying of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender People

Media Release

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Clergy and faith leaders say “No More Bullying!”
In Wake of Gay Teen Suicides and Anti-Gay Violence, Faith Leaders Pledge Peaceful Actions

In a groundbreaking alliance of high level mainline Christian leaders and faith groups that fully include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, faith leaders released a statement calling on “the Church Universal to join us in working to end the violence and hatred against our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters.”

In the wake of a rash of suicides after anti-gay bullying and violent attacks on gay people in New York, top faith leaders signed a pledge “to be LGBT and straight people of faith standing together for the shared values of decency and civility, compassion and care in all interactions.”

National faith leaders signing the Clergy Against Bullying statement include the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, the Rev. Geoffrey Black, President of the United Church of Christ, Elder Cynthia J. Bolbach, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, Bishop Yvette Flunder, Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship and the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches.

The Rev. Michael Kinnamon said, “The member churches of the National Council of Churches are moved by scripture to affirm every person as a valued child of God and to support protection from bullying and discrimination. Just as we spoke out on behalf of Muslims who were under threat, so we now stand as Clergy Against Bullying of our neighbors, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Given the recent outburst of anti-gay rhetoric and action, the Church must not be silent.”

Head of The Episcopal Church, Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said, “The Episcopal Church abhors the persecution of any group of human beings and seeks the just and dignified treatment of all.”

"Bullying for any reason is contradictory to authentic religion,” said Dr. C. Welton Gaddy. “Religion inspires respect, empathy, compassion and humility--values that prompt healing and condemn hurting.”

“We are asking all faith colleagues, LGBT and straight alike, to go online and sign the Clergy Against Bullying statement and to work toward safe space for all God's children in our churches,” said the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson. “Too often, young people who are gay, transgender or questioning fear judgmental church people. This statement by Clergy Against Bullying will help us all tell the story of the One who came not to judge or condemn but to love us. Today we are saying to every child who is different in any way: ‘You are safe in the arms of God; you are safe with our congregations.’”

Bishop Yvette Flunder of The Fellowship said, “When our young people hear messages of condemnation from church leaders, they are left alone to wonder if God loves them, if their families will reject them and
if their peers will attack them with taunts and bullying. Today, Clergy Against Bullying are choosing to speak words of humility, love and acceptance.”

Harry Knox of the Human Rights Campaign said, “We rejoice that we are joining our voices with Muslims for Progressive Values and the more than 300 Jewish organizational leaders coordinated by Keshet. You will be inspired to do more when you read the powerful Keshet and Muslim statements.”

For a full statement of Clergy Against Bullying and to sign on, go to the web site. All clergy and people of good faith are welcome to sign. Clergy Against Bullying will be building online resources to help congregations create safe spaces and support for all of God’s children, including the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children.

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CLERGY AGAINST BULLYING
CALL FOR ACTION AND TIME OF HEALING
IN WAKE OF GAY TEEN SUICIDES AND ANTI-GAY VIOLENCE

For Immediate Release: October 18, 2010

Today, as leaders of Christian communions and national networks, we speak with heavy hearts because of the bullying, suicides and hate crimes that have shocked this country and called all faith communities into accountability for our words or our silence. We speak with hopeful hearts, believing that change and healing are possible, and call on our colleagues in the Church Universal to join us in working to end the violence and hatred against our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters.

In the past seven weeks, six young and promising teenagers took their own lives. Some were just entering high school; one had just enrolled in college. Five were boys; one, a girl becoming a young woman. These are only the deaths for which there has been a public accounting. New reports of other suicides continue to haunt us daily from around the country.

They were of varying faiths and races and came from different regions of the nation.

The one thing these young men and women had in common was that they were perceived to be gay or lesbian.

Each in their own way faced bullying and harassment or struggled with messages of religion and culture that made them fear the consequences of being who they were.

In the past two weeks, cities like New York have seen major escalations in anti-gay violence. Two young men attacked patrons of the Stonewall Inn, legendary birth place of the LGBT rights movement in the United States, locking them in the restroom and beating them while hurling anti-gay epithets. Men on a Chelsea street, saying goodnight after an evening out, were attacked by a group of teens and young adults, again hurling anti-gay slogans and hurting one person badly enough to require emergency treatment. And nine young men in the Bronx went on a two-day rampage beating, burning, torturing and sodomizing two teenage boys and their gay male adult friend for allegedly having a sexual relationship. "It's nothing personal," one of the now arrested said. "You just broke the rules."

What are the "rules" of human engagement and interaction that we, as people of faith, want to teach our congregants, children and adults alike, to live by?
Many have responded from within and beyond the faith community offering comfort and support to the families and friends of Billy Lucas, Seth Walsh, Asher Brown, Tyler Clementi, Raymond Chase and Aiyisha Hasan. Our hearts, too, are broken by the too soon losses of these young and promising lives, and we join our voices to those who have sought to speak words of comfort and healing.

Many others, however, have responded by adding insult to injury, citing social myths and long-held prejudices that only fuel division, hatred and violence – and sometimes even death.

We, as leaders of faith, write today to say we must hold ourselves accountable, and we must hold our colleagues in the ministry, accountable for the times, whether by our silence or our proclamations, our inaction or our action, we have fueled the kinds of beliefs that make it possible for people to justify violence in the name of faith. Condemning and judging people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity can have deadly consequences, both for the victims of hate crimes and those who commit them.

There is no excuse for inspiring or condoning violence against any of our human family. We may not all agree on what the Bible says or doesn't say about sexuality, including homosexuality, but this we do agree on: The Bible says, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God in them." Abiding in love – together – is the rule we must all preach, teach, and seek to live by.

People of faith must realize that if teens feel they will be judged by their church, rejected by their families and bullied by their peers, they may have nowhere to turn.

Too many things go unspoken in our communities. It's time to talk openly and honestly about the diversity of God's creation and the gift of various sexual orientations and gender identities – and to do that in a way that makes it safe for people to disagree and still abide in love.

It's time to talk openly and honestly about the use and misuse of power and authority by those we entrust with our spiritual well-being. It's time to make it safe for our clergy colleagues who are struggling to live what they preach, to get the help and support we all sometimes need.

The young people who took their lives a few weeks ago died because the voices of people who believe in the love of God for all the people of God were faint and few in the face of those who did the bullying, harassing and condemning. Today we write to say we will never again be silent about the value of each and every life.

To that end, we pledge to urge our churches, our individual parishes or offices, our schools and religious establishments to create safe space for each and every child of God, without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. And we ask you to join us in that pledge.

Today, we personally pledge to be LGBT and straight people of faith standing together for the shared values of decency and civility, compassion and care in all interactions. We ask you, our colleagues, to join us in this pledge.

We want our children and the children of the communities we serve to grow up knowing that God loves all of us and that without exception, bullying and harassment, making fun of someone for perceived differences, and taunting and harming others is wrong. The Golden Rule is still the rule we want to live by.

We pray today that you will join us in being the faces of a faith that preaches and demonstrates God's universal acceptance and offers to one and all safe space to live, to learn, and to love and be loved.
In faith and solidarity,
HEADS OF COMMUNIONS
The Rev. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches
The Rev. Geoffrey Black, United Church of Christ General Minister and President
Elder Cynthia J. Bolbach, Moderator, 219th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)
The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church
The Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, 219th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)
The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, Moderator, 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America
The Rev. Peter Morales, President, Unitarian Universalist Association
Bishop Yvette Flunder, President of The Fellowship
The Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches
Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls, Vice President of the National Board and Regional Prelate, Unity Fellowship Church
Archbishop Carl Bean, Founder and Presiding Prelate, Unity Fellowship Church Movement
Carol Blythe, Alliance of Baptists President
Paula Clayton Dempsey, Minister for Partnership Relations, Alliance of Baptists

NATIONAL FAITH STAFF OF LGBT ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS
The Rev. Harry Knox, Director of Religion and Faith Program, Human Rights Campaign Foundation
The Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Director of Institute for Welcoming Resources, National Gay & Lesbian Task Force
Dr. Sylvia Rhue, Director of Religious Affairs, National Black Justice Coalition
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The Rev. Mark Hostetter, Chair of the Board, Auburn Seminary
Sung Park, Program Director, Believe Out Loud
The Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, President of The Interfaith Alliance
The Reverend Debra W. Haffner, Executive Director, Religious Institute
Sister Jeannine Gramick, SL, Executive Coordinator, National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN)
The Rev. Neal Christie, Assistant General Secretary of the United Methodist Board of Church & Society
The Rev. Cynthia Abrams, Program Director, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church
Linda Bales Todd, Director, General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church
The Rev. Dr. Cindi Love, Executive Director, Soulforce, Inc.

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THEOLOGICANS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS
Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, Professor of Sociology at Georgetown University.