



PINE VALLEY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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My name is Rev. Carolyn Schwarz. I am the Senior Minister of Pine Valley Christian Church in Wichita. I received my Masters of Divinity degree and have been ordained to Christian ministry since 1997. For most ministers there are scriptures that shape their understanding of ministry. One of those scriptures that shape my ministry is found in 1 John 4:

7 My dear friends, we must love each other. Love comes from God, and when we love each other, it shows that we have been given new life. We are now God's children, and we know him. 8 God is love, and anyone who doesn't love others has never known him. 9 God showed his love for us when he sent his only Son into the world to give us life. 10 Real love isn't our love for God, but his love for us...11 Dear friends, since God loved us this much, we must love each other. If we keep on loving others, we will stay one in our hearts with God, and he will stay one with us. 20 But if we say we love God and don't love each other, we are liars. We cannot see God. So how can we love God, if we don't love the people we can see? 21 The commandment that God has given us is: "Love God and love each other!"

I share these words from my faith tradition out of concern over Senate Bill 175. While I'm sure that those who authored this bill were well-intended, I am concerned with the possible consequence of passing this bill. I am concerned that it lacks fairness for persons because they may not fit the idea of someone's religious beliefs. This does not sound like the all-embracing, all-encompassing love of God. It reflects, instead, an attitude that falls short of tolerance.

This past week I had the opportunity to meet with a Wichita State student who is finishing his P.H.D. in Civil Engineering. He is a member of the Student Association for Interfaith Dialog. We met so I could become acquainted with this organization. He is from Turkey. He is also Muslim. In our conversation he talked about his initial fear about coming to the United States. His fear was influenced by media in his home country that depicted intolerance and violence as the norm in the United States. He was very relieved when he arrived to discover that most people share an attitude of acceptance and tolerance for all people no matter their differences. Religious tolerance can only flourish in an atmosphere that encourages appreciative learning and relationship building. Thoughtful dialogue cannot happen when groups are allowed to create divisions or encourage labeling some as insiders and some as outsiders. My concern is Senate Bill 175 has the potential to cast an aura of division and mean-spiritedness to permeate our State's institutions of higher learning. The beauty of university life is that it expands our world view so we may grow into mature adults. Freedom of religion isn't for a few, but for all persons. Senate Bill 175 allows for freedom for only a few, leads to division and mean-spiritedness and risks squelching creative inspiration that is so valued in higher education. It lacks tolerance and fairness for this WSU student and other students based on nationality, culture, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation or religious affiliation. It fails to respect the Golden Rule that calls us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

The Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, with which I am affiliated celebrates a Welcome Table where we enact love and welcome at the Lord's Supper every week. Following Christ's example of love is demonstrated by preserving the dignity and humanity of all people. Senate Bill 175 runs counter to the love and acceptance, which is the way of God. I am Kansan born, I graduated from Newton High School, attended Friends University, graduated from Wichita State. My children were born and raised here. Kansas is my home. I have recently returned home to Kansas after some time of ministry in Virginia. This is not the Kansas that I left. This is not the Kansas I know and love. The Kansas that I love and call home embraces the values of welcome, fairness, true freedom and love for all people.

Mean-spiritedness masked as religious freedom is still mean-spiritedness.

Intolerance masked as religious freedom is still intolerance.

Division masked as religious freedom is still division.

Do what leads to fairness, tolerance and acceptance. I urge you to vote no for Senate Bill 175.