

13th Annual Transgender Day of Remembrance

This is the time of year when many of us think about the Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR), a day in which groups across the world hold vigils to remember those that have been brutally murdered simply because of their gender identity.

This year (, as we approach November 20,) we honor yet more victims of the horrific violence that has gone largely unnoticed. These are just a few of the individuals whose lives were silenced this year by gender bias and gender hatred.

I'm joining with the *Standing on the Side of Love* campaign to reach out to our congregation again this year and bring awareness to the senseless murders that continue to happen in our country as well as abroad.

We gather here today to mark the thirteenth anniversary of the Transgender Day of Remembrance. The Transgender Day of Remembrance was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. Today we often memorialize all LGBTQ individuals who were killed or severely beaten during the preceding 12 months.

Rita Hester, an African American transgender woman, was stabbed to death in her apartment in Allston, Mass. on Nov. 28, 1998. An outpouring of community grief and support led to a candlelight vigil taking place just a few days afterward.

Shortly after the vigil, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, a transgender activist, founded the Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day to memorialize those who fall victim to transgender hatred. Rita Hester's murder also kicked off the "Remembering Our Dead" web project and a San Francisco candlelight vigil in 1999. Rita Hester's murder — like most anti-transgender murder cases — has yet to be solved.

Due to the interest in both the web site and that original vigil, it was decided to create an annual memorial to those killed

Although not every person represented during the Day of Remembrance self-identified as transgender — that is, as a transsexual, cross-dresser, intersex or otherwise gender-variant — each was a victim of violence based on bias against transgender people. Since 1998 over 350 deaths have been recorded

We live in times more sensitive than ever to hatred based violence, especially since the events of September 11th. Yet even now, the deaths of those based on anti-transgender hatred or prejudice are largely ignored. Over the last decade, some three persons per month have died due to transgender-based hate or

prejudice, regardless of any other factors in their lives. This trend shows no sign of abating.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance serves several purposes. It raises public awareness of hate crimes against transgender people, an action that current media doesn't perform. The Day of Remembrance publicly mourns and honors the lives of our brothers and sisters who might otherwise be forgotten. Through the vigil, we express love and respect for our people in the face of national indifference and hatred. The Day of Remembrance reminds non-transgender people that we are their sons, daughters, parents, friends and lovers. The Day of Remembrance gives our allies a chance to step forward with us and stand in vigil, memorializing those of us who have died due to transphobic violence.

Transphobia is the hate or fear of gender variant people, which is similar to homophobia. Unlike homophobic acts, however, violent crimes against transgendered men and women are not considered hate crimes in many states. The Transgender Day of Remembrance is a response to the discriminatory actions without proper judicial ramifications.

Between January 2011 and May 2011, 55 transgender-related murders had been registered in 19 countries, according to a worldwide research project that examines the human rights situation of transgender persons throughout the world. Four of these murders occurred in the United States, a slight decrease compared to previous years.

A study conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality, surveyed nearly 6,500 transgender Americans.

The study found that 26 percent of respondents had experienced some type of physical assault because they were transgender. And well over half of those polled said they had experienced serious discrimination. This includes being incarcerated, evicted, or fired because of their gender identity.

Ten years ago, only two states had laws protecting transgender individuals from discrimination. Now, 15 states do. But it isn't up to policymakers and police officers alone to curb discrimination against transgender people: It's up to society as a whole. There is no safe city — there is no safe state — for transgender people in the United States.

Rachel Crandall, co-founder and executive director of Transgender Michigan said, "Transgender Day of Remembrance is very important because it's the day to remember transgendered people who were killed solely because they were transgender. It's my way of thanking those who have lost their lives and paved the way for the transgender men and women who follow after them."

Michelle Fox-Phillips, co-founder of Transgender Detroit, an organization that

advocates for Transgender issues in the metro Detroit area said, “I don’t know how to explain it [Transgender Day of Remembrance]. It’s the most important transgender event of the year. All these victims need to get recognition in some way. The press ignores them, the police ignore them.”

In many Unitarian Universalist congregations, a moment during a Sunday worship service in November has been set aside to remember that violence and hatred still exist, and to grieve for the lives changed and lost due to this violence. The following resolution was passed at the General Assembly (GA) in Portland, OR, in 2007 in support of transgender people and education for non-trans confronting Gender Identity Discrimination.

“Whereas the President of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations noted, in his June 21st report to the General Assembly, the work of our West Florida congregations on the issue of employment discrimination against transgender individuals, and

Whereas there has been no prior statement by the General Assembly specifically addressing our Association's views on transgender identity,

Be it resolved that the 2007 General Assembly affirms its commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of *every* human being, including transgender individuals.

We further resolve to express this spiritual value through our employment practices, educational efforts, congregational life, and public witness, and encourage member congregations and societies to explore with their communities the important differences between sexual orientation and transgender identity.

The GA continued, while the Sunday closest to November 20th is ideal, it is more important to find an appropriate time regardless of when it is—to grieve, honor, and remember those who have died.

UUA Pres. Rev. Peter Morales said in a statement last year, “Anti-transgender violence is a stunning epidemic, embodying the darkest aspects of human nature. Perpetrators of such violence have succumbed to the moral plagues of fear, hatred, and cruelty, turning away from love and compassion. Sadly, the victims of their murderous rage are too often forgotten by society at large.”

When Matthew Shepard was killed, the Catholic priest in Laramie, WY, is reported to have said that Matthew would be our teacher, now after death.

What can we learn from hate and misunderstanding?

Why must it take death for us to realize someone has humanity?

Every person has something to teach us.

This past year, all too many people who we would identify as transgender were attacked simply for seeming to be different.

In many cultures, transgender people have been celebrated as people with insights about humanity, as people who understand gender more so than others, and as healers.

Let us take a moment to remember those lives who have been affected by violence and grieve for the loss of life at the hands of violence. Parents have lost children, spouses have lost loved ones, and we all lose when someone dies too soon.

May we remember and honor those who have died and work toward a world where the violence is no more. May we learn from others in life what they have to teach us.

Reading and Roll Call for Transgender Day of Remembrance

I now ask the members of our Interweave Chapter to come up and assist me.

Join us in a vigil "Remembering Our Dead"

CHRISSIE BATES, 45,

A transgender woman living northeast of the Basilica of St. Mary in downtown Minneapolis, was killed on January 12th. She was the city's first homicide victim this year.

TYRA TRENT, 25,

Was found dead on February 23rd in a vacant Baltimore home. Her family says she was constantly tormented because of the way she looked.

MARCAL CAMERO TYE, 25,

Was found by police a little after 5am Tuesday, March 8, on Highway 334 in east-central Arkansas. The body appeared to have been shot and dragged under a car Tuesday.,

CHRISSY LEE POLIS, 22,

was attacked by two women ages 14 and 18, savagely beaten on April 22, in a McDonald's Restaurant. She experienced a seizure and was left twitching on the floor. Her crime was that she had used the women's restroom.

MICHAEL HUMPHREY, 59, and CLAYTON CAPSHAW, 61,

a gay couple found murdered inside a burned Lake Highlands apartment on April 28th.

UNKNOWN TRANSMAN, 27,

was beaten, raped and robbed on May 18th in St. Paul, MN, by another man who was looking for things he could sell to buy cocaine. The assailant was subsequently arrested, tried and convicted.

MISS NATE NATE aka NATHAN EUGENE DAVIS, 44,

Was murdered on June 13th and her body was found behind a trash bin at an apartment complex.

CAMILA GUZMAN, 38,

Stabbed several times in the back and neck.on August 1, 2011, in New York City.

LASHAI MCLEAN, 23,

Shot on street in Washington, DC,. A few days later a memorial to her was destroyed and a teddy bear burned.

Another Transgender woman was shot a few blocks away.

On 26 August by Kenneth Furr, an off-duty police officer, stood on the hood of a car and shot through its windshield, hitting two transgender women and a male friend, wounding one critically. The officer is a 20-year veteran of the city's police force and is currently in jail, awaiting trial.

According to a Baptist report, there has been "an increasing pattern of violence" against transgender persons in the nation's capital, including seven muggings in August and September.

GAURAV GOPALAN, 36,

Engineering research scientist Gaurav Gopalan was an enthusiastic learner, friends said. Gaurav Gopalan had three main loves in his life: helicopters, Shakespeare and his partner of five years, Bob Schaeffer. He died on September 12th from suspicious causes.

UNKNOWN TRANSWOMAN

was shot in the neck on Sept. 12. The bullet punctured both of her lungs and lodged next to her heart, where it remains. The shooter accepted the plea bargain to one count of Aggravated Assault While Armed, which carries a 5 year mandatory minimum and a maximum of 30 or 40 years.

AKEEM LAUREL, 27,

was shot to death on Sept. 16. Police still are looking for his killer.

JAMEY RODEMEYER, 14,

On Sunday, Sept. 18, 2011, Jamey Rodemeyer took his own life at the age of 14. Earlier this year he had participated in the "It Gets Better" Project, but just a week before the suicide, he wrote, "I always say how bullied I am, but no one listens. ... What do I have to do so people will listen to me?" It didn't get better for Jamey.

LUCIE PARKIN, 36,

was shot and killed Sept. 20 in a motel room on Hesperian Boulevard in Hayward, CA. Her killer has been arrested and charged with the homicide.

UNKNOWN TRANSWOMAN

was stabbed in the abdomen on Sept. 26th by two male suspects. The suspects also verbally assaulted the survivor and her friends with homophobic/transphobic language before the attack. Thankfully, the victim's injuries were non-life threatening and responding police officers were able to arrest both suspects. They are being charged with Assault with a Deadly Weapon – Bias Related.

RASHAUN BERNARD HOWARD, 26,

was shot and killed by 16-year-old Jarrett Jones on October 17th.

SHELLY MOORE, 19,

was last seen on 23 October at 1:30 AM at the 900 block of Longfellow St. in Detroit, MI. Moore's killers did not just kill this teen. They dismembered her. They burned her. They dumped the remains along a service drive on the side of an interstate. They did all they could to make her a non-entity. Then Moore's mother had to identify her child solely from a charred torso.

ASHLYNN CONNER, 10,

committed suicide November 11 after enduring bullying that included being called a boy when she had her hair cut short. Family members believe she took her own life due to bullying and teasing that had gone on for several years.

CASSIDY NATHAN VICKERS, 32,

was shot to death on November 19 in Hollywood, California. Her killer was seen and is being sought.

Let us never forget the courageous souls who lost their lives in the struggle for acceptance — not simply on a personal level, but in society as a whole.

Let us never forget those who didn't — or couldn't — abide by the "gender rules" society placed on them. And how could they, when in the deepest abysses of their souls, they knew they were not the gender they portrayed to the world?

This day is not about trying to inspire pity, but about reflection and hope. Please take a moment to reflect on the spirit of this memorial.

It's a feeling I know all too well, of being driven to the brink of suicide by the demons in my mind. Knowing in my heart I was a woman, even though physiology and society told me I was a man. Obviously, this day isn't going to elicit the same reaction from the majority of the community as it did for me.

Being forced to live a lie on a daily basis is bad enough, but having to live life in fear is worse. No one should ever have to fear physical violence for just being themselves. We are simply trying to have the outside of our bodies match the inside and it is a struggle that is nearly incomprehensible to someone who does not question their innate gender.

We are blessed to live in a time where things are improving. For instance, in 2010, 337 companies achieved a 100 percent in the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, more states and communities are enacting equal rights ordinances, as are government departments of labor, housing and health. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health have significantly eased (and reduced the overall cost of) the standards for care. And on Nov. 3, the IRS overturned a long-standing decision of disallowing tax deductions for medical care related to gender transition.

I'm proud of who I have become, but I am also looking forward to the day when I'm viewed not for being a transsexual, but simply for being female.

Everyday is better than the last, because I'm truly, genuinely happy. Yet as things inevitably improve, I cannot — and will not — forget those who died or suffered unspeakable violence for being true to themselves.

[Days of remembrance are just that and there will always be those who are more affected by the cause than others.]

May our congregation be a place where all are welcomed, where all can learn and all can be teachers. May our congregation be a place where all are safe. May our congregation be a place where people can seek and experience wholeness.