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SHAPING SANCTUARY: WELCOMING REMARKS BY REV. ERICA POELLOT

 REV. ERICA POELLOT /  SEPTEMBER 7, 2017 /

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IN AUGUST 2017, SHAPING SANCTUARY: ROLE OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN ADDRESSING THE OPIOID OVERDOSE CRISIS ([HTTP://WWW.JUDSON.ORG/EVENTS/2017/8/24/SHAPING-SANCTUARY-EVENT](http://www.judson.org/events/2017/8/24/shaping-sanctuary-event)), WAS AN INTERFAITH SERVICE OF LOVE AND LAMENT DEDICATED TO LIVES LOST TO OPIOID OVERDOSE. REV. ERICA POELLOT PROVIDED THE WELCOMING ADDRESS.

I am thrilled to see so many of you here today.

I am Incredibly grateful that you took the time to prioritize being here with us, to vision how we collectively shape sanctuary, to ensure that all people hear their names welcomed into loving community and connection.

This gathering is long overdue. It is true we are in the midst of an overdose crisis. In this city alone, we are losing an average of four beloved made in the image of all that is good and love, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, lovers and friends each day. Last year in NYC, we lost over 1,374 wonderfully and fearfully made human beings.

It is true we are in the midst of an overdose crisis, but first and foremost, we are in the midst of a spiritual crisis, of a moral crisis. We are in a crisis, which fails to recognize the full humanity of our beloved who use drugs, which condemns people who carry their burdens and their joys in ways beyond our ability to understand.

We are in a crisis, when whole people, created in the image of the most divine, are redacted and fractured, reduced to behaviors and pathologies, dehumanized.

We are in a crisis which stigmatizes and others our most vulnerable neighbors, which limits access to opportunities and rights, to stable and healthy housing, which ensures under and unemployment, which fuels an industry of exclusion and deportation, which

limits elevation through education and prevents people from accessing drug treatment and life affirming harm reductions services.

We are in a crisis.

Most significantly, we are in a crisis which fails to recognize God in black and brown people, which terrorizes black communities through mass surveillance and brutality called policing, which wields racist drug policy to decimate black families, which fails to recognize the overdose crisis has long been devastating these communities, which fails to celebrate the lives of people of color, proclaims in silence and through the creation of sacrifice zones that black deaths are more compelling than black lives.

We are in a crisis.

This crisis is an opportunity. This crisis is also an obligation.

As people who seek to align ourselves with the higher good, who are accountable to the spirit of perfect justice and love, we are called to participate in the emergence.

The emergence of healing. The emergence of freedom. The emergence of the beloved community.

We see the beloved community in the birth of sanctuary cities and sanctuary states. It is emerging in resistance, in organizing, in the rise of fierce, radical love, it is emerging in the harm reduction movement. It is emerging here today, in this space, in you.

Harm reduction is the beloved community. It is transformative anti-oppression. It is liberation. It is reciprocity and reconciliation. It is sanctuary. It is the gospel. And it is our obligation to ensure that this gospel of dignity, compassion, of love, that this gospel of harm reduction, is accessible to all.

Harm reduction is holy, faith-full resistance, rooted in love and unapologetically insistent on justice. It is the expression of radical welcome, the welcoming of all stories and paths.

Harm reduction calls people by name, and attends to and cherishes the particularities. It is a hospitality that seeks people out, meets them where they are and invites them into loving community. Harm reduction is love that stands with awe at the hardships that people carry, rather than stands in judgment at how they carry it.

It is the proclamation that you are needed, wanted, you are loved and wholly enough. Holy and enough.

Harm reduction is the beloved community and I look forward to our time today to vision how we might build sanctuary for all people, together.

Here in this congregation, we are thrilled to be launching a new project, The Sanctuary at Judson, a harm reduction resource center for communities of faith, and intend this conversation as an invitation for you to join us, partner with us, call on us to take up this holy work of love and resistance, to cherish and lift up the lives of people who use drugs and their communities.

About the Author

Rev. Erica Poellot, is the Director of Development at the [Harm Reduction Coalition](http://harmreduction.org) (<http://harmreduction.org>) and a Community Minister at [Judson Memorial Church](http://www.judson.org) (<http://www.judson.org>) in New York City.



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