



The Gospel of Harm Reduction

Erica Poellot
Immigration Coordinator

Since the “[Faithful Advocacy for Intersectional and Transformational Healing in Harm Reduction](#)” resolution was passed at Synod, I have been reflecting on models for this ministry of ours. I am moved profoundly by the model of ministry that people who use drugs have long been leading.

I have spent many nights over the last years sitting with a loved one who had experienced an overdose, sitting with other loved ones who had loved this person back to life, sitting with them for hours until we could be assured that they were not going to go back into an overdose, that they felt connected to care.

Sitting in the presence of kindness, compassion, selfless love, of showing up and sticking around even when it is scary and heartbreaking. Of showing up over and over, no questions asked. Of showing up because their lives and loves are sacred. Of showing up because our lives and loves are sacred.

Showing up in New York City where I live is one thing: naloxone, the overdose reversal medication, is legal and easy to access, [Good Samaritan legislation](#) protects first responders (often family and friends) from most legal or police action, and [naloxone is made available through harm reduction programs and health departments](#).

However, I also know that in many states this ministry of showing up, this ministry of harm reduction, looks quite different.

The [syringes to administer injectable formulations of naloxone are outlawed, criminalized paraphernalia](#).

There are [laws that enable people who share drugs with someone who overdoses to be charged with homicide](#).

There are [laws that limit who can safely carry naloxone, sterile syringes, and fentanyl test strips without the fear of search, arrest, and risk of deportation.](#)

[There are policies that penalize family and community members for using insurance to purchase naloxone.](#)

Limited access to harm reduction and [naloxone in rural communities](#) drives up the number of accidental overdose fatalities.

Stigma [is a significant barrier to naloxone saturation in underserved communities.](#)

And yet, people who use drugs, people who have experienced their own overdose, people who have lost a loved one to overdose, carry naloxone no matter what, at their own risk, at an incredible cost, no matter the cost.

They know firsthand the true cost of not having access.

People who use drugs and their loved ones reverse the majority of community overdoses. They do so at the risk of their own freedom, they do so at their own expense, they use their own resurrected lives in loving service.

They give their own lives that others might live.

This is the model of ministry I aspire to.

Harm reduction ministers are the most powerful ministers I know. Ministers who have been ordained by their community, by their God, may in some contexts never be authorized, given authority, or even recognized for the ministries they lead.

They use their own lives, their own resurrections to give life to others.

They have taught me how I might use mine to love and give life.

I imagine they have done the same for many of us or they will. They embody the utmost authority, the utmost power, and that is love.

Harm Reduction is this love. [We hope you will join us in spreading this Gospel of Harm Reduction with us.](#)

Ask us how you might expand and implement Faithful Advocacy and Intersectional and Transformational Healing in Harm Reduction in your

congregations and communities @ poellote@ucc.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Erica M. Poellot is the Minister of Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Ministries for the United Church of Christ, Executive Director of Faith In Harm Reduction, and Senior Ministry Innovator at Judson Memorial Church in NYC.

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