

Christians shouldn't lower themselves to bullying

I remember the bullies. They were the kids who stopped me on the playground and insisted that I give them 50 cents or candy or sometimes they would just push me around for the fun of it.



JEFFREY SMITH

Guest
column

many other areas of life. While we still have the playground-type bullies who use physical force to hurt other people, typically adult bullying is more sophisticated. There are times when it is socially acceptable (or at least socially ignored).

I am referring to the bullying that happens when a boss picks on a subordinate and makes life miserable because . . . well, because they want company in their own misery, I guess. I am also referring to those who use their positions of power to keep other people down and limit any potential upward mobility of people they consider to be "beneath them." There are those who use skin color or level of income or religious differences as excuses to bully other people.

In faith communities, we find many instances where people resort to bullying in order to force their own theological or moral convictions on others. I have seen with interest the various tactics used by those who are attempting to close down Planned Parenthood in our own community. Let me say here that I am not a proponent of abortion as a method of birth control. I certainly believe we ought to be looking for ways to make abortion obsolete as a tool for dealing with unplanned pregnancy.

That does not, however, warrant any amount of harassment directed toward organizations that support Planned Parenthood or any similar organization. Instead of working toward solutions to deal with the issue

of abortion, we have seen individuals and groups resort to harassment and bullying in an effort to erode the foundation of an organization whose many other programs are worthy of community support. As a Christian, I am aware that Jesus never called us to bully people into conforming to our way of thinking; rather, Jesus gave us the example of loving our enemies and offering alternatives that make things like abortion a thing of the past.

When Jesus was in the garden, Judas showed up with the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus. As they moved toward Jesus, one of the disciples took his sword and struck a guard on the ear (probably with the intention of cutting his throat). Though the Gospels tell the story differently, the words of Jesus ring throughout the story

consistently: "Those who live by the sword, die by the sword." The ministry to which we are called is not a ministry of violence and coercion. It is a ministry of love and reconciliation. Isn't that what builds community? Even for those who do not adhere to the Christian faith, there is the widespread recognition that love builds up. And that leads me to the paradoxical conclusion that I have to love those who are not like me.

I have to love those who make different moral choices than I make. I have to love those who think differently, look differently and act differently than I do. And yes, I have to love even the bullies. In my understanding of faith, that is the only way.

Jeffrey A. Smith is the senior pastor of Woodway First United Methodist Church.