

# EARLHAM

Office of the President

November 8, 2006

To the Parents of Earlham Students:

At Earlham, we are all grieving the recent tragic death of our student Austin Harris, a sophomore from Celina, Ohio, who took his own life on October 25, 2006.

Austin's was a life of promise that ended much too soon. His suicide floods us all with powerful emotions — as would any tragic death. And such a tragedy occasions many difficult questions, especially questions about what one or another of us could have done differently to have prevented this from happening.

I do want you to know that several Earlham students (Austin's friends and hall mates) acted with love and concern to get him appropriate and much needed medical attention. Members of the Earlham administrative and teaching faculty went to extraordinary lengths to save his life. I believe we did all that we could possibly do to prevent this tragedy.

Some of our students have never experienced the death of someone they knew well. Our staff members are trying to help them as best we can, understanding that grief is a process that must be lived in its own time and in its own way for each of us. Immediately following Austin's death, Earlham staff members from Counseling, Residence Life, and Campus Ministries were available around the clock to assist students. Campus Ministries staff arranged quiet spaces on campus where students could gather and convened a moment of silence in the Meetinghouse. We will be holding a memorial service on Sunday, November 12, at 7 p.m.

We recognize that suicide is the second most common cause of death among college students. While the last suicide at Earlham occurred a quarter century ago, each year our Residence Life and Counseling staffs work with several students who have voiced suicidal intentions. The procedures we follow conform with best practices at American colleges and universities, and I believe Earlham adds to these procedures unusual care and personal attention to each and every student. Of course, our main goal is the safety of the student. We get the student appropriate medical care. We notify parents and try to get the student home on a medical leave, away from the stresses of academic life, so that medical follow-up can occur.

While we can never prevent all deaths by suicide, we can keep our eyes and ears open for the possible warning signs. If you notice a dramatic change in your son's or daughter's behavior or believe that your student could benefit from talking with someone, please encourage him or her to take advantage of the support systems available on campus. Students should contact Director of Counseling Services Holly Woodruff at <http://earlham.edu/~sas/health/> to schedule an appointment. They also could seek out a member of the Residence Hall staff or speak with their academic advisor. Please know that Earlham's teaching and administrative faculty are here to support your student in any way that we can.

Please do not hesitate to contact either of us if you have further questions.

Sincerely yours,



Doug Bennett  
President



Deb McNish  
Dean of Student Development