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IN THE MAIL: Swastikas anger and alarm us all

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GRAND FORKS — This week, a fifth swastika was found on the campus of UND, the state's premier research and educational institution. University officials have rightly expressed their disgust and dismay at the string of events involving the Nazi symbol this spring.

At the UND Center for Human Rights and Genocide Studies, we loudly echo the sentiments of the university leadership that these acts of hatred, which seek to promote and condone intolerance, have no place in our community.

The mission of the center is to increase understanding of the history and issues related to genocide and other violations of human rights with the intent of preventing such atrocities in the future and advancing human rights on all levels. An example of our pursuit of this mission is our ongoing "Nazi Occupation of Norway" project, which is digitizing portions of the Nuremberg Trial transcripts related to Nazi atrocities committed against Norwegians during World War II.

This project seeks to disseminate vital information about these crimes to remind us of the inhumanity of Nazi doctrine and practice, as symbolized by the swastika.

It deeply saddens and alarms us, therefore, to confront that very same symbol on our campus. We must recognize that the perpetrators of these crimes intend to invoke the hatred and violence for which the swastika stands. We cannot help but see the use of this hate emblem as an attack on human dignity and on the freedom by which we realize that dignity.

These attacks implicate not only UND, but also our city, state and nation. They are an affront to people from all walks of life who cherish decency, freedom, and democracy.

We are sadly mistaken if we view this aggression as some form of twisted, impulsive prank or even as a poorly chosen vehicle through which anger is channeled. To do so justifies silence and neglect, and we cannot afford such apathetic responses.

During the dark days of World War II, the silence and neglect of both local and global communities permitted the systematic mass murder of millions of innocent civilians across Europe, from all ethnic, national, racial and religious backgrounds. Let us never be lulled into thinking that the swastika, the emblem of that bloody reign of horror, is ever used innocently.

Like any act of terror, defacing property with the Nazi symbol is meant to break bonds of trust among community members. And by dividing the community, oppressive relations are facilitated. We urge all readers to recognize these acts for what they are, an affront to our core values. Let us stand in solidarity against them.

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