



A Statement on the Events in Charlottesville, VA and Addressing Ideologies of Hate

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.

-- Esther 4:14 (NRSV)

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches mourns the violence, bloodshed, and death that occurred during the “Unite the Right” rally on August 12, 2017 in Charlottesville, VA. We condemn the beliefs that led to this rally and the resulting act of domestic terrorism—white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and other racist ideologies and hatred based on differences—and we call for an end to the intimidation and violence directed at people of color, religious minorities, and those who stand in solidarity with them.

We pray for the healing of individuals, families, and the Charlottesville community as it aches with pain following this horrendous act of violence. We pray for peace for the family of Heather Heyer, and for the swift and complete recovery of those who were injured physically. We pray also for transformation of the hearts and minds of those who would do violence to their fellow human beings simply because they are different.

As Christians, we profess the belief that all human beings are created in the image of God. Many of the groups that participated in the rally in Charlottesville—including the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and others—see their fellow human beings of different races and creeds as inferior or less than human, and seek to make the United States a white-only nation. These beliefs, espoused by persons who also claim the mantle of Christianity, are antithetical to scripture and our understanding of a loving God that pronounced all of creation good. They fly in the face of our understanding of Jesus, who welcomed all persons regardless of their place in society. We believe that God calls us to love our neighbor—all neighbors—love our enemies, and treat others as we wish to be treated, with dignity and respect.

While the hateful actions by those participating in the “Unite the Right” rally resulted in death, injury, anxiety, fear, and grief for the families and friends of the victims, they seek also to destroy the very soul of our society by dividing and marginalizing persons based on the faulty human constructs of racism and other forms of hatred based on differences.

This is not a time for Christians to stand idly by. Silence is complicity. We call on our congregations to address racism and other prejudices that marginalize and create fear among our neighbors who belong to racial minorities, other faith traditions, and other populations that are targeted for being different. We call on all Christians to challenge the ideologies that create marginalization and fear. We call on elected officials at every level of government to publicly condemn white supremacy, racism, xenophobia and related ideologies, and to stand against the organizations that seek to advance these ideologies and attempt to give them mainstream credibility. We also call on them to embrace the principles upon which our country was founded, recognizing the dignity and value of every human soul. These values have led to some of our nation’s finer moments, such as ending slavery, women’s suffrage, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These actions reflect our understanding that America is a place where every human being is honored for who they are—children of a loving God, created in God’s image.

As a statement from Faith in Public Life declares:

We are reminded of God’s call in the Hebrew Scriptures: “Choose this day whom you will serve.” One cannot serve God and embrace hate and inequality. One cannot be American and be silent when others would tear our values asunder.

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