



**Boca Raton Clergy
Interfaith Association**

**Statement on events in Charlottesville, Virginia
August 17, 2017**

As religious leaders of Boca Raton representing churches, synagogues and mosques, we come together with respect for each other: for the values we share and for the differences we honor. We recognize that this is a challenging time in the life of our nation.

In Charlottesville we witnessed the violence and hatred expressed and perpetrated by Neo-Nazis, klansmen, white supremacists and white nationalists. And we join together to condemn their ideologies and the dangers these groups represent to an open, respectful, democratic, free and pluralistic society. We also mourn the deaths of Heather Heyer, State Trooper H. Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke Bates. We extend our prayers and condolences to their loved ones.

In the last century, we witnessed the extraordinary evil and destruction that white-supremacy and Nazi ideology can wreak. Nearly half a million Americans gave their lives in World War II to counter totalitarian fascism, and thousands more have given their lives to fight against those who do not hold dear the rights and freedoms that form our society's bedrock.

The United States of America is founded on the principle that all are created equal, endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Those rights are for all Americans with no exceptions or exclusions. We are saddened by the lack of clear moral leadership in our nation. As Elie Wiesel wrote, "And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever, wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must - at that moment - become the center of the universe."

We hold as an article of faith that every human life is created in the divine image, and is of infinite and equal value. Therefore, we condemn the rise of racist and bigoted ideology. We encourage government leaders and law enforcement to pursue justice, to stand against hate crimes and to protect the rights of every individual. We encourage our parents and teachers to lead by crying out against expressions of racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, misogyny and homophobia. We must stand with the vulnerable against those who seek to persecute and intimidate.

As leaders of different faiths working respectfully for the common good of our community and all people, we ask everyone to join us in condemning hatred and violence. Please also join us for an interfaith candlelight vigil on Monday, August 21 at 8 pm at Sanborn Square Park in downtown Boca Raton. We, as citizens of this city, this state and this nation know that we can model behaviors of respect and tolerance for all. We are called to stand together as people of faith and as patriotic Americans.

Rabbi David Steinhardt, Bnai Torah Congregation
Rev. Andrew Sherman, St. Gregory's Episcopal Church
Fathi Khalfi, Imam, Islamic Center of Boca Raton
Bassem Alhalabi, President, Islamic Center of Boca Raton
Rev. Tom Tift, First United Methodist Church
Rev. Benjamin Thomas, St. Gregory's Episcopal Church
Rabbi Craig H. Ezring, Temple Beth Israel
Rev. Bill Mitchell, Boca Raton Community Church
Rabbi Jessica Spitalnic Brockman, Temple Beth El
Rabbi Greg Weisman, Temple Beth El
Rev. Dr. Richard B. Barbour, Advent Lutheran Church
Rabbi David Baum, Congregation Shaarei Kodesh
Rabbi Robert Silvers, Congregation B'nai Israel
Rabbi Rony Keller, Congregation B'nai Israel
Rabbi Allison Cohen, Congregation B'nai Israel
Rabbi Dan Levin, Temple Beth El
Rev. Rachel DeLaune, First United Methodist Church
Rev. Marcus Zillman, II, First United Methodist Church
Rev. Michael McGraw, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church