

October 29, 2018

My dear friends and colleagues,

The news over the past weeks has revealed an undercurrent of hate within our culture and our country. Between the assumption that immigrants walking nearly 2,000 miles seeking asylum being seen as a threat to our security, the pipe bombs mailed to those who oppose our current political administration, the massacre of 11 Jewish citizens during services at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and the shooting of unarmed African American men in a grocery store, it is hard to find cause for hope in our nation.

The rhetoric of hate and divisiveness calls for a response from the faith community. While we should not advocate for candidates or political parties, we must advocate for justice, humanitarian treatment of our neighbors, and for safety in our places of worship. We are a diverse nation and until recently that diversity has been seen as a strength. We, in the church, must stand as moral authorities proclaiming peace and hope, compassion and justice.

Wherever and whenever you have the opportunity to provide wisdom and comfort, inspiration and compassion, I urge you to do so. To be silent is to let evil prevail and we, as people of faith, cannot do that, any more than Jesus could do it in his time and culture. Find a way to bring peace and hope to your faith communities, your communities, our state and our nations.

Today I am asking that members of your congregation be invited to **write prayer notes or notes of compassion** to our brothers and sisters at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Mail them from your local church to them at 5898 Wilkins Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15217.

Participate in a vigil or a peaceful worship process in any one of your communities and if there isn't one, please plan one. Rabbi Seth Phillips, who participates in our Lehigh Conference of Churches, sent this message to us. "B'ezrat HaShem, with God's help, the Jewish community will gather at the Jewish Community Center of the Lehigh Valley at 702 N 22nd St, Allentown, PA 18104 on Wednesday night at 7pm. Please feel free to join us as our beloved brothers and sisters and to spread the word to your communities." If you are able, this would be a wonderful way to demonstrate solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters in the Lehigh Valley and across the state and nation.

By all means pray but above all do not fail to speak out or to act. As Martin Niemöller (German Theologian and Lutheran Pastor) wrote:

“First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me
and there was no one left to speak out for me.”

We are called to be people of prayer, but we are also called to remember that “The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18).” May we each and all do our part to make our communities, state and nation places of hope and peace.

In Christ’s love,

Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bates, Conference Minister