



Letter from Dan Rosensweig
President/CEO Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville

August 17, 2017

Dear Friends and Colleagues throughout the Habitat network,

We are so grateful for the many words of support and solidarity that you've sent this week as we mourn the death of three heroes and the passing of more than just a little bit of our innocence.

Thank you. You have no idea how much your expressions of love have lifted us up during a really dark hour.

You know, we used to think of the early days of Koinonia as a relic of the ever-more-distant past, a symbol of what we've overcome. Seventy-five years ago, in the midst of a toxic soup of racial hatred, anti-miscegenation laws and white supremacy, the cooperative farm was born out of the desire to open up a community to people of all races, from all backgrounds.

Clarence Jordan wasn't looking to start a movement... instead he and Florence created Koinonia Farm as a demonstration plot, a place for a concrete expression of the Kingdom of a God—not for the few and privileged, but for all of His children regardless of where they came from or what they looked like.

For the crime of living and working together, of going about their business peacefully and with love, the neighbors and coworkers of Koinonia found themselves subject to shootings, boycotts, KKK rallies, and other forms of violence and intimidation from other local white supremacy groups.

Until last week, we had the luxury of thinking about Koinonia as a benchmark of a now overcome past. After all, this beacon of light and hope ultimately spawned Habitat for Humanity International, a global housing movement that has resulted in tens of millions of people across this nation and worldwide gaining access to safe, decent, affordable housing. Clearly, laws have changed and the arc of history has bent predominantly toward tolerance.

Nonetheless, the vile and tragic events of this past week right here in our beloved little town remind us that the hatred spewing forth from Sumter County so long ago still flickers, albeit feebly—but the fact that it still flickers at all means that it's too bright, its heat too intense.

And that's why friends, here in Charlottesville, we are planning to respond by planting our shovels in the ground and begin the process of creating our own Koinonia.

Today, we officially break ground on a new mixed-income community of 14 homes and a center of worship and fellowship for the multicultural Prospect Neighborhood, less than one mile from the scene of this weekend's violence. Bringing the community together to build Harmony Ridge will be our sweat equity contribution toward repairing the fractured family of Abraham. Like Koinonia, Harmony Ridge will be a physical manifestation of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, a source of Tikkun Olam—the ancient Jewish calling to repair whatever we find broken, a place that restores the divine light of Muhammed for many weary travelers of this war-torn world.

We don't have answers as to why the kinds of evil and hatred experienced in Charlottesville this week exist in the world, but we do know these three things:

- People who are swinging a hammer are not swinging a stick or a flag pole.
- When we are given the opportunity to work side by side with someone from a different background we inevitably replace fear with a shared sense of purpose and humanity.
- When we commit to listening without judgment, we all inspire people to be guided by their better angels.

Thanks again for your support. Now, let's honor Heather Heyer, Jay Cullen and Berke Bates by moving forward together—many diverse hands in solidarity—one shovel of dirt, one board, one sheet of drywall at a time.

With Gratitude and Love,

Dan Rosensweig
President/CEO
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville