An Interfaith Statement Against Bigotry and Division

As interfaith leaders in the Lehigh Valley, we are aware of a climate of tension and anxiety in our community and nation. We lift our voices together, as people of faith, to remind our brothers and sisters that we are all Americans united not only by the concord of our national polity but also by the call to build the “Beloved Community.”

As faith leaders we commit to overcoming hatred and discrimination in our communities, schools, and places of worship. We are deeply troubled by actions and language that vilify persons based upon their race, nationality, faith, gender, or sexual orientation; we reject the targeting of particular groups in our society, and the promotion of hatred and fear. We unapologetically witness against bigotry and bullying that targets individuals because of their identity or faith expression. We acknowledge that there is a global state of division and discord, fueled by intolerance and xenophobia. As people of faith we challenge this dynamic and express our witness against it.

Our faith traditions—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu—call us to love our neighbor, reconcile with our enemies, and strive for the inclusion of all in our communities, especially the most vulnerable. We share with all Americans the responsibility for creating a society where our differences are respected, where dialogue on critical community concerns is the norm, and where collective action for the common good transcends our narrow agendas. We yearn for a time when all people can live and work in mutual respect, while advancing the well-being of our communities and nation.

Our role as leaders is to proclaim by what we say and what we do that God is a God of love, and that we are people of love—for all of God’s children. To further our witness, we therefore encourage people throughout the Lehigh Valley to join with us and commit specifically:

- To act respectfully toward others, including those representing other faiths and ideological perspectives.
- To refrain from personal attacks on individuals or groups while maintaining the right to disagree vigorously.
- To set an example for our youth in finding ways to settle disputes peacefully and in refraining from acts of bigotry and bullying.

We also call upon members of our faith communities to participate responsibly, respectfully, and faithfully in community building. We urge listening to diverse voices, dialoging with people across faith and racial boundaries, and creating opportunities to break down walls of division, while creating bridges of hope within our community.

Signed December 2016

Dr. Jack Felch, Executive Director, Lehigh Conference of Churches
Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens, Ecumenical Director, Lehigh Conference of Churches
Chaplain George Altounian, Center Valley
Rev. Dr. Becky J. Beckwith, Sr. Pastor, St. John’s UCC, Fullerton
Timothy Bingham, the Interfaith Action Committee, the Lehigh Conference of Churches, Allentown
Rev. Sherry Blackman, Pastor, Presbyterian Church of the Mountain, Delaware Water Gap
Rev. Dr. Scott Brooks-Cope, Director, Pastoral Care Services, Phoebe Ministries, Allentown
Rev. Suzanne Brooks-Cope, Pastor, St. Matthew’s United Church of Christ, Kunkletown
Rev. Dr. Carol S. Brown, Vice Moderator, Lehigh Presbytery, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Rizwan Butt, President, Easton Phillipsburg Muslim Association, Easton
Rev. Tom Cormier, Co-chair, the Interfaith Action Committee, the Lehigh Conference of Churches
Dr. Irving Cotto, Superintendent, Northeast District, Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference, the
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Mike Drake, Pastor for Mission, First Presbyterian Church PC (USA), Allentown
Rev. David Duquette, Pennside Presbyterian Church, Pennside
Rev. Stephen T. Emick, Pastor, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship, First Presbyterian Church,
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Suleyman Eris, President, Respect Graduate School, Bethlehem
Rev. Dr. William Falla, Dept. of Philosophy/Religion, Moravian College
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Rev. Don Garrett, Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem
The Rt. Rev. J. Christian Giesler, Pastor, Emmaus Moravian Church, Emmaus
Rev. Elizabeth Goudy, Pastor, Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem
Rev. Dr. Jack Haberer, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Allentown
The Rev. Canon Laura Thomas Howell, Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church, Bethlehem
Rev. Dianne Kareha, Retired, Presbyterian Church (USA), Allentown
Mohammed Khaku, Islamic Community Activist, Upper Macungie Township
Elder Paul A. Lucia, Facilitator, Upper Tier Congregations of Lehigh Presbytery
Rev. Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister, Penn Northeast Conference, United Church of Christ,
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Ed Miller, Board Member, the Lehigh Conference of Churches, Allentown
Rev. Karen Moeschberger, St. John United Church of Christ, Allentown
Rev. Kari A. Olson, Pastor, Hope of Christ Presbyterian Church, Summit Hill
Rev. Judi Painter, Community Ministry, Allentown
Shree Patel, Youth Director, Shree Swaminarayan Spiritual & Cultural Center - Anoopam Mission,
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Peter Petit, Director, the Institute for Jewish Christian Understanding, Muhlenberg College
Seth Phillips, Rabbi, Keneseth Israel, Allentown
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Don Robertson, First Presbyterian Church Bethlehem, PC (USA), Steering Committee, Allentown
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James K. Robinson, Retired Elder of Faith Presbyterian Church, Emmaus
Rev. Steve Shussett, Pastor, St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Allentown
Kamran Siddiqui, President, the Muslim Association of the Lehigh Valley, Allentown
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Rev. R.C. Smith, Pastor, College Hill Presbyterian Church, Easton
The Rev. Twila Smith, Grace Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church of the Mediator and Refugee Community Center, Allentown
Rev. Dr. Lloyd Steffen, University Chaplain and Director, Dialogue Center, Lehigh University
Rabbi Danielle Stillman, Director of Jewish Student Life and Associate Chaplain, Lehigh University
Cantor Ellen Sussman, Temple Shirat Shalom, Allentown
Aqeel Syed, Outreach Director, the Muslim Association of Lehigh Valley
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Bishop Samuel Zeiser, Bishop, Northeast Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America