



The United Methodist Church
The Philadelphia Area Episcopal Office

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Statement by Bishop Peggy Johnson on the tragic weekend events in Charlottesville, Virginia

August 13, 2017

Our terrorism: fears within, fightings without

Our world has been rocked with many forms of terrorism in recent years. Long before the events of September 11, 2001, and ever since, we have seen an unprecedented number of bombings, mass shootings and other violence.

The world once again witnessed acts of extreme violence and rage in Charlottesville, Virginia, over the weekend. Once again, as all too often, the heinous cause is racism--in fact, racism born of a demented, demonic belief in white supremacy.

It is beyond strange and deeply disturbing when some misguided malcontents feel racially superior but also fearful; when they pose as strong and dominant to hide the inferiority and weakness of their world views that are doomed to extinction. Meanwhile, memorials to paragons of the slave-holding Confederacy disappear, as God's beloved community comes more clearly into view.

Much of the cause for acts of terror in our world--especially this weekend's racial violence in Charlottesville--is fear-induced rage: fear of the "other," fear of someone taking away something we value, or fear of false, perceived threats. Often, it's fear of losing something that is already lost--indeed, something born of human hate and the enemy's lies that was lost from the beginning.

Such fear and rage within gives birth to terrorism without. And this outgrowth of animus comes in overt acts of violence but also in subversive acts or verbal and attitudinal assaults.

I see it all the time, even in the church when people decide for whatever reason that certain people or certain beliefs are not to their way of thinking. The result is a call for righteous indignation, insults, rejection, division and

strife.

The Lord shakes his head at our church, the Body of Christ, whose many different parts are God's divine plan for accomplishing the mission of the church most effectively. We are called to work together in love and humility; but instead, some parts of the body are calling out other parts of the body because of fear. And the verbal violence and schism are not far behind.

As I John 4:18 reminds us, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." Our mission needs to be to teach and model for the world the perfect love of Christ that casts out fear: fear of the "other," fear of want, the fear, pride and ignorance of having to have our own way at any price.

We must celebrate and find ways to enhance our marvelous diversity. This is slow and heart-searching, heart-changing work. The "terrorism within" us is deep-seated and can only be cleansed by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

During the aftermath of this most recent scene of horror and deadly violence in Charlottesville, I call the church to prayer and witness. I call us to inscribe on our hearts and in our thoughts and actions the words of the Rev. Carolyn Gillette's song: "God, with Joy We Look Around Us"

*God, with joy we look around us at your world's diversity.
Folk of every kind surround us and you call your church to see.
All are made in your own image, all are people whom you love.*

*In the times we've hurt each other, Lord, we've hurt the ones you bless.
Hating sister, cursing brother, we've denied what you express.
All are made in your own image, all are people whom you love.*

*God, you sent a Savior to us, breaking walls that would divide.
By your Spirit now work through us as we witness side by side.
All are made in your own image, all are people whom you love.*

(Used by permission, "Songs of Grace: New Hymns for God and Neighbor," from Upper Room Books)

Bishop Peggy A. Johnson

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