

A Faithful Response to Hate Crimes and White Nationalism

A Theological Statement and Call to Action by Gamaliel Religious Leaders

God creates every human life in beauty, dignity and respect. The idea of the superiority of any race over others is an anathema to the principles of all major religions. Rather, the world's major religions affirm the value of each person, and the value of every culture, language, and racial group, and our God-given worth. Hate is antithetical to all major faiths.

While not every faith tradition is represented below, we look to these Sacred Texts and Teachings reflecting our shared values:

A teaching from Buddhism:

- *"Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law." The Dhammapada (Sayings of the Buddha)*

From Jewish Scripture: A just society is one where everyone has opportunity.

- *"See that justice is done. Defend widows and orphans and help those in need." Isaiah 1:17*
"You shall not follow a majority in wrong-doing, ...you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice" Exodus 23:3

Teachings of Sikhism:

- *"Humanity is the cord that ties us together . . . it is 'above faith' and we must work for justice for the benefit and prosperity of all. Acting always out of love and compassion is the door to God."*

Teachings from Islam:

- *"Did (the Lord) not find you an orphan and give you refuge? And He found you lost and guided you, and He found you poor and made you self-sufficient. So as for the orphan, do not oppress (him), and as for the beggar, do not repel him. And remember the favors of your Lord." The Holy Quran 93:6-11*
- *"To love God, we must love humanity. To love humanity, we have to address the conditions in which we live. The dignity of human beings matters. Structures and institutions matter." —Omid Safi, Director, Duke University Islamic Studies Center*

Teachings from Christianity:

- *Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35*
- *The Apostle Peter said, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him... He is Lord of all. " Acts 10:34-36*

In 2018, alleged white supremacists in the United States were responsible for all race-based domestic terrorist incidents according to official government statistics. 75% of all terrorist attacks on our nation in recent years have been initiated by white nationalists. Who are white nationalists? They are fringe groups that believe the white race is fundamentally superior. These beliefs are abhorrent and antithetical to our democracy.

White supremacists have been at the core of our own nation since its founding. We can never forget that it has been over 400 years since the arrival of Africans who were enslaved to our shores. Sadly, many who believe in white superiority identify as Christians. And Western Christianity as practiced in our country has been a significant source of racism and white nationalism. This is evident in the one-sided way our nation's history has been told and the system of white privilege which our nation has supported. Racism is sewn into the very fabric of our society and there is no escaping its raw and hurtful impact on each and every person, those unaware, and those who are targets of it.

We are living in an era that most of us did not think possible just a few years ago. Our politics have returned to race-baiting, fear-mongering, and an attempt to turn our nation's diversity against itself. We are being urged to mistrust and fear because of our cultural, ethnic and racial differences.

Today, white nationalists are experiencing a renaissance of power and acceptance. Their philosophy of racial superiority stands in sharp contrast to a belief in a God who created human diversity and in a society that has been built, since its origins, on an ethnic and racial diversity now considered our nation's strength, not its scourge.

This is not a partisan issue. It is not an issue of one President, one leader or one political party. It is far more profound than to be assigned so narrowly. We call upon persons of faith to ask, "Can we live in a society which equally values all of its citizens, no matter their race, religion, sexual orientation or gender? Does a belief in racial superiority have any legitimate place in our nation? Can our society survive when fear of one another's differences is a basic organizing principle?"

We cannot as persons of faith "go along" or tolerate white superiority and white nationalism based on a doctrine of fear, violence and hatred. Can we invite those who have been enticed into these groups, perhaps as silent supporters, to re-think their position and value anew our nation's dream of the equality of all human beings?

In summary, intolerance, racial and religious hatred cannot be tolerated in our country. We cannot look the other way. We cannot pretend that this crisis will go away or dissipate with time. Even if intolerance is defeated at the ballot box, these years of growing racial superiority will not quickly or easily be defeated.

We, as leaders of Gamaliel, must be vigilant. We must unite our interfaith voices. We must alert our local and national leaders as to the high cost of ignoring or tolerating this threat to our democracy. We must work to pass local laws that place respectful boundaries around speech and action that divide our nation.

Clergy and religious leaders must take the lead. We have a particular responsibility and burden to speak the truth. Hate has no place in our hearts and no place in our society. Superiority of any race is unacceptable and would eventually destroy the moral fabric of our society. Violence based on white nationalism cannot be accepted under any circumstances. Distrust of our neighbor because of our human differences has no place in a free society. Demonizing and devaluing People of Color, Immigrants, Women, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, GLBTQ members of our society and People with Disabilities must end.

Voices are needed. Actions are necessary. We call upon all religious leaders and upon all congregations within the Gamaliel network and beyond to unite to overcome this insidious movement with the solid conviction of respect, love, tolerance, and empowerment of all persons and groups within our society.

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Call to Action!

It is our intent that this document motivate us to take actions of faith. Therefore, we urge all Gamaliel chapters and congregations and leaders to:

- Urge each Gamaliel Affiliate to build deeper relationships with the faith minorities in its region.
- Urge Gamaliel Affiliates to diversify membership across lines of faith.
- Work to pass local laws (the Iowa City model¹) that place respectful boundaries around speech and action that divide our communities and our nation.
- Urge each Gamaliel Affiliate around the nation to organize in May and June, 2020 with interfaith and congregational action toward overcoming hatred and white nationalism.
- Urge all persons related to Gamaliel to approach upcoming our elections with heightened awareness of candidates who can speak the truth about racism and white nationalism rampant in our society and who display leadership skills to guide us away from hate and bias. Engage in Candidate Forums to pin candidates as to their stances toward white nationalism. Seek to commit candidates to give a full-throated denouncement of white nationalism.
- Where possible, urge Gamaliel Affiliates to be aware of white nationalist groups active in their own region and seek dialogue with silent supporters whose minds and hearts might be changed.
- Urge each Gamaliel Affiliate to monitor white supremacist groups in their region. Find connections to regional groups who closely monitor white supremacists.
- Urge each Gamaliel Affiliate to include a statement addressing systemic racism in its website and public documents, as well as to include this “Faithful Response to Hate Crimes and White Nationalism” in websites and public documents.
- Urge all Gamaliel Affiliates to discover their own ways to address and implement this document and to share regional ideas with Cynthia Jarrold at cjarrold@gamaliel.org

¹ In June 2019 in response to the efforts of a self-proclaimed racist organization to intimidate communities of color in Iowa City through the distribution of racist and anti-Semitic messages, Gamaliel’s local affiliate, Johnson County Interfaith Coalition (JCIC), successfully secured the passage of a city ordinance that creates a hate crime for harassment or trespass with intent to harass done because of a person’s protected characteristic, and it enhances the penalty for perpetrating a hate crime. The ordinance is unique, however, in that it intentionally does not “trample” on the First Amendment freedom of expression. For more information, go to: <https://gamaliel.org/gamaliels-iowa-affiliate-jcic-organizes-to-secure-hate-crimes-ordinance-and-wins/>