

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | March 6, 2017

The texts for Lent 2 lift up the gift of salvation by God's grace through faith. If we think that our good works will influence God's decision about our salvation, we are mistaken. God has claimed us, loved us, and forgiven us day after day. The season of Lent reminds us that every day we fall short of the Kingdom of God; evil, sin, and hate are a present reality in ourselves and in our world. The only one who can drive out the darkness of evil is God. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; Light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; Love can do that." It is God's love alive in us that will drive out hate.

Our nation grew in the early years in-part because people were fleeing religious persecution in Europe; freedom to practice our faith has often been lifted up as a core value of the nation. Defending this value, standing alongside our brothers and sisters of faith, and actively working to counter religious intolerance is what God is calling us to address today. Bringing hate out of the darkness into the light of God's love will change our world.

Over the past many weeks, incidents of religious intolerance have been on the rise. This is a stark reminder about sin in our world. Many Jewish community centers and synagogues have received bomb threats, cemeteries have been vandalized, mosques have been defamed. In short, our brothers and sisters are experiencing the consequences of hate because of their faith. Gov. Christie and other elected officials gathered last Friday to stand up against this violence. [Read about that call for safety here.](#)

Senator Booker stated, "In the cover of night, individuals want to spray-paint hatred. We must cast that away with the strength of our light and brilliance." "Some coward in the darkness on a telephone who wants to launch threats at us. We must show our united courage that we will match those ... tones with our chorus of conviction and love."

The Southern Poverty Law Center has created [a resource guide](#) that can help us plan a response to this evil in our world.

ADVOCACY ASK

- Call the synagogue or mosque in your area. Introduce yourself, express your support, and discuss how your parish can stand alongside your neighbor. Build relationships with communities of faith where you live.
- Have conversations with the leadership of your congregation, discuss the possibility of putting a yard sign on the church's property indicating your congregation's commitment to work against religious intolerance. Make a public witness!
- Consider asking your town/city council to pass a resolution that condemns hate crimes in your community. Here is a sample statement:

A RESOLUTION reaffirming (insert municipality name here) values of inclusion, respect, and justice, and the City's commitment toward actions to reinforce these values; and calling on all elected officials to condemn attacks and hate speech that perpetuate religious persecution, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia.

RESOURCES TO SHARE

If you are the victim of a hate crime, please take the following steps:

1. Call the local police.
2. Call the FBI at 973-793-3000.
3. Call OHSP's Counter Terrorism Watch at 609-963-6817 or John Paige at 973-277-0651.

If you receive overseas email from unknown sources please use caution. Wear gloves when opening up physical mail.

Again, please call all authorities above about any letter, email, or phone call of concern which may be a bias incident or hate crime.

UPCOMING EVENTS

“Everyone is Welcome Here: Addressing Immigration Issues Facing Our Communities”
Join the Community Development Network of New Jersey and the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice on Friday, March 17 at 11 am for a free webinar about how best we can meet the needs of new American residents, refugees, and others in uncertain and challenging times. [Register here.](#)

“Faith, Hope & Love: Building Safer & More Welcoming Congregations for LGBTQ Youth”
This daylong event is for senior high youth, pastors, youth workers, parents, and other congregational leaders will focus on how to be welcoming for LGBTQ youth. The event will go from 9:30 am - 3:00 pm on Saturday, March 18 at Abiding Presence Lutheran Church in Ewing, NJ and you can [register here.](#)