

For immediate release
Friday, March 15, 2019

#Enough - We must speak and act against gun violence

A statement from the Anti-Gun Violence Commission of
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

Our Commission writes with a heavy heart about another mass shooting, this time in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, A shooting that killed at least 49 people in a horrific and methodical slaughter, part of which was broadcast live on the internet after the publication of a white supremacist manifesto online.

This terrorist attack targeted helpless people who were gathered to pray and be in sacred community. The terrorist a self-described fascist who killed people at prayer based solely on their religious identity. We mourn the deaths of our Muslim siblings and we mourn the continuation of gun violence that stands against God's dream for our world.

We believe God calls us to speak and act decisively against gun violence. And so we offer words of prayer, from both our Christian tradition and the sacred words of Islam.

And we call for action, from ourselves and all of you.

Here are four things you can do today to act in love, against this violence:

1. [Share our Facebook post](#): Raise awareness about hate crimes and stand with those who are wrongly targeted simply because of who they are (such as religious identity).
2. [Read our resource](#) on understanding and addressing hate crimes. (Posted in the comments.)
3. Demand the Ban: Read and share [the latest statement by Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence](#) and join our Commission in calling for another Demand the Ban action.
4. Follow [Interfaith Philadelphia](#) for information on joint prayer services and vigils happening in our region.

For more information about the AGV Commission, contact The Reverend Canon Sarah Hedgis at AGVFaithfulWitness@gmail.com.

We must speak.

Words of prayer from the Christian tradition:

*Gracious God,
surround us and all who mourn this day
with your continuing compassion.
Do not let grief overwhelm your children,
or be unending,
or turn them against you.
May we travel more peacefully because of today,
and come at last, in the fellowship of all your people,
to the haven where we long to be;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

(New Zealand Book of Prayer)

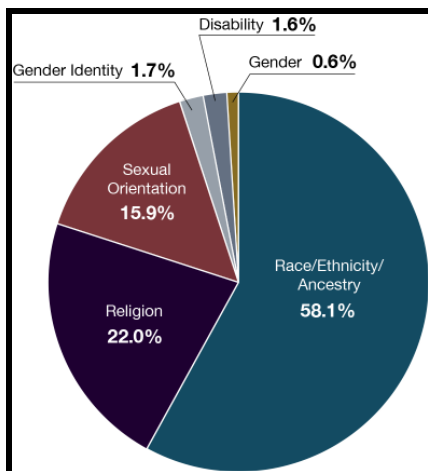
And we lift up these sacred words from the Muslim tradition:

Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un.
("Verily we belong to Allah, and truly to Him shall we return.")

We must act.

Raise awareness about hate crimes

While the most recent tragic mass shooting took place in New Zealand, we know the United States isn't immune from these same kinds of domestic terrorist attacks. We have experienced the tragedy of hate crimes that target a particular group of people based solely on a part of their identity (such as religious tradition).



In the US, the FBI defines a hate crime as a "criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity."

The Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism reported a spike in extremist violence and murder in 2018. The Department of Justice has not released hate crime statistics for 2018, but the 2017 hate crime statistics report states there were 7,106 single-bias incidents involving 8,493 victims and 69 multiple-bias incidents involving 335 victims.

Of the over 6,000 known offenders, over 50% of hate crime offenders were white. Of the over 7,000 incidents of a hate

crime, 22% of hate crimes were based on religious identity, with the rest of the breakdown displayed in the included chart.

Hate crimes are real, and they are on the rise in the United States.

With a rise in hate crimes nationally, including a rise in many US major cities, it is important to know how to talk about hate crimes with our communities, neighbors, and loved ones. We must also do what we can to speak and act against hate crimes.

The Southern Poverty Law Center identified 10 things we should all do to address hate crimes and created Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide, these strategies include --

1. Act
2. Join Forces
3. Support the Victims
4. Speak Up
5. Educate Yourself
6. Create An Alternative
7. Pressure Leaders
8. Stay Engaged
9. Teach Acceptance
10. Dig Deeper

The ADL created a guide to talking about hate crimes with children and young adults, which is crucial as they are exposed to more hate crimes through media coverage and also an increase in communities.

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission has basic information about hate crimes, from the state-based definition to how to report hate crimes.

In November 2017, Philadelphia's District Attorney's Office established a hate crime hotline for people who either witness or are a victim of a hate crime in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia Hate Crime Hotline: 215-686-8931

