

New York State Council of Churches

Statement on Events in Charlottesville, Virginia

In Charlottesville, Virginia our nation witnessed a horrifying display of hate from white supremacists. Tragically, one young woman, Heather Heyer, was killed by a 20-year old white motorist with a supremacist background. Two police officers, Lt. H. Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke M.M. Bates, monitoring the protest from a helicopter, died in a crash. In addition, 20 people were injured including 5 who are reported to be in critical condition in a Charlottesville hospital. We pray for the victims and their families. We also need to offer great comfort to each and every person who experienced terror that day and still does. This display of hate from white nationalists is the ugly by-product of a political climate which has given tacit permission to hate speech which was on the fullest display in Virginia.

American triumphalism, demonization of immigrants along with Jews and Muslims, and use of dog whistles and coded language to blame black and brown people for their struggles, all gave permission to the display of hatred we saw on Saturday. We should be clear that clergy and others standing up non-violently to counter the hate, as earlier implied by the President, are not remotely equivalent to what white supremacist perpetrators did that day. At the same time, we stand convicted for not more rigorously standing up to subtle and not so subtle hateful rhetoric and actions in our communal and political life.

It would be easy to view what has transpired in Charlottesville to be a Southern development from which New Yorkers are immune. We need to be very clear that white nationalism lurks in so many of our New York communities, rural and urban, in every part of the state. Such supremacy is something which needs to be rigorously addressed by our political, business, civic, and religious leaders accompanied by advocacy for public policies that do not discriminate or widen inequality.

At this time, we urge you to speak against racism in your communities and reach out to others who may be organizing protests and vigils. Please show up to these events and offer to speak and co-sponsor. Pastoral presence is important.

Going forward, the Council urges you to speak up more forcefully against the subtle and not so subtle expressions of hate in your locale.

We also ask that you strongly advocate for laws and public policies which arrest racism rather than perpetuate it. Current immigration policy and practice, funding cuts to programs on which the poor and disenfranchised rely, restrictions on voting rights, criminal justice and drug policies which encourage mass incarceration, and policies which degrade the environment and disproportionately affect black and brown communities all have strong racist undertones which need to be confronted.

Finally, its important you build community and relationship with your neighbors including with those who may not see things the way you do. May we resolve to do what Robert Kennedy, Jr. urged us to do many years ago, "to make gentle the life of this world".

Sincerely,

Peter Cook

Executive Director

New York Responses to Events in Charlottesville

What follows is coverage of the event in Albany on Sunday, August 13

[Albany Times Union article](#)

[Daily Gazette article](#)

Below is a news roundup of other rallies which took place on Sunday throughout upstate New York.

[Rallies across upstate New York](#)

[Article about rally in Utica](#)

Events Coming Up

[August 17 in Schenectady](#) Vigil of Love and Solidarity for Charlottesville

[August 24 in Saratoga](#) "All Are Welcome Here" Walk and Vigil sponsored by Saratoga Immigration Coalition.