

New York Yearly Meeting

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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QUAKERS REJECT THE POLITICS OF DIVISION

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*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*
Pastor Martin Niemoller

We grieve for our divided nation. We pray for the wisdom to speak love into that divide.

The day after the election, a supporter of President Trump said in an interview, “For years we have been told we were nothing, that we did not matter. And now, we *are* America.” Sadly, this sentiment articulates the tragic reality that in a nation so divided, only one side or the other gets to *be* America, and those who felt marginalized and disregarded now feel empowered and compelled to marginalize and disregard.

Regrettably, the current administration has not relinquished the rhetoric of division which propelled Mr. Trump into the White House. It has, instead, forcefully acted on it, scapegoating whole segments of our society, exercising a politics of division, fear, and exclusion. In this climate it is hard to live out Jesus’ commandment that we love one another, and yet that is what we must do.

In the short time since assuming power, this administration has created and passed executive orders to deport all undocumented immigrants, acting on election promises but ignoring the fact that many of those who are without documents are deeply woven into the fabric of our society, doing hard manual labor in our dairy parlors, our slaughterhouses, our farm fields, doing domestic work and child care in our homes—work too demanding, and at pay too low, for most US citizens to want to do it. Many of the people at risk of being deported have children who are US citizens. Others came to this country fleeing poverty and/or grave risk of bodily harm. Sending them back will put many of them back in harm's way. Undocumented immigrants are a part of us, and excising them from the body politic will do incalculable harm to our society as a whole.

Our President has signed a 90-day ban on residents from seven Muslim-majority nations, in order to subject them to “extreme vetting,” clearly stating that Christians from those nations will be expedited in this process. Many of those detained had already been vetted for two to five years. Some are legal US citizens, holding dual citizenship or having been born in this country. Many critics have commented that this order is not about safety, but about exclusion. The message seems clear: even if they are US citizens, Muslims are a danger, Christians are not. The night after this executive order was enacted, someone set fire to a mosque in Texas, perhaps responding to that implicit message.

News of a law being prepared which will allow discrimination against LGBT people on the grounds of preserving the religious freedom of those doing the discriminating has been circulating for some weeks. Many fear for the erosion of the civil rights of these members of our community. And if it is legal to discriminate against one group of Americans, it is no large step to then discriminate against others.

The President's refusal to acknowledge the validity of multiple studies documenting the overwhelming absence of voter fraud and his insistence on a substantial investigation into states that rejected his candidacy has been taken by many as laying the groundwork to justify enacting national voter ID laws. These laws would disproportionately affect people of color and the poor, excluding them from the body politic.

Quakers Support a Politics of Understanding

We grieve for our divided nation. We pray for the wisdom to speak love into that divide. We echo the words spoken by early Quaker Margaret Fell to the King of England in 1660: “We are a people, that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity. It is our desire that other's feet may walk in the same.”

For over 350 years, it has been our practice to seek common ground, to hear the truth in the words of the person with whom we disagree, to seek the way forward which both encompasses and undergirds the apparent contradictions of opposing views. We have sought to understand, and to lovingly reason with those with whom we disagree. We have sought to live out our commitment to peace not just in our refusal to bear arms, but also in our refusal to engage in the spiritual violence of meeting others with hatred and fear. We recognize that many issues in public life are complex and that simple truths are tempting, but usually incomplete. We seek the patience necessary to live into the fuller picture which is satisfactory to all, rather than to jump at solutions which offer immediate relief, but which precipitate problem after problem after problem, which must then be resolved.

We Reject the politics of division, pitting one group of Americans against another, enacted in laws and regulations which make these actions legal, but still immoral and unjust. The heart, soul, and essence of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the spiritual mandate to welcome the stranger. This core theme of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and generations of witness by Friends is so fundamental to how our tradition has experienced God's directive to us, that we cannot ignore it and remain faithful. Jesus reminded us that we cannot love God without also loving our neighbor, and that that neighbor might at first appear alien to us, unfamiliar, not "of our tribe." That is the person we are commanded to love. (Lk 10:25-37)

We Envision an American society which welcomes all willing to live peaceably in this great experiment of democracy, in a society that does not pit brother against brother, sister against sister, for political gain. We envision an American society where all receive due process under the law, where all have equal access to justice, where all have equal opportunity to prosper, where all have equal rights regardless of their wealth, their race, their religion, their sexual orientation, or their gender. That vision lives out, makes real, the truth that we know, that there is a spark of the Divine in each and every person, and that we are therefore all beloved children of God, all equal in God's sight.

We Repent the ways we have excluded others from our own fellowship, the ways in which we ourselves have seen and treated people as "other," as "not of our tribe." We have isolated ourselves into enclaves of like-minded people, and consciously and unconsciously excluded those who might be a part of us, whose differences would challenge us, but also enrich us. We are the poorer for it, and this must change. Confident in our own views, in large part we have not sought out those with whom we disagree to be in fruitful conversation. We have sought to first be understood, rather than to understand. We have hardened our hearts, and thereby joined in the politics of division.

We Commit to doing all in our power to stand against the politics of division, wherever we encounter it, whether that be in our civil society, or in our own fellowship, or in our own hearts. We commit to facing where we have held people as "other," including the members of this administration, and commit to seeing them as our brothers and sisters. And we commit to resisting the efforts of those who engage in the practice of division, dressed in whatever legal garb, religion or political party, to dehumanize, disempower, or diminish our fellow Americans and the citizens of this earth we call home. We commit to the demanding spiritual discipline of working to hold open this space of acceptance and deep listening to those different from us, knowing that there is that of God in all, and to grounding our resistance in genuine love for those whose views and actions we are called to oppose.

In Faith,
Lucinda Antrim, Presiding Clerk
Christopher Sammond, General Secretary
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