



Bringing the Values of Compassion into the Light in the Midst of Tragedy

November 20, 2015

The Church Council of Greater Seattle shares our profound sorrow with the families, loved ones and all impacted by the tragic and horrific murders in places such as Nigeria, Lebanon, and Paris. We abhor violence in all its forms and the taking of innocent lives as the world has witnessed so often in recent times is particularly deplorable. We condemn the recent hostage-takings and killings by groups promoting terror and cry out in grief over the loss of lives in those countries and around the world. In this climate where many may live in fear, all people need to come together now more than ever to show their faith in God and humankind by emanating hope and affirming life.

This moment calls us to deeper reflection as a people, society and nation. Rhetoric and actions that label, dehumanize and criminalize refugees fleeing for their lives – including from terror – have no place in a country that prides itself on freedom and strives for equity and full participation as an embracing and inclusive citizenry.

Our faith is rooted in enduring moral values that cross boundaries and borders and which we are called to proclaim consistently and compassionately in service of the common good and the Beloved Community, as espoused by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. We wish to state three values which provide a principled-response to the unfolding events related to human tragedy, the refugee crisis, our own security and war.

1. Refugees who flee persecution and violence deserve welcome and hospitality consistent with their dignity as human beings.

“From the very beginning, the Church has identified itself with refugees. Our ancestors in faith were themselves refugees when they fled the chariots of Pharaoh after escaping from slavery. Jesus himself was a refugee when his family fled to Egypt to escape the sword of Herod. Whenever early Christians were persecuted, they were made refugees. Since the first century, when people have fled violence and other calamities, and sought refuge in other places, often the welcome they received in these foreign societies was symbolized, and indeed motivated, by the open embrace of churches providing sanctuary and material assistance. Christians and Jews alike have heeded God’s command, ‘You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:19, NRSV).’” The practice of compassionate hospitality is central to Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Unitarian teaching and practice as well.

- National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

From this principle and our Christian experience we stand in support of Governor Jay Inslee’s announcement that Washington State will continue to be a state where refugees are welcomed, received and allowed to settle as part of our communities. Indeed, we believe that refugees have contributed enormously to the social fabric of our state.

“Washington will continue to be a state that welcomes those seeking refuge from persecution, regardless of where they come from or the religion they practice. We have been and will commit to a state that embraces compassion and eschews fear mongering, as evidenced so well by Republican Governor Dan Evans’ welcome of Vietnamese refugees here in the 1970s.”

- Governor Jay Inslee

2. *Peace with justice is built on the foundation that our security rests in God.* Our tradition proclaims in the face of fear a message of peace that can transform situations of violence into ones where truth, accountability and reconciliation are possible.

“We Christians and all others of good will cannot let fear rule the day. Fear paralyzes, divides people, fosters distrust and clouds judgments. We also stand shoulder to shoulder with people of faith who are firmly opposed to vengeful reprisals and prejudice. In particular, we are concerned for and committed to standing with our Muslim neighbors who are facing threats and acts of discrimination and hate from those who conflate Islam with terrorism.”

- Reverend Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

“The root of war is fear.”

- Thomas Merton, Trappist Monk

3. *Love is the ground and compass for our actions, a love without exclusions.* Love is the vehicle to a healing and liberating wholeness whereby the “other” becomes part of a “we” together.

“As a Christian I am called to treat my enemy as a brother to meet hostility with love. My behavior is thus determined not by the way others treat me, but by the treatment I receive from Jesus.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, as cited by Jesse S. Wheeler

From these values, we encourage all people of faith and good will to speak truthfully and lovingly as we grieve the tragic losses of life abroad and in the U.S. We ask for the Holy Spirit to guide us all to “repair the breaches and restore the foundations” of our communities, our nation and our world.

Take action: The Church Council invites you to write to or call Governor Inslee to thank him for his statements in support of Washington’s continuing commitment to hospitality for Syrian refugees and those from other nations.

Email form for Washington State Governor Jay Inslee: <https://fortress.wa.gov/es/governor/>

The Governor’s office can be reached at 360.902.0002 (1.800.833.6388 for TTY/TDD users) or via the Legislative hotline at 1.800.562.6000. The Legislative hotline is currently open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m..