

Lament And Hope Community Interfaith Service

Remarks from Mayor Stephen Hagerty

In the 1940s, Martin Niemoller, a German holocaust survivor, wrote:

“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.”

Welcome, friends, neighbors, and allies. Tonight, we gather to speak out.

We speak out because we know that silence in the face of evil is evil itself. We speak out to voice our fear for the precarious state of our country. And we speak out because history shows us that unity against injustice and oppression will prevail.

Indeed, such solidarity is the cornerstone of our diverse democracy: Its absence can weaken our resolve, but its presence is a source of unyielding strength.

This weekend’s events in Charlottesville remind us that unity against injustice and oppression is paramount. Charlottesville shows us that, as a country, we are never far away from seeing those who would choose to normalize racism and intolerance empowered. In this case, it only took one President and his sycophants, using dog-whistle politics. We speak out to condemn this. And we must be specific: The rallying cry of white nationalists is one of hate, bigotry, and violence. Such views are counter to democracy and will never be acceptable in our national and local life.

I quote seriously from a very popular current musical – History now has its eyes on us. Future generations must see that we were unified in our belief and actions that love, kindness, courage, and empathy were stronger than hate. As a nation founded on the ideals of democracy, but also built on the back of racism and sexism, we must leave behind evidence of our work against bigotry and intolerance. History will judge us on our willingness to fight against any assault on our values of respect, fairness, and human dignity.

This effort starts locally. We must be vigilant – and fearless – in rooting out inequalities that exist in our backyard. That means having our citizen police complaint assessment committee take an honest look at our complaint process, that means looking seriously at alternatives to arrest for young men in our community, and that means looking for additional ways to make our community safer and more welcoming for immigrants.

Fortunately, no other citizens are better prepared to unify against hate and toward hope than those of Evanston.

I'd like to bookend Martin Niemoller's quote from the 40s about the dangers of political and civic apathy, with the words spoken just yesterday by the mother of Heather Heyer, the young woman killed in Charlottesville because she dared to speak out. Her mother said:

"...what happened to Heather has struck a chord because we know that what she did is achievable. We don't all have to die. We don't all have to sacrifice our lives. Remember in your heart, if you're not outraged, you're not paying attention. Find what's wrong, don't ignore it, don't look the other way. You make a point to look at it and say to yourself, 'what can I do to make a difference?'... I'd rather have my child, but by golly, if I have to give her up, we're going to make it count."

By being here tonight, together as one community, this is our honoring that wish to make it count. Thanks to Second Baptist Church, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, the NAACP of Evanston/North Shore, our local public officials, Beth Emet The Free Synagogue, Reba Place, Dar-us-Sunnah Mosque, Alice Millar Chapel at Northwestern University, Evanston 4ALL, EPD Chaplain Team, First Presbyterian Church, First United Methodist Church of Evanston, Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Sojourner Covenant Church, and all other organizations who are working tonight and in the future to make it count.