



**Resolution of the KI Social Justice Policy Task Force  
Statement following Events in Charlottesville, Virginia  
August 17, 2017**

*White supremacists wielding Nazi flags and spewing racist vitriol need to be specifically condemned, not only violence and hate “on many sides.” If our leaders can’t call out this virulent strand of hate we will surely fail to stop it.*

*- Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism*

A defining difference between prejudice, bigotry, and hatred, on the one hand, and fascism, Nazism, and autocracy on the other is the involvement of political and government actors. If we are to avoid traveling down the very dark path that was visited upon Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, then we have a moral imperative to resist hatred, to resist moral equivalency, and to resist normalizing extremist ideology as part of our political culture and our self-governance.

On August 12 and 13, 2017, White nationalists, neo-Nazis, members of the Ku Klux Klan, and followers of various Alt-Right groups descended upon Charlottesville, VA for a “Unite the Right” rally. They were there purportedly to protest the decision of the Charlottesville City Council to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee, the Confederate general who led the rebel forces during the Civil War. They arrived heavily armed with bats, helmets and shields, as well as semi-automatic weapons and chanted racist and anti Semitic slogans.

Alan Zimmerman, the president of Reform Congregation Beth Israel, described what happened on Friday evening, August 12<sup>th</sup>. He said, “For half an hour, three men dressed in fatigues and armed with semi-automatic rifles stood across the street from the temple.” He said, “parades of Nazis shouted, “There’s the synagogue!” when they passed the building, followed by chants of ‘*Seig Heil*’ and other anti-Semitic language.” When services ended Zimmerman advised congregants to leave through the back door. As a precaution they removed the *Torahs*, including a Holocaust scroll from the synagogue. Zimmerman and others learned Nazi websites had posted a call to burn the synagogue.

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, White supremacists and neo Nazis clashed in violent skirmishes with counter-protesters, including clergy. The fury of their hate-filled rampage culminated in the death of Heather Heyer, a Charlottesville resident. She was killed when a 20 year-old Ohio man identified with White supremacists and Nazi ideology purposefully plowed his car into a group of pedestrians. Nineteen others were seriously injured.

Large, public displays of bigotry and hatred by groups such as the KKK are not new in the United States. In 1925, for example, 25,000 Klan members marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. wearing full Klan regalia. However,

something new and different is also happening along with this resurgence of hate in our country. Today, various sectors of government in the United States are being harnessed to intimidate and prevent a broad group of Americans who are disfavored by right wing extremists from enjoying the civil liberties and rights guaranteed to them by our Constitution. Increasingly, Jews, Muslims, African Americans, Latinos, gays, transgender, immigrants, disabled people, and women are targets.

When President Trump spoke to reporters on Tuesday, August 15<sup>th</sup> about the events in Charlottesville he blamed “both sides” for the hatred, bigotry and violence thereby drawing a moral equivalency between the Neo Nazis, and racist protestors and the counter protestors. He said, “There were many fine people on both sides,” thereby suggesting there were some fine neo-Nazis among the protestors.

We condemn hatred. We condemn moral equivalency where there is none. And we reject any move toward normalizing the ideas they represent and which undermine the fundamental values we hold to be true as Americans and as Jews.

We support the URJ’s statement on Charlottesville, and call on all members of our community:

- to commit to bringing social justice issues to the center of our congregational life,
- to support organizations and causes that champion the rights and inclusion of all people, regardless of status, orientation, or religion, and
- to demand that our elected representatives visibly and consistently act to delegitimize white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and other forms of racism.