

An Open Letter to the Statesboro Community:

The recent events of bigotry and hatred in Charlottesville, Virginia, by those who identified themselves as White Nationalists and/or White Supremacists have brought to light the very real need for religious leaders to stand together in opposition to such and similar groups. Grounded in our faith traditions that compel us to love our neighbors as ourselves, we, the undersigned faith leaders in Bulloch County, share our concerns and deeply held convictions, which are rooted in the Gospel of Jesus, as well as in other faith traditions from across our community.

While recognizing the right to free speech, we cannot and do not condone the right to use that freedom to foment violence. We grieve over the death of Heather Heyer, who was killed in the attack on counter-protesters last Saturday, and we pray for those injured during that attack. We also grieve for the two Virginia State Troopers, Jay Cullen and Berke M.M. Bates, who were killed in a helicopter crash while trying to prevent further violence.

Their deaths are only the most recent in our nation's history that have ensued from violence based on the false doctrine of white supremacy that has been passed down from generation to generation from the birth of our nation. The grievous events in Charlottesville have further reminded us that White Supremacists are not the only hatemongers in our nation, so we also unequivocally reject the tactics of fear, violence, and racial division used by any group, regardless of the ideological belief or political perspective from which they come.

It is time for us to declare together that we will no longer be silent or tacitly complicit in propagating such racial discord, which contravenes our nation's foundational belief that all men and women are created equal, and which ignores the fundamental truth that each person is made in the image of God.

As a diverse group of pastors, we collectively call upon the members of our congregations and community to join us as we pray for peace among all Americans and for the love of one another that will enable this great nation to heal its ancient wounds and to thrive as never before.

Dosria A. Atkinson, Jr., *LifeSpring/Langston United Methodist Church*

Bill Bagwell, *Pittman Park United Methodist Church*

Jimmy Cason, *First United Methodist Church*

Donald Chavers, *Agape Worship Center*

Douglas K. Clark, *Saint Matthew Catholic Church*

R. Cameron Cowart, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*

Lisa Deloach, *City of David Worship Assembly*

Kenneth W. Griffin, *Brannen Chapel United Methodist Church*

Mike Holt and Jon Cook, *Grace Community Church*

Francys Johnson, *Magnolia Missionary Baptist Church*

John R. Johnson, *St. Christopher Catholic Church*

Joan Kilian and Steve Darby, *Trinity Episcopal Church*

Stewart Moody, *Southbridge Community Church*

Jean and Frankie Owens, *Original First African Baptist Church*

Jane Altman Page, *Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Statesboro*

Dan Rea, *Baha'i Faith of Statesboro/Bulloch County*

Louis Roberts, Clerk, *First Presbyterian Church*

Gregory Thomas, *New Hope and Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Churches*

Sam Trumbore, *St. Paul's Lutheran Church*

John Waters, *First Baptist Church*

Brandon Williams, *Connections Church*

Wayne L. Williams, *New Beginning Christian Outreach Ministry*