

INTERFAITH CONFERENCE OF GREATER MILWAUKEE

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Religious Leaders Address Threats of Violence

This week Jews celebrate Passover and Christians celebrate Easter. A central theme for both celebrations is the passage from bondage to freedom. The source of this freedom is the covenant relationship between God and the people. Faithfulness to this covenant demands that people live out their relationships with God and each other through acts of justice and love.

We enter the week deeply aware of how fragile our relationships are. The media gives evidence of this fact almost daily. Recently, public attention has been given to the remarks of Alderman Michael Mc Gee, who calls for violent action in five years if the city does not create a 100 million dollar jobs program and take steps to revive central city neighborhoods.

What could be understood by some as political rhetoric to make a point is perceived by others as a real threat of violence. However it is understood or perceived, the religious leadership of the Interfaith Conference is concerned over the escalation of words that has the potential to cause violent acts among individuals and groups of people. Such acts cannot be condoned by people of Biblical faith.

However, there is also the danger that, in our efforts to respond to each other's rhetoric, we will ignore the violence that already exists in our community. The lack of jobs paying a living wage is doing violence to men and women who want to support themselves and their families. The lack of affordable, decent, safe housing is a source of violent tension for families that are forced to double up and live in deteriorating conditions.

We cannot ignore the violence of racism that is part of our history and has contributed to our pressing social problems. We are experiencing the consequences of deliberate acts of discrimination by individuals and the institutions of our society.

As people of Biblical faith, we also cannot condone these forms of violence.

We realize that the failure of society to address all kinds of violence in central city neighborhoods is contributing to the rage felt by the African-American community.

We make this statement because we are challenged to act responsibly to decrease violence in our midst. City government cannot do it alone. As a community we need to speak clearly and forcefully to the state and federal government, as well as to the private sector, for programs that provide health care, day care, affordable housing, quality education, and jobs.

As Religious Leaders of the Interfaith Conference, we pledge to continue our efforts to address the causes of violence. We intend to collaborate with others in this endeavor. We must work together to eliminate violence in all its forms in order for all people to experience the passage from bondage to freedom.

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