

“WHAT HAPPENED” AND “WHAT TO DO NEXT”

SEVEN STATEMENTS IN THE WAKE OF THE SAN BERNARDINO KILLINGS

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Living in one world as one people has always been a challenge, and one of the most threatening realities to our common humanity is horrific acts of violence that some engage in, human against human. On December 2, in San Bernardino, CA, terrorizing violence was chosen by two people, resulting in the deaths of fourteen and leaving twenty-one others wounded.

In these tragic and disturbing times, our oneness is challenged. Distinctions that otherwise are enriching may be seen as threatening, and being hurt by people who are different in skin color, attire, religious affiliation or nationality may cause us to stray from our fundamental belief in and commitment to our oneness as human beings.

During these serious times of grief, reflection and investigation, each of us tries to make sense of “what happened” and “what to do next”. We want to understand, and we want to be safe. We see the pain on the faces of the survivors of this attack and with the relatives of the injured and of those who died. We want to do everything we can to prevent something like this from happening again. Our country will struggle with alternative ideas. Individually we will elevate some values and principles over others, and then meet up with someone who views the situation quite differently.

In these days of lived grief and uncertainty, what wisdom does each of us offer? What can our diverse communities contribute to the “what happened” and “what to do next”?

The Interfaith Round Table of Washtenaw County as an alliance of people from across many faith traditions has been coming together for 21 years to address the deep and divisive issues and concerns facing all of us. Our experience over these years can be summarized in the following principles and practices. We believe that each, in varying degrees, can help us as a country respond to the tragedy of mass murder in San Bernardino.

1. **Compassion** can be the centerpiece of our understanding and behavior. Compassion brings us alongside those who are suffering, and true compassion keeps us from becoming what we reject in the violent perpetrators of tragedies like this.

2. **Respect** for all individuals keeps us from assigning blame to others who are in no way responsible for “what happened”. Simplistic stereotyping and over-generalizing just add another layer of injustice that if we were treated that way, we would object.
3. Fear of future attacks and of people who we think want to do us harm can help us be vigilant in putting together reasonable safety measures to limit the risks that come with not knowing what tomorrow will bring. **Fear**, however, can easily overtake us and cloud our judgment leading to over-reactions that bring unnecessary suffering to innocent people who might look, dress or appear to be similar to the perpetrators responsible for these violent acts.
4. **Understanding** other groups, religions and nationalities is crucial to building healthy communities and countries. Being isolated from one another can only lead to seeing others as very different and, in some cases, dangerous. Diversity has always been a bedrock principle of this country, and creating opportunities for conversations, reflection and relationships can serve us well in creating a culture of understanding and inclusion.
5. **Learning** what motivates violent behavior while at the same time refusing to allow individual grievances to justify this behavior is difficult but necessary work. Understanding such motivation is important in order to recognize the issues that drive violence. There are people who can go to the deep places of listening. They can hear people’s stories, and they can become greater sources of justice and love for everyone.
6. **Hospitality** must win over hostility. All of the religions represented in the Interfaith Round Table value hospitality. It is a lens through which we try to see other people. It is a principle that utilizes listening, learning and sharing. It is an outlook that can help us experience “E pluribus unum” (“Out of many, one”). Hostility, on the other hand, only serves to divide and disunite.
7. Violence and hatred do not resolve our human problems of living together on one planet. **Religious and spiritual principles and practices** at their best hold little or no room for either. The core, the heart, the purpose and the mission of the world’s religions is to help us navigate our differences in ways that utilize these seven statements. As one religious leader said recently, “There is no religious or human justification for these attacks.”

Finally, we really do need each other, in good times and in the bad. Though neighborhoods might not be as dominant as they once were in this country, neighborliness need not be lost. Reaching out, being proactive, being creative, taking a risk, looking for opportunities, being in ourselves what

we want in others, doing small things, being curious, mixing with others and taking the first step in building relationship can help us better understand “what happened” in San Bernardino as well as “what to do next” in our desire to not see something like this repeated.