



## THE COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

### **Response to the Synagogue Massacre in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago is horrified by the vicious antisemitic murders at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. We remember with bitter sorrow the Shabbat morning worshipers killed and injured in this attack, and we honor the police officers who were wounded while coming to their aid. We pray for comfort and hope for the families and friends of those affected by this act of hate.

But we are also outraged.

- We are outraged by the increasing normalcy of racist violence in a sacred space. The victims at Tree of Life join the victims at the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.
- We are outraged by the frequency of such violence. Tree of Life is the 294th mass shooting in the United States this year. Almost 12,000 people -- including 441 in Chicago -- have died from gun violence in 2018.
- And we are outraged by the regularity of our reactions. All of us -- news networks, first responders, political leaders, and yes, faith leaders -- know just what to do following a mass shooting. We follow a script, we mourn the dead, and we move on.

But we are past the time for mourning without meaningful response.

Placing armed guards in America's more than 300,000 religious congregations is not the answer. Churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues already have taken steps to "harden" their security, and the injuries to police officers in Pittsburgh show that even trained responders are at risk. This strategy mistakes the effects of gun violence for its means and sources.

We need a different path.

- (1) We call on the President of the United States and leaders at every level of our society to remember that their words matter. Pittsburgh reminds us that the rhetoric of violence begets violence. Everyone has the moral responsibility for what they say.
- (2) For our part, we will convene meetings in congregations across this region on ways to reduce the potential, frequency, and lethality of gun violence. We welcome people from across the political spectrum. Our only condition is that participants share a commitment to strategies and outcomes that reduce gun-related deaths and injuries.

In every religious tradition, human life is sacred. Our democracy is diverse, boisterous, and very contentious, but we cannot express our differences through violence if we expect to long endure. Let us honor the dead by having the courage to live with our differences and to realize the vision of America's founders, *e pluribus unum*, "out of many, one."

(October 29, 2018)