

EXAMPLE OF AN ARTICLE FROM THE LOCAL GRAND RAPIDS PRESS:



Liberating message of God's love trumps hate crime

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Special To The Press

On July 27, at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., a man entered the sanctuary and opened fire on the 200-plus worshippers during the service.

The shooter was subdued, but not before he had murdered an usher, Greg McKendry, as well as visitor Linda Kraeger, a member of the Knoxville Westside Unitarian Universalist Church.

Joe Barnhart, Jack Barnhart, Betty Barnhart, Linda Chavez, John Worth Jr., Tammy Sommers and Allison Lee were also injured, with three still in critical or serious condition. No children were hurt, although they were presenting a pageant that morning.

The congregants, minister and visitors are recovering from the trauma. Those of us in other Unitarian Universalist churches stand with them and seek understanding from a spiritual nearness and physical distance.

In a note, the shooter identified "the liberal movement" as the central reason he targeted this congregation for his heinous act.

The minister regularly contributes essays to the local paper, including one supporting tolerance and rights for gay couples, while the congregation supports issues of freedom, reason and tolerance. Modern religious despisers declare that faith fosters violence, but so do other human endeavors, such as politics, nationalism and economic greed. And our Unitarian Universalist churches number political conservatives and liberals. It was not political liberalism that was the object of the shooter's venom, because he discharged his vengeful spite in church, at a distinct faith tradition and message.

Our Unitarian teachings on spiritual freedom date back through John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to the Pilgrims and the early forebears of political freedom in the 16th-century congregationalism of Europe. Our convictions concerning the unity of the human family mean we will continue to stand for the separation of Church and State and for strong public education for all. (We started Harvard and the American public school movement). The first university classes in America studying the world's religions were taught by our people, and, in this, we will continue to advocate for a tolerance for all faiths.

We have a long-standing tradition of support for gay men and lesbian women, and I have officiated at gay weddings since the mid-1980s. Our Universalist teaching of God's love for all souls trumps traditional

obedience to Scripture's time and culture-bound expressions. We have martyrs of the civil rights movement and supported women's civil and reproductive rights for the same divinely inspired reasons. Though this violent act is not unique in our 500-year-old history, we Unitarian Universalists will continue to counter the narrowness human beings are capable of, with the liberating message of moral and ethical capability and the breadth of God's love. And we will continue to aim our protests and critiques at religion first.

Yet, we are recovering from a heinous hate crime. It will not deter us, but in the coming weeks we would ask for the thoughts and prayers of other faith communities and traditions, that love, freedom and, therefore, hope, might be restored to our common life together.

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