

Unification Theological Seminary: Mourning the 50 Muslims killed in New Zealand

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Mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand have caused the loss of at least 50 lives, including women and children. As the horrific news continues to come out, I am full of grief, just as I was over the murders of 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh last October. As I said at that time, an attack on one religious community is an attack on all of us. Each and every person, whether Christian, Jew, Muslim or atheist, is a child of God and beloved by God.

News reports indicate that the shooter was influenced by extremist rhetoric on the internet that foists false and hate-filled stereotypes about Muslims. We must counter that rhetoric with the truth, which is that God is inspiring good Muslims, and people of all faiths, to join as one human family under God. The mission of the Unification Theological Seminary is to educate leaders of all faiths to build God's world of peace by working to bridge religious, cultural and racial divides. This horrible crime calls us to increase our efforts to build bridges between faiths and counter hate with action through love and service to others.

I offer prayers of comfort to the victims and their families. I offer support to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and all the good people of New Zealand in this hour of trial, that they may embrace their Muslim communities in bonds of love and healing, and strengthen their commitment to peace and safety for all of their citizens.

My prayers are also for America, that we can make the United States a beacon of peace and hope for all people, and specifically a nation that educates the world to love and respect people of all faiths and not to hate them or seek revenge. Let us take up the mission of Jesus who forgave his enemies, and with that spirit of forgiveness, forgive whatever Muslim extremists have done to damage our country in the past. It is time to turn the page on the dark deeds of the past and make a new start. Let's all work to make America into one nation under God with a spirit of forgiveness, healing, love and genuine respect for all people.

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