



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

United Church of Christ leaders call for denouncing hate, standing with Haitian community in Springfield

Cleveland, Ohio, Sep 23, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- United Church of Christ General Minister and President, the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, has written the following statement responding to the [recent rise in violent threats and harassment](#) toward members of the Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio, following widely spread, [false narratives about Haitian immigrants](#).

The Rev. David Long-Higgins, Conference minister of the UCC Heartland Conference — where Springfield is located — has also [written a pastoral letter](#) urging people to stand with Haitian siblings “as the beloved children of God that they are and utterly reject such false narratives.” He joined many clergy to speak at a [prayer press vigil in Springfield](#) (speaking at 52:10) which was livestreamed by the organization Repairers of the Breach.

The full text of Thompson’s statement follows:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. Zechariah 7:9-10

As people of faith, called to love our neighbors as ourselves, the United Church of Christ denounces all xenophobic, racist, and violent rhetoric and actions against immigrants in the United States and stands with the Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio, at this critical time.

Written, spoken, signed, or typed, words have power. Texted, tweeted, posted, or preached, words invite reaction. Words can tear people down, drive us apart, and stoke anger, hate, and violence. And words can bring people together, build community, and celebrate the Holy among us.

Recently, former President Donald Trump and Senator J.D. Vance of Ohio used the power of their words to spread dehumanizing, racist lies about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio. These claims, which Senator Vance has admitted are false, yet he continues to perpetuate, are stoking threats of violence including ongoing bomb threats. Many now fear for their lives, as schools have been closed and people are afraid to attend their places of worship. The harassment and abuse of these siblings labeled as immigrants or pejoratively as illegals or aliens needs to end.

The island nation of Haiti is currently facing a severe humanitarian crisis marked by political instability, gang violence, and economic hardship. Recognizing the plight of our Haitian neighbors, the United States opened a pathway for legal entry which has led to the growth of the community in Springfield. While the United States has long been a beacon of hope for those fleeing persecution, the vile words and actions now targeting Haitians in Springfield and other immigrant communities

across the country do not reflect the historic values of our country. Nor do they reflect the values of the United Church of Christ.

At this time, we call on our churches, clergy, and all UCC members to denounce vitriolic rhetoric, stand against hate, and advocate for the rights of immigrants who continue to navigate bigotry and marginalization in the U.S. and around the world.

We further call on our churches to seek peace, justice, and security for those whose human rights and dignity are targeted. As followers of Jesus, we must persist in speaking truth in love. We are called to be active expressions of God's love in the world.

Congregations are encouraged to reach out to their association and conference to learn what they can do together to offer welcome in their communities. Together, let us counter the false narratives and lies through our support for migrating, immigrating, and refugee persons as they become vibrant and integral members of their new communities. Let us offer a word of hope and of love.

God of all peoples, in whose image each one is created, grant us a spirit of discernment for hearing the truth when it is spoken. Guide us to stand in kindness and mercy with the vulnerable in our communities. Give us the courage to speak out against injustice and always to listen and respond in love.

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