



Letter to the Governing Board and Ecumenical Officers of the NCC

May 18, 2022

Dear Friends,

All of us are impacted by the attack on the Black community in Buffalo. From personal experience, I know some of us are struggling more viscerally in deep pain. May God strengthen and comfort all who are in distress in this time of grief and trauma.

The Black community in Buffalo is in a “state of emergency” even though no emergency has been declared. Children are afraid to go to school and are also afraid to have their parents leave their homes. Reports from the community indicated there is a lack of counselors at schools and that counselors are not equipped to deal with this level of trauma so that students who may be experiencing trauma would be punished for acting out rather than get the psychological help they desperately need. The only wellness center in the community is heavily guarded in order to keep the facility safe, but for those who view the police with suspicion, this stops their ability to seek help.

The clergy in Buffalo are issuing a call for help. They are overwhelmed and need relief. They have issued a call for ethnic-specific ministers who can provide a pastoral counseling presence and who also understand racial trauma. If you know of such persons, organizations, or resources that could be made available, please let me know.

If your denomination has churches in need of assistance, VOICE Buffalo has been sharing information on the available resources including rides to other grocery stores since the east Buffalo community has been turned back into a food desert without their one and only grocery store.

<https://www.voicebuffalo.org/live-free>

After many meetings with federal authorities over the weekend, I want to pass on their guidance to you in case you have not been present in these spaces.

- Generally, we are being advised to be more observant of our surroundings so that church members realize that if they see something, they should say something to the appropriate agency.
- The agencies have issued a broad call for active partnerships to be formed in all communities focused on the prevention of violence. These networks should include churches, ministers, schools, guidance counselors, coaches, parents, friends, and relatives. The networks will work to educate on mental health indicators so individuals can recognize when someone is going down the path of violence and feel empowered to take action by reporting what has been observed to appropriate authorities.
- More information can be found at this link: <https://www.dhs.gov/CP3>

This year the NCC gathered all of the resources from federal agencies such as the FBI, DOJ, and DHS for keeping our churches safe into one page: <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/preventing-violence-against-places-of-worship/> We advise all of our member communions to share this information with local churches so that every house of worship initiates a safety plan. Faith leaders can also contact their local FBI office for Partner Engagement Training which consists of a two-hour seminar about active shooters: <https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>

Another resources for those experiencing feelings of desolation and thoughts of suicide is the NCC's "A Christian Approach to Suicide Prevention," which can be found here: <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/new-ncc-resource-a-christian-approach-to-suicide-prevention/>

As we continue to serve Christ, let us continue to inspire others to widen their faith and circles of concern. I respectfully call on each of us to be more vocal, vigilant, and visible in our communities.

- Let us take more personal responsibility to be vocal in our public spaces - home, clubs, community, and sacred/worship spaces - to call out irresponsible behavior without jeopardizing personal safety. Let us encourage our members to do the same. This will call for uncommon courage to speak up against divisive acts and actions. Let us remain vocal about any encroachment upon civil rights and the policies/theories that encourage hate.
- Let us be vigilant in looking for opportunities to plant seeds of love and conscious community that recognizes the humanity of all people and uproots the planted seeds of hate.
- Let us visualize what the "Beloved Community" could like at this time. Let us work together to see the vision become our reality.

Please reach out to me to share how we can be more supportive of your work and ministry and how the NCC can meet this moment.

By the Grace of God,

Vashti Murphy McKenzie

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