

**The Board of Bishops
The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**

An Open Letter to the Congress of the United States of America

August 16, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressional Leaders:

"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." (James 4:17)

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, known as "The Freedom Church" is the church of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Coretta Scott King. As such, we have a more than 200 year history of addressing the issues of justice, equality, and reconciliation. It is that legacy that demands we raise our voices to speak to the crisis currently facing our beloved country.

We lament the violence that occurred in Charlottesville, VA this past weekend and extend our sincerest condolences to the families of Heather Heyer, the fallen police officers, and to the scores of others injured by the weaponized vehicle or individual assaults. Our shared sorrow has now become righteous indignation as a result of the remarks by the 45th President of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump, that suggested a moral equivalence between advocates for justice and white nationalists and neo-Nazis. Such a perspective is abhorrent for any person, but coming from the President, it is extremely dangerous and demands an immediate and strong rebuke from Congress. The combined events in Charlottesville and the statements by the President have revealed what many of us have been painfully aware. There is a toxic stream of bigotry and racism that has been an animating force in some politics and policies. Such political opportunism and division must be publicly renounced by all persons of good con-

science across the political spectrum. Those who espouse racial, ethnic, and religious hatred must never find succor in the words or actions of any elected official but especially those elected to the highest office in our land.

Donald Trump has peddled for many years in racially charged rhetoric and discriminatory practices, including his offensive and false accusations that our only African American President wasn't born in this country. It will be a blight throughout history that many remained silent in the face of Trump's birtherism claims. His list of other divisive comments are well documented and far too many to be litigated in this letter. Simply put, any person who harbors such immoral beliefs or offers excuses for those who do, is grossly unfit to hold such a high office.

This is a defining moment for this country and for our religious, civic, and political leaders. Speaker Ryan has declared that; "There can be no moral ambiguity." We wholeheartedly agree but insist that concrete actions must now be taken to live up to those words. As such, **we petition the United States Congress to pass a Joint Resolution censuring the President for his lack of moral clarity and failure to strongly and unequivocally condemn the hate-filled ideology of white nationalists and neo-Nazi groups.** This must not be a partisan issue, but a righteous one. We remind you of the powerful words of Dr. Martin Luther King who stated; "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Racism has been an ugly stain on the American story since it's founding and requires each generation of citizens to confront this evil forcefully. Unfortunately, there has been a spike in the number of hate groups in recent years and they have now been emboldened by the current occupant of the White House. Many of these groups have promised rallies in the weeks to come. We are deeply concerned that the potential for further violence is real. As the AME Zion Church, we call for non-violent protests against such vile ideologies and enhanced resistance to all policies that adversely impact oppressed and marginalized people. However, we are clear that words must be linked with actions that promote justice.

In order to begin the process of healing for this nation and address the crisis we currently face, it is important that in addition to a censure resolution the United States Congress must also act on the following:

- Issue a joint statement calling for the end of practices that lead to voter suppression, voter intimidation, and discriminatory gerrymandering.
- Jointly call for the immediate dismissal of any individual working in any branch of the US Government who has a documented history of associations with white nationalists groups, including the current White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon.
- Hold public hearings of the Judiciary Committees to address recent actions by the Department of Justice that fail to enforce consent decrees with Police Departments and that eliminate resources devoted to investigating white nationalists, Neo-nazis, and other domestic hate groups.

For the cause of Justice, Liberty, and Truth, we are;

The Board of Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

The Right Reverend George E. Battle, Jr. - Senior Bishop

The Right Reverend Dennis V. Proctor - President
The Right Reverend Kenneth Monroe
The Right Reverend Darryl B. Starnes, Sr.
The Right Reverend Mildred B. Hines
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