The Episcopal Diocese of Central New York
The Rt. Rev. Dr. DeDe Duncan-Probe

Dear People of Central New York,

During my time of Sabbath, I too have witnessed last week's events in Charlottesville, Virginia with a heavy heart. Hatred, racism, anti-Semitism, and the dehumanization of others have no place in our common life. Our Christian faith professes that all people are created by God and in the image of God. As I watched our fellow Episcopalians in Charlottesville peacefully praying and standing in opposition to blind hatred, I felt resolved that we will be just as courageous in our own diocese and local communities. The sins of racism, anti-Semitism and dehumanization are not confined by geography or political opinion.

As Christians, we begin with repentance, returning to the way of God. It is too easy to insist that racism, anti-Semitism and dehumanization are sins belonging to others. Indeed, as last week's events unfolded, many of us felt the sting of hatred and blame rising in our own hearts alongside grief. But our savior is a Middle-Eastern Jew who commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to forgive our enemies, and to serve one another. As Episcopalians, we have taken vows to resist evil, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to honor the dignity of every human being. We cannot profess to be faithful to the God of love if we do not address the sin in our own hearts.

None of us are perfect. All of us need forgiveness and restoration. Still, I encourage you to beware of making false equivalencies between white supremacism, Nazism, Neo-Nazism and fascism, which have resulted in the torture and senseless slaughter of millions, and those who stand in opposition to this violence. In World War II, many of our brave men and women fought to defeat an evil that now seeks expression in our own country. We must be clear: this cannot be tolerated.

The words we speak and our conduct are the ways we express our faith. Now is a time for honest self-reflection. Has fear prevented us from forming relationships or supporting our neighbors? Have we or those we know made jokes or casual remarks that may perpetuate hate and negative stereotypes? Have we benefited from systems and practices that favor us, not counting the cost to others? The hard truth is that all of us dehumanize others from time to time; in some way viewing "them" as substandard to "us." But if we say we love God, we must repent. I John 4:20 tells us:

If anyone says, I love God, and hates a brother or sister, he is a liar, because the person who doesn't love a brother or sister who can be seen can't love God, who can't be seen. (CEB)

There can be no doubt: these times in which we live are very, very difficult. Fear is all around us. Many people, ourselves included, are afraid, confused, and struggling to find the right path forward. There is great temptation to polarize, expressing our fear in anger and division rather than seeking God's healing and grace. Let us hold one another in prayer, and determine that together we will live our faith in ways that speak to the power of love over hate. There are many faithful responses, so let us affirm one another in responding to the Spirit's work within us. I pray we will remember who we are, and, more importantly, *whose* we are. God, our Creator, is faithful; Jesus continues to be the light that cannot be overcome by the darkness of this present time. We need not be afraid.

My dear friends, our help is in the name of the Lord so be bold, be vigilant, stay alert, and live as ambassadors for Christ. Share God's eternal life-giving love with the world.

In closing, I offer this prayer:

> *Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
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> (BCP, p. 823)

Faithfully,

Bishop DeDe

The Rt. Rev. Dr. DeDe Duncan-Probe
Bishop of Central New York