29 October 2018

Dear Theological School community,

Like so many of you, I felt devastated watching the horrific events unfold at the L’Simcha (Tree of Life) Congregation in Pittsburgh. The incalculable and senseless loss of life, plus its impact on the larger Jewish community in Pittsburgh and beyond, is reprehensible and heartbreaking. We at Drew Theological School grieve the death of the eleven innocent people who were mercilessly gunned down as they celebrated Shabbat, and we mourn with their families, with their congregation and local Jewish community, with their fellow Pittsburghers, and with the Jewish community throughout the world.

This particular congregation was specifically targeted because of their religious identity and their deep, longstanding commitment to immigrants and all who are displaced from their homes because of political, economic, religious, racial, or other reasons. Drawing from the long history and experience of Jewish forced migration and violent oppression, they chose to embody the biblical mandate that "(W)hen the immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the immigrant. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love them as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt" (Common English Bible). This dedication to social repair and justice made them targets of hate, rather than exemplars and moral s/heroes.

I pray that their example and courageous witness will not be in vain. Their deaths should and will matter. Instead of simply offering thoughts and prayers, I hope that we will honor them by strengthening our own commitment to social repair and healing. Let us stand with and protect with our own lives our Jewish sisters and brothers who face escalating violence globally. At this crucial moment, we cannot be silent and cannot pretend we do not see the rising trend of divisive rhetoric and deadly violence in our communities and around the world. We should not give succor to those who promote hateful ideologies, but instead must be in solidarity with all who are vulnerable to the unjust and dehumanizing public policies that target specific groups and individuals. Our silence is our tacit agreement with and accommodation of hate. Therefore, let us speak loudly and let us act boldly to promote peace, healing, shared values, and the dignity of all.

With you in the struggle,

Javier A. Viera, Dean
Drew Theological School