

Rev. Dr. John R. Deckenback
Statement at Vigil
Steps of Evangelical Reformed
United Church of Christ
Frederick, Md
June 14, 2016

I am John Deckenback, a member of this congregation and Conference Minister of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ.

On behalf of Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ and its pastor, Rev. Barbara Kershner Daniel, we welcome you to this sacred space.

From her vacation retreat Barbara wrote: *This is a gathering of love in defiance of hate. This gathering states loudly and clearly that in Frederick all are welcome and we will not allow hate to define us. This public witness cannot be the last word and we cannot remain silent when brothers and sisters anywhere are suffering. After tonight may all who pass by these steps be reminded of the hundreds who have gathered and that we are not alone in working towards a world in which all of God's children, ALL, are able to live without fear and able to be their true selves as God has created them.*

Speaking for myself: We welcome you to this sacred space.

It is flag day and tragically it is the brilliant colors of the rainbow that fly at half-staff.

On these sacred steps we are knit together in unity, a giant tapestry - a quilt of love uniting what others would tear apart.

This is not our first time on these steps...an intersection between faith and the community. We are here to build illuminated bridges of hope and bring down walls of fear and hatred.

Think of our witness on these steps as a sanctuary against oppressive aggression... We are angry but we will not return hate for hate.

Violence against LGBTQ people and the LGBTQ community is not a new phenomenon –there is a long painful history... a gruesome legacy from Stonewall to the Castro to the Upstairs Lounge...

On Sunday, another safe haven, Pulse, became a house of horrors...unimaginable horror in pools of blood and shattered bodies and lives – horrifying bursts --as the hunted hid in toilet stalls, under the bar, beside the DJ...

Pulse where friends went to hug a friend, steal a kiss, dance the night away...

It is long past time for the violence – physical and spiritual – to stop.

Remember Dr. Kings' words: "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that.

"Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

Too often we have not come out into the night...but tonight we do!

We come out into this night amidst our grief to light bright candles of love and hope from this sacred community knit together in witness.

Our PULSE is strong, may it not beat in vain!

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