



interreligious institute

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Contact: Lisa N. Zook, Director

Phone: 773.896.2485

Email: lisa.zook@ctschicago.edu

A Statement on the Chabad of Poway Synagogue Attack from the InterReligious Institute at Chicago Theological Seminary

CHICAGO- April 29, 2019 - We find ourselves again in a time of mourning, this time for the Chabad of Poway, CA Synagogue and the murderous attack on their concluding Passover worship. We offer our deepest sympathy and heartfelt prayers to the family of the victim and to the entire congregation. The world's religions are now bound by shared suffering and shared compassion — what a grief-filled lesson for us all.

Rabbi Myers of the Tree of Life Synagogue offered some profound reflections after the Christchurch massacre. May we not only ponder his words but adopt the practices he advocates:

As I take a step back to take it all in, permit me to share my view from 30,000 feet. After the horror in [Tree of Life](#), I took an oath a scant two weeks later at a rally at Point State Park, in downtown Pittsburgh, that stated that the word 'hate' is an obscenity, just like other four-letter words. I, and many others, now refer to it as the 'H word.'

H speech frequently leads to violence, as it did in Pittsburgh and, alas, [other places](#). When we tone down our rhetoric, though, we lessen the emotional impact of our words, and perhaps steer ourselves and others away from the wrong path. If you don't like something, I urge you not to say 'I H it.' Rather, say: 'I don't like it.' This simple act is necessary to restore civil discourse to our society, buffeted as it has increasingly been by too much uncivil discourse.

More than anything, H speech reveals the unhappiness of its author, who foists anger, disappointment, and insecurity upon another group and who is unable to personally deal with life's challenges. When you blame others for what happens to you, you transfer your perceived victimhood to them — in this case, the Jewish community — and they then become the victims and the victimizers at the same time. This demonstrates the absurdity of [anti-Semitism](#): those who speak and act from bigotry try to come across as victims, with the Jewish people as the source of their problems. The Jewish people, victims of this eternal plight, respond and make the bigot feel even more victimized.

The Jewish community is resilient, having faced, and continuing to face, numerous forms of [anti-Semitism](#), one of the oldest forms of H speech in existence. But while H speech is not going to disappear any time soon, I have seen that it does not remotely reflect the attitude of all the people on this planet. Within minutes of the massacre at Tree of Life, words of love flooded my email and social media accounts. Strangers of different faiths shared in their grief and dismay, and offered comfort, strength and hugs. The sheer volume of communication from people across the planet, which continues unabated, provides a loving reminder that the vast majority of human beings on this planet are good, decent people. They felt my pain, and could not understand how a fellow human being could inflict such carnage upon other human beings. They wanted to reassure me that this is not a reflection of humanity, but an aberration.

And they are right.

<http://time.com/5565996/tree-life-synagogue-christchurch-attack/>

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We at the IRI are focusing our work these days not only on what Rabbi Myers recommends, namely stopping “H speech,” but also on best practice research for the ways in which local religious leaders can learn to interrupt the cycles of violence and revenge that now so characterize this current age of terror against the world’s religions.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to interreligious engagement and our refusal to allow “H” to define our world.

Statement by:

Rev. Lisa Zook, Director
InterReligious Institute at Chicago Theological Seminary

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ABOUT THE INTERRELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

The InterReligious Institute at Chicago Theological Seminary is dedicated to interfaith engagement in our community through academia, theology, and public dialogue for a more just and pluralistic society. The InterReligious Institute is funded in part through a generous lead gift from the **Henry Luce Foundation**.

ABOUT CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Based on Chicago’s Southside, Chicago Theological Seminary is committed to creating leaders for the next generation at religious leadership...whatever that may be. A leader in social justice, CTS is committed to LGBTQ and gender issues, interreligious understanding, and racial justice.

CTS is an affiliated seminary of the United Church of Christ. Since its founding in 1855, CTS has pushed at the growing boundaries of the church in order to make faith more relevant and transform society towards greater justice and mercy. The student body now represents more than 40 different faith traditions, perspectives, and denominations.

