

People of God in Southern Ohio,

As people of God, we know that our words matter. Our stories matter. In our baptism, we promise to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, and to respect the dignity of every person. When we go into the world, we seek and serve the marginalized, drawing our circle ever wider, knowing that Jesus calls us unequivocally to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Over the last several days, because of hate-filled words and fabricated stories, the community of Springfield, Ohio has been thrust into the national spotlight, prompting a barrage of racist threats against our Haitian neighbors. Let me be clear: these stories are fear-mongering and admitted lies. These dangerous falsehoods have resulted in a tense moment of palpable racism, bomb threats that have shut down schools and workplaces, and the cruel politicization of one child's tragic death.

Over the past week, I've been in conversation with the Rev. Michelle Boomgaard, Ph.D., rector serving Christ Church, Springfield, and am deeply grateful for her leadership. United with other faith leaders in Springfield, they have been strong in their witness against hate and calling the community toward compassionate welcome. They offer these ways to take action in support of the Haitian community in Springfield and in our own communities:

- Stop spreading misinformation and memes. The situation in Springfield is dangerous, and joking about it only exacerbates the tension on the ground and gives credibility to the conversation.
- Engage Haitian businesses. With the barrage of bomb-threats and other abuse, utilizing our neighbors businesses can mitigate the effects of unforeseen closures and other safety provisions.
- Join me in giving to Springfield's Haitian Community Help and Support Center, a nonprofit by and for Haitians, helping to connect neighbors with local services and support networks.
- Act locally to support immigrants of all backgrounds in their transition to this new country, making clear our call to welcome the stranger in our midst.

Friends, as Episcopalians in Ohio, we must stand strong and use the words and stories Jesus taught us. Together, we can confront this hate with love, this fear with compassion, these words of evil with the words of the Good News: that the way of Jesus is the way of God's boundless and never ceasing love.

Yours in Christ,

