

JOHN KNOX PRESBYTERY

OFFICER'S STATEMENT

REGARDING PHOTO IN BARABOO, WISCONSIN

We, the officers of John Knox Presbytery, are disturbed by the recent photo appearing on social media of a group of young men from the Baraboo, Wisconsin area making Nazi gestures and giving signals from White Supremacy ideology. We appreciate the School District's announcement of a forthcoming investigation. This is a situation that requires all not to act in haste. And yet, the seriousness of the situation leads us to recognize the damage that such symbols inflict and the hate they represent. These visible expressions should not be lightly dismissed as innocent fun, or, worse yet, be reinterpreted by others to be things other than what they are. To dismiss these as harmless ignores their devastating impact and frightful history. It is our hope that this will become a time for all concerned, to examine their lives and hearts, to learn new ways to understand those who are different from us, and to renew the bonds we have with one another as human beings.

The resurgence of expressions in our country of the superiority of one group of people over another and of the desire to return to a time when such superiority was taken for granted and enforced with prejudice, unequal treatment, and even with violence, should alarm all those who take the words of our Constitution to be the true expression of our concept of our purpose as a nation. Particularly abhorrent to us is when racial, religious, gender and other prejudices are masked in religious language. The scriptures are clear that all humans are valued and loved equally by God our Creator, "...there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female."

We care deeply for the individuals involved. Our desire is that all young people grow into individuals who are informed by truth – historical truth, truth about the influences in their lives, and the spiritual truth of the meaning of their actions. We are deeply concerned for our communities. The revival of a movement that a generation fought and sacrificed to defeat alarms us. We are troubled by how casually it develops and is tolerated. We are deeply concerned for our world. We desire a world in which people live in tolerance and kindness. That world cannot become a reality in the presence of hatred.

Chaz Ruark, Linda Jawson, Tim Geraden, Cathy Van Landuyt, Kathleen Owens