

Rev. VanderWeele attended the First UU service where anti-choice protestors disrupted worship. This letter was written in response. 40 local faith leaders signed on to say that the Space for Worship is Sacred.

<http://www.theneworleansadvocate.com/opinion/9819330-171/letters-worship-is-sacred>

Letter: Time, space for worship sacred

ADVOCATE STORY Aug. 04, 2014

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On Sunday morning, July 20, the sacred time and space of a historic New Orleans congregation was violated. As congregants of First Unitarian Universalist Church, founded in 1833, held a moment of silent prayer to grieve a young woman of the church who had died the previous week, protestors from Operation Save America began to harangue the minister and spew words of hate to and at the congregation. In shock, but with increasing pain as these diatribes continued, the congregation listened quietly as protestors vilified and insulted them. Soon, though, the protestors were ushered out of the church.

As this was happening in the sanctuary, other protesters, holding grotesque images, massed around the windows of the church nursery, screaming at the babies and toddlers. Youth were told they were “going to hell” and that their family members were suffering from illness due to their sins. The church members responded by singing words of love, justice and freedom to counteract this hateful rhetoric.

For religious communities in the United States, the freedom to worship is a deeply cherished right. Whatever our faith, whenever we worship, the right to worship as we choose was fought for by our ancestors and is vital to all today. Along with this freedom comes the right to disagree, which is one part of the pluralism created by our religious freedom.

But all of us agree that no one has the right to desecrate the sacred worship time and space in order to express their disagreement. The undersigned people of faith do not agree on everything. In fact, some of us only agree that we have the right to disagree. But that is enough. No congregation, whatever their views may be, should have their sacred worship time and space violated. Not ever. Not by anybody.

I and 39 other local religious leaders by this letter call on the larger community to stand with us,

with hearts joined on the side of love and in opposition to religious terrorism.

The Rev. Jim VanderWeele, New Orleans
The Rev. William Barnwell
The Rev. Paul Beedle
The Rev. Claire Vonk Brooks
The Rev. Gary Brooks
Pat Bryant, co-moderator, Justice and Beyond
The Rev. Callie Winn Crawford
Rabbi Edward Paul Cohn
The Rev. Jeff Conner
The Rev. Rob Courtney
The Rev. Don Frampton
The Rev. Lauren Frazier-McGuin
The Rev. Joann M. Garma
Vanessa Gueringer, vice president, A Community Voice
Michael G. Hackett, deacon, Diocese of Louisiana
The Very Rev. AJ Heine
The Rev. Henry L. Hudson
The Rev. Eronica C. King
Rabbi Ethan Linden
Rabbi Robert H. Loewy
The Rev. Dr. Jane Mauldin
The Rev. Priscilla Maumus
The Rev. Herbert McGuin, III
Rabbi Barbara Metzger
The Rev. Melanie Morel-Ensminger
Max Niedzwiecki, convener
Tom Paine, pastor
The Rev. Fred Powell, III
The Rev. Tony Rigoli, OMI
The Rev. Darcy Roake
Minister Norbert Rome
The Rev. Mitchell Smith
Dr. William Soileau
The Rev. William H. Terry
The Rev. William Thiele, Ph.D.
The Rev. Jennie Thomas
The Rev. Ron Unger
The Rev. Deanna Vandiver
The Rev. Tom Watson
The Rev. Dwight Webster, Ph. D.

