

Eviction Press Conference

Rev. Dave Swanson - Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network

A careful student of history will quickly learn that, left unchecked, human societies usually designate certain people to occupy a vulnerable and precarious position within the group. This happens so frequently, it is as if a force were guiding groups to function this way. The civilizations commonly thought of as being the greatest all carried within them the ugly truth of the ones whose lives were forfeit for the sake of a dominant caste.

But another force also emerged in history. In the ancient Near East, *Adonai* reached out to the people of Israel drawing them out of slavery. Hundreds of years later, Jesus identified himself with those on the margins, saying, “Just as you did it to the least of these... you did it to me.”

This emergent source of power was rooted in a new fact: The divine spirit identifies with and seeks the flourishing of those who struggle under the weights of violence, slavery, poverty, and social vulnerability. This fact is a bell that has rung true over the centuries, even the bloodiest one, the twentieth. In its early decades, Mahatma Gandhi rang the bell, bringing forth the riches of Hinduism to power a movement for freedom in India, not only from the clutches of British imperial overlords, but also from the system that produced untouchables, the designated caste stuck at the bottom of that society’s ladder.

At mid-century, while the whole world watched, the African-American Church rang the bell and reeducated the Christian world to truths it had long buried: God desires liberation for those who struggle under injustice and empowers them to bring it about. Further, God’s dream for the world is Beloved Community: a society where mutual flourishing is brought forth across all our diversities.

In our time and place, we must ring the bell again. The scourges of violence, poverty and injustice have not yet been eradicated. And if any need convincing of this, they can remember that today is the three-year anniversary of the murder of eleven people at Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill.

Right now a thousand of our neighbors are facing eviction as the weather turns cold, as our young children are still not vaccinated from COVID, and as the mental health of many suffers under the strain of the pandemic. Another 11,000 are walking the knife’s edge, haunted by the spectre of eviction as they wait to see if rental assistance is forthcoming.

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This is our opportunity to tap into this same force for justice. Soul Force that rests in the divine promise of power and courage to loose the bonds of oppression. God is with the vulnerable and if we fail to protect our siblings whose homes and families are at risk at this moment, we essentially kick, not only them to the curb, but the divine spirit as well..

With this courage in our heart and power in our limbs and voices, we must speak and we must act. Right now, join me as we march over to Judge Clark's offices and demand that she stop these evictions! It was for freedom that we have been set free. Let's practice freedom and justice together.