

## E-News for 4/5/23

On March 25, Community Church of Chesterland (a member of the United Church of Christ with whom we have a full-communion agreement) was attacked with Molotov cocktails in attempt to burn it down because of their plan to host a Drag Story Hour. Fortunately, no one was hurt, the person believed to have committed this crime has been arrested, and the church's ministry went forward without further violence. This event is a sad reminder that religious violence has been part of our faith from the very beginning: Jesus was crucified, Stephen was stoned, and the early church faced persecution and discrimination. Some Christians continue to face discrimination today. As we enter Holy Week, let us remember that this week is often a dangerous time for our siblings in other countries when attacks on their homes, businesses, and places of worship increase because these holy days draw attention to how they are different from their neighbors. Let us also remember that we, as Christians, have also been the perpetrators of that violence as some of our siblings have carried out these attacks believing that they are "in Jesus' name." As we enter Holy Week our Jewish siblings are also entering Passover; the confluence of these holy days has ended in bloodshed time and again throughout history.

I encourage all our congregations to be mindful of security as you go about your ministry and consult with local law enforcement and your insurance provider for helpful guidance. Our denomination, and State and Federal Agencies have also provided some resources for houses of worship to think through security issues including:

[Ohio Emergency Management Agency](#)  
[US Department of Homeland Security](#)  
[Federal Emergency Management Agency](#)  
[Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#)

I also encourage you to reach out to your neighbors, particularly those with whom you may not always agree or share the same faith, so that we can develop relationships of respect and understanding that can be the basis for enduring peace. If you need some help on that the [PCUSA Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations](#) would be glad to help!

Finally, in addition to building good policies and healthy relationships I encourage you to remember the words of *A Brief Statement of Faith* in which we declare that "In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace." With that courage, let us pray:

God of righteousness and peace,  
We pray for all of our siblings in the human family  
Who have suffered violence and persecution.  
Where we disagree, help us to do so with the spirit of peace.  
Where our actions have hurt others, forgive us.  
Where the actions of others have hurt us, help us be reconciled.  
Teach us once more to follow the Way of Jesus in the world:  
To forgive and turn the other cheek, and  
To cry for justice and lift up the oppressed.  
As we once more return to the tomb this Good Friday,  
Renew in us the hope of Resurrection:  
That indeed, the powers of death, have lost their sting  
And your Way of Peace will have the final victory. Amen.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,  
Barry