

OUR DOORS AND OUR HEARTS WILL REMAIN OPEN



A TRAGIC ACT OF VIOLENCE IN KNOXVILLE

On Sunday July 27th, the peace of the morning worship service at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church was shattered by violence. A man beset by his



personal demons opened fire with a shotgun just as the youth of the congregation were about to begin a performance. Two people were killed and six others were wounded

before brave members of the congregation wrestled the gunman to the ground.

We mourn the loss of Greg McKendry and Linda Kraeger, and our hearts and prayers go out to their families and friends. We are praying for the recovery of the wounded.

And we celebrate the bravery of the congregants who, with no thought for their own safety, rushed to disarm the shooter before he could kill others.

Our prayers are also with the shooter, that he may find peace and reconciliation.

The tragic events of that morning have much to tell us about the Unitarian Universalists of Knoxville and about the larger Unitarian Universalist faith community.

STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE

In the aftermath of this horrible tragedy, it would be understandable if the Knoxville Unitarian Universalists responded with anger, with fear, or with despair. Instead, they have greeted hatred with love and have created meaning from a horribly destructive act. Their courage, their love, and their unbreakable spirit have been an inspiration to people everywhere.

Police reports suggest that the Tennessee Valley Church may have been targeted because of the congregation's justice

work in the community: opening its doors in welcome to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people; feeding and housing the homeless; and working for racial justice. Indeed, TVUUC faithfully embodies Unitarian Universalism's focus on deeds, not creeds.

Unitarian Universalists know that our congregations are places where our spirits can be nurtured and we will be lovingly supported on our spiritual journeys. But we are not content to leave our faith in our sanctuaries when Sunday worship has ended. We are called by our faith to help heal our world. And we thank people of all faiths who have reached out with support.



On August 3rd, just one week after the joy and innocence of their Sunday service was defiled by gunfire, the TVUUC congregation rededicated their sanctuary to peace. Inspired by the Unitarian Universalists of Knoxville, Unitarian Universalists everywhere have rededicated themselves to our religious mission: to welcome the stranger, to love our neighbor, to work for justice, to nurture the spirits of all who seek a liberal religious home, and to help heal this wounded world.

We will not give in to fear. We will meet hatred with love. We will continue to work for justice. Our hearts, and the doors of our more than 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations nationwide, remain open. Unitarian Universalists stand on the side of love. We invite you to stand with us.



In faith,

Rev. William Sinkford

Rev. William Sinkford
President
Unitarian Universalist Association
of Congregations

NURTURE YOUR SPIRIT. HELP HEAL OUR WORLD.



**Unitarian
Universalist**
CONGREGATIONS
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For more information about Unitarian Universalism,
please visit UUA.org/welcome and watch our video, *Voices of a Liberal Faith*.