



## THE UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BARNSTABLE

*Unitarian Universalist*

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Dear Governor Baker, I am the Rev. Dr. Kristen Harper, the minister of the Unitarian Church of Barnstable and a Massachusetts resident. In the midst of all the fearful and hate filled rhetoric surrounding the acceptance or rejection of Syrian refugees, I felt compelled to share my concerns about your stance against welcoming those who need us most now to settle in our beloved state. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, in his book Strength to Love, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool." It is my humble hope that the calling of my conscience might invite you to think deeply about the position you have taken.

On the eve of Thanksgiving one cannot help but remember that the Pilgrims, who arrived on Cape Cod November 11, 1620, were refugees fleeing religious persecution. They came to America hoping to find a place of freedom, where they could worship their God as they experienced him. Half of their number died the first winter in Plymouth and they would probably have all perished if not for the welcome they received from the Native peoples of the Wampanoag Tribe. History tells us that the first formal contact between the Pilgrims and the Native Americans was when Samoset walked into the settlement in Plymouth and said, "Welcome Englishmen."

According to history, Massasoit, the leader of the Wampanoag, was apprehensive at first about the Pilgrims because other English men had killed members of his tribe. Sound familiar? But he did not refuse the Pilgrims aid. He did not put them in internment camps or kill them. He

did not force them to leave or to worship the way his people did. Within a month the two groups had established a treaty. But their relationship did not end there. Squanto, who had spent time as a slave in Europe and spoke English, stayed with the Pilgrims and taught them subsistence farming and helped them set up trade agreements with the Wampanoag. This man who had once been enslaved by the English gave them hospitality and refuge.

Governor, as you sit down at your table to celebrate Thanksgiving, and give praise for all the blessings in your life, I ask that you consider how our ancestors were welcomed and whether or not we have a moral obligation to do the same with others fleeing persecution.

I have a great respect for the history of our nation. So many of our ancestors and relatives have come to the United States seeking sanctuary from war, religious, political and ethnic persecution, genocide, and oppression. The Emma Lazarus quote on the Statue of Liberty is not just some pretty sounding words—"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me. I lift up my lamp beside the golden door." It doesn't say only if you are Christian. These words are important to who we are, our identity as a nation.

It is clear that many people are afraid after the attacks in Paris by the extremists. So am I. I fear another Marathon Bombing, another 9/11, another something I cannot even imagine. However too often when we allow our fear to lead, we confuse the stranger with our enemy. Too often fear leads us to act out of our worst selves. Too often fear leads to ignorance and hatred. Our fear will not keep us safe and giving into our fear only gives power to ISIS and those who wish to destroy our way of life. I am sure governor that you recognize that the Syrian Refugees too are afraid. They are afraid of the war and terrorism occurring around them every day. They are afraid they will not make the journey to safety. They are afraid no country will take them in. They are afraid of dying in the camps. They are afraid they will be pushed back into the ocean and rejected.

Not accepting refugees has consequences. I wonder if you were aware of the U.S. refusal to admit over 900 Jewish refugees that had sailed from Hamburg Germany during WWII. 254 of them died in concentration camps. The rest were taken in by England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The U.S. also rejected a proposal that would have saved 20,000 Jewish children. Their deaths are a shameful part of our history.

Governor, as you are aware, many of the most shameful moments in our history were the result of our acting out of our fear and ignorance. Such as the Jim Crow Laws that degraded and dehumanized African Americans, forcing them into second-class citizen status. In the name of protecting good white Christians, the Ku Klux Klan was formed and terrorized, ostracized and murdered black citizens. Our government stood aside and let persecution of these former slaves continue until the 1960s. Not a highlight in our history.

Even closer to home were the Salem Witch Trials where we hung, burned and drowned women who were accused of witchcraft. And of course there was the Trail of Tears where tens of thousands of Native Americans from four different states, were forced off their ancestral lands and made to walk thousands of miles to Oklahoma. Thousands of the Natives died on the way from disease, hunger and frostbite. And then there was the forced relocation and incarceration of 120,000 people of Japanese descent during World War II. The calls to do the same to Syrians frightens me but the suggestion that we force Muslims to register chills my soul. Is that not how it began in Nazi Germany. Will we become the new Fascists? Will we let this land of freedom and promise and possibilities fade into a land of suspicion, hatred and fear?

It was March 4, 1933, Governor. The Stock Market had crashed and thousands of U.S. citizens were unemployed. Banks were shutting down. Food lines stretched for blocks. War in Europe was on the horizon. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his first inaugural address as President said, "Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—

nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes the needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.” Please do not let fear prevent us from saving thousands of lives.

Aldous Huxley agreed with the biblical notion that “Love casts out fear.” But he added, “conversely, fear casts out love...” Fear, he went on also “casts out intelligence, casts out goodness, casts out all thoughts of beauty and truth.” Rev. Sara Moore Campbell concludes that, “In fear we isolate ourselves, in love, we connect with others. In fear we become immobilized. In love, we are empowered to act. In fear, we judge others. In love, we seek justice. In fear, we distrust. In love, we trust. In fear we seek punishment. In love, we seek mercy and forgiveness. In fear, we see death. In love, we see life. In fear, we retreat. In love, we reach out. Let us respond to our times with love. Let us reach out.” Let it not be said we responded to desperation and hope with denial and fear.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Kristen L. Harper