



Our mission: To embody mercy, justice, and love
as diverse faith partners in Washington County

www.harccoalition.org

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Statement from HARC

The Hagerstown Area Religious Council (HARC) is committed to providing a constructive and meaningful forum for interfaith cooperation and collaborative service throughout Washington County. While our focus is typically on programs and interfaith dialogue, from time to time we speak out when issues of injustice arise that concern our agreed upon values.

One of HARC's core values is: "We believe that all people have equal value and are loved by God." No exceptions. Most major religions teach that we are to "love our neighbor," so we also strive to uphold that teaching. Whether you are on the "left," on the "right," "in the middle," or avoid politics altogether, you are loved by God and we love you. Whether you are Native American, a U.S. citizen born from generations of U.S. Citizens, or an immigrant seeking refuge in this country, you are loved by God and we love you. The list goes on.

Because of this core value, we are anguished when we see policies and actions that de-value people. Right here in our community, we have seen the effects of division and the effects of policies and practices that hurt the most vulnerable of God's children among us. When ICE arrests, detains, and seeks to deport a woman who is legally here, who committed a crime 19 years ago, but paid her debt and did her time, and now is a business owner contributing to the community... that is not love or even justice; we cry for her and her family, and our community is wounded. This is not an isolated incident in Washington County, but is only the most public example of the acts of dehumanization that are happening.

We are also grieved when our local leaders are treated with disrespectful vitriol regularly as they try to do their jobs and serve our community. When people of different political parties disparage one another instead of seeking common ground.

We envision a better community, nation and world where:

*Diversity of body, background and thought is seen as beautiful,
Everyone is made to feel welcome and loved,
Everyone has an opportunity to thrive spiritually and economically,
And we work together, regardless of our differences, to seek truth, fairness, kindness, and caring
actions that benefit everyone.*

Through our work, our collaboration of faith communities are striving to live out this vision. HARC is welcoming new neighbors through the Refugee Welcome Network, working side-by-side with our

schools to feed and enrich children, loving and promoting diversity through our racial justice efforts, and partnering with other organizations to end child poverty in the south end of Hagerstown. We strive to protect, support and LOVE the most vulnerable people and each other.

We have seen signs of this all around our community as well! Many people have rallied to stand up for Mong Tuyen Thi Tran (“Melissa”), protesting her arrest and writing letters to leaders attesting to her character, her humanity, and her very real contributions to the local economy and community. We have seen many individuals and organizations doing their part to love their neighbors with their words and actions, serving those most in need.

We ask that everyone, no matter your religious affiliation or lack thereof, join with us to live out the vision of love and kindness, to build a world where the rights of every human being are cherished and all are allowed to live with the dignity and respect they deserve. We ask that everyone speak out when you see acts of injustice, of hate, of division.

In this pivotal time, we cannot remain silent or still. Within the context of your belief system, we ask you to find a value-aligned action, no matter how small you think it may be, that speaks to you. Whether it is simply being kind and listening to someone across the political aisle, writing to leaders, attending protests to stand up for someone or something that matters, or challenging your friends in a loving way to see the humanity in everyone, all actions matter.

Rabbi Mark Perman, HARC President

Rev. Les McIntosh, HARC Vice President

Kathy Powderly, Executive Director