



Message to the Macalester Community Following the  
Mass Murder at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh

We live in deeply troubling times.

The mass murder of Jews in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh—surely among the most destructive acts of anti-Semitism in American history—comes on the heels of the racist murder of two African Americans in Kentucky and the mailing of pipe bombs to more than a dozen Democratic political figures and activists by a white supremacist.

First and most important, we must mourn the loss of so many lives and offer support to all in our community and in the communities beyond the campus who are deeply affected by these horrific acts. We must, as always, counter hate with love, fear with courage, and attempts to divide with demonstrations of solidarity.

But we must also acknowledge the broader currents in our society that are making these acts more likely. One reads all the time, in the wake of such atrocities, that “this is not who we are.” And while it is true that we are surrounded every day by large and small acts of kindness and love, this much is also true: so long as we refuse to enact sensible gun laws; so long as we pretend that anti-Semitism and racism and xenophobia are aberrant and uncommon; so long as we elect leaders who enflame the worst aspects of human nature for political gain; so long as we do these things, this is indeed who we are.

And only we have the power to change things. This begins with an acknowledgment of our failures and continues with actions, in the voting booth and elsewhere, that express our rejection of hate, bigotry, and violence.

I must add something, finally, about the explicitly anti-Semitic nature of the Pittsburgh murders. The President of the United States initially expressed surprise that such things could still happen today. This reveals a profound ignorance of history, of the sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the United States and around the world, and of his own role in encouraging, whether tacitly or openly, anti-Semites. When white supremacists who march in Charlottesville chanting “Jews will not replace us” are not explicitly condemned by the ostensible leader of our country as anti-Semites, that empowers and encourages them.

Today my heart breaks. But I must be honest and say, as I must too often in these times, today I am very, very angry.

Sending love to you all,

Brian Rosenberg  
President, Macalester College  
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**THE PRESIDENT**

1600 Grand Avenue  
Saint Paul, Minnesota  
55105-1899

651-696-6207  
rosenbergb@macalester.edu  
macalester.edu