

Remarks at Vigil.            29 October 2018

Thank you all for coming this evening.

At this moment in our national life when it seems we can no longer be shocked by verbal and physical assaults on human dignity, we find ourselves once again shocked--and rocked to the core of our sensibilities. What seems beyond belief has become the news of the day. The senseless and hate-filled murders that took place over the weekend in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill have left all people of good will disturbed and broken and longing for some sense to be made of these tragic events. But there is no sense to be made of them other than to see playing out the logic of deep-seated hatred that finally expresses itself in violence. These acts of violence were directed at peaceful people who were coming together in the safety and security of their community house of worship—and the serenity of those moments of prayerful reflection given over in respite from the busyness of life--time given over to God--was shattered by gunfire, wounding and death.

These are sad days, and we grieve for all those affected by these events—and that should include not only the families and friends of the shooting victims, but all of us. Sad days, yes, but also a time when we need to recommit ourselves to core values and common values—the values we honor here in the university setting: the values of respectful and non-violent engagement, of learning, of our need for listening and sharing in the possibility of transformative dialogue. Love is stronger than hate, stronger than death, many of us believe, and we see that in the outpouring of care directed towards the victims of this latest shooting—we see that in your presence here this evening. In the days ahead, attend to those you love and those you do not know and need to understand. Remember that violence can issue in murder, but the hierarchy of violence begins with seemingly inconsequential things like rolling your eyes or gossiping and with all the little things we do every day that demean or disrespect others. We must commit to a better way of engaging, of living together, and of accepting--not just tolerating--one another, for in that move forward we experience the connections we all have to one another: the love that is stronger than hate, the love that is stronger than death.