

Rev. VanderWeele attended the First UU service where anti-choice protestors disrupted worship. This letter was written in response. 40 local faith leaders signed on to say that the Space for Worship is Sacred.

<http://www.theneworleansadvocate.com/opinion/9819330-171/letters-worship-is-sacred>

## Letter: Time, space for worship sacred

ADVOCATE STORY    Aug. 04, 2014

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On Sunday morning, July 20, the sacred time and space of a historic New Orleans congregation was violated. As congregants of First Unitarian Universalist Church, founded in 1833, held a moment of silent prayer to grieve a young woman of the church who had died the previous week, protestors from Operation Save America began to harangue the minister and spew words of hate to and at the congregation. In shock, but with increasing pain as these diatribes continued, the congregation listened quietly as protestors vilified and insulted them. Soon, though, the protestors were ushered out of the church.

As this was happening in the sanctuary, other protesters, holding grotesque images, massed around the windows of the church nursery, screaming at the babies and toddlers. Youth were told they were “going to hell” and that their family members were suffering from illness due to their sins. The church members responded by singing words of love, justice and freedom to counteract this hateful rhetoric.

For religious communities in the United States, the freedom to worship is a deeply cherished right. Whatever our faith, whenever we worship, the right to worship as we choose was fought for by our ancestors and is vital to all today. Along with this freedom comes the right to disagree, which is one part of the pluralism created by our religious freedom.

But all of us agree that no one has the right to desecrate the sacred worship time and space in order to express their disagreement. The undersigned people of faith do not agree on everything. In fact, some of us only agree that we have the right to disagree. But that is enough. No congregation, whatever their views may be, should have their sacred worship time and space violated. Not ever. Not by anybody.

I and 39 other local religious leaders by this letter call on the larger community to stand with us,

with hearts joined on the side of love and in opposition to religious terrorism.

The Rev. Jim VanderWeele, New Orleans  
The Rev. William Barnwell  
The Rev. Paul Beedle  
The Rev. Claire Vonk Brooks  
The Rev. Gary Brooks  
Pat Bryant, co-moderator, Justice and Beyond  
The Rev. Callie Winn Crawford  
Rabbi Edward Paul Cohn  
The Rev. Jeff Conner  
The Rev. Rob Courtney  
The Rev. Don Frampton  
The Rev. Lauren Frazier-McGuin  
The Rev. Joann M. Garma  
Vanessa Gueringer, vice president, A Community Voice  
Michael G. Hackett, deacon, Diocese of Louisiana  
The Very Rev. AJ Heine  
The Rev. Henry L. Hudson  
The Rev. Eronica C. King  
Rabbi Ethan Linden  
Rabbi Robert H. Loewy  
The Rev. Dr. Jane Mauldin  
The Rev. Priscilla Maumus  
The Rev. Herbert McGuin, III  
Rabbi Barbara Metzger  
The Rev. Melanie Morel-Ensminger  
Max Niedzwiecki, convener  
Tom Paine, pastor  
The Rev. Fred Powell, III  
The Rev. Tony Rigoli, OMI  
The Rev. Darcy Roake  
Minister Norbert Rome  
The Rev. Mitchell Smith  
Dr. William Soileau  
The Rev. William H. Terry  
The Rev. William Thiele, Ph.D.  
The Rev. Jennie Thomas  
The Rev. Ron Unger  
The Rev. Deanna Vandiver  
The Rev. Tom Watson  
The Rev. Dwight Webster, Ph. D.

