

Clergy march in Washington against white supremacy

The protest focusing on hate crimes, mass incarceration, and discrimination received larger support after Charlottesville.

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [September 27, 2017](#) issue



One Thousand Ministers March for Justice—attended by an estimated 3,000—on August 28, 2017, in Washington, D.C. RNS photo by Adelle M. Banks.

From Protestant preachers to Jewish cantors to Catholic nuns, religious leaders of a range of faiths demonstrated in Washington, D.C., for racial justice, criticizing the silence of some within their own ranks on the subject of white supremacy.

Wearing stoles, robes, and yarmulkes, the participants proceeded August 28 on a 1.7-mile route from the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial to the Justice Department. Organizers estimated close to 3,000 ministers took part, a larger turnout than suggested by the title of the event: "One Thousand Ministers March for Justice."

“We wanted to say this nation is in moral trouble,” Al Sharpton told those assembled at the King memorial.

One protester carried a sign saying “Black Lives Matter To This Rabbi.”

The march was originally planned to protest increased hate crimes, mass incarceration, and discrimination and to call on the Trump administration and Attorney General Jeff Sessions to address those issues.

But the recent violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, where neo-Nazi, white supremacist, and white nationalist protesters clashed with anti-racism activists, prompted increased interest in the gathering.

Sister Patricia Chappell, executive director of Pax Christi USA, who is a black Catholic nun, decried white supremacy. She believes that “even our institutional church is racist” and needs to address some of its policies and practices.

Sharpton’s National Action Network spearheaded the march on the 54th anniversary of the March on Washington. Many of the people had planned to be at the march before the Charlottesville events spurred more to join them. Some speakers addressed other issues that concern them, such as criminal justice, voter suppression, and health care reform.

“You’re going to see the victims of Nazism, the victims of white supremacy march today to the Justice Department,” Sharpton said just before leading the march through downtown Washington.

Jamal-Harrison Bryant, an African Methodist Episcopal pastor from Baltimore, criticized evangelical ministers who support and advise the president “and declare erroneously an outright lie—that Donald Trump is a man of God,” he said. “They do not reflect the body of Christ at large.”

The interfaith crowd took part in a call-and-response conversation with speakers who urged them to sing, recite scripture, and high-five each other in shows of unity.

“Let me tell all the white supremacists and KKK and everybody that America is a multifaith country—do you all agree?” said Sikh leader Rajwant Singh, who was greeted by cheers. “America belongs to all of us.”

Jonah Dov Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, recalled that Jews marched 5,000 years ago “out of Pharaoh’s slavery and bondage in Egypt,” he said. “And we know today that we do have the power to break the bondage of the modern pharaoh.”

The National Action Network, a predominantly black, Christian organization, also was an organizer of a 50th anniversary commemoration of the March on Washington that was held in 2013 and drew throngs to the National Mall to remember the event that featured King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Monday’s march originally focused on clergy but some groups encouraged all people of faith to attend.

Some clergy who have supported or advised Trump gathered at the National Press Club instead of at the King Memorial and issued a statement about the need for the government and religious officials to do more to bridge racial divides.

“Naturally, we need government, business, law enforcement, and community stakeholders to partner with us,” their statement read. “The glue that will keep our nation together, though, is the Church and faith leaders.” —Religion News Service

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