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Looking Forward

Looking Forward: Outshine the darkness with hope, light



By Mark James Miller, August 25, 2017

"Shining a light on hate groups is the most urgent moral imperative of today for advocates of social justice," says Dawn Addis, one of the organizers and speakers at the Outshine the Darkness rally.

"We cannot fight this with hatred," she continues. "But we can band together, en masse, to say no to the message the hate groups preach."

Less than a week after the shocking events in Charlottesville, a remarkable coalition of progressive groups came together in Mission Plaza in San Luis Obispo. Their purpose was not only to declare solidarity with the counter-protestors of Charlottesville, but also to send a message of love, hope and unity in the wake of the ugly violence that came along with the Unite the Right gathering, and resurgence of white supremacist groups and the alt-right all over the country.

More than 1,000 people came to the event in Mission Plaza. They carried signs that read "Dump Trump"; "No KKK, No Nazis, No Alt-Right"; and "Stand With Heather," a reference to Heather Heyer, the young woman who was killed when she was struck by a car driven by a white supremacist. Her last Facebook post — "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention" — was seen and heard over and over.

Whether the events of Charlottesville will be remembered as a watershed moment in American history — like the water cannon blasting peaceful protestors in Birmingham in 1963, or that of police dogs attacking the marchers in Selma in 1965 — remains to be seen. But the recent spate of right-wing violence, and the sight of white supremacists marching with Nazi swastikas and chanting "Blood and soil" as well as "Jews will not replace us" — many of whom feel they have the support of the current president — has

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brought about a backlash the likes of which has not been seen in many years. Dawn Addis agrees.

"I do believe Charlottesville will go down as a turning point," she says. Addis recalls that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once commented that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but bends toward justice. We need history to see that America did not wait for the arc to bend, but that we bent the arc ourselves so that peace and justice reigned."

A recent study by the Southern Poverty Law Center found that California has the dubious honor of being home to the most hate groups in the country, with 79. Some have innocent-sounding names like Traditional Values Coalition, Pacific Justice Institute and Traditionalist Workers Party. Other names have a more sinister sound — Soldiers of Odin, Gallows Tree Wotansvolk Alliance, and the Western Hammerskins. Some of the other names are more familiar — American Nazi Party and the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

"We must make this the moment when Americans come together and decide that we are better and stronger," said Dawn Addis, once again echoing the message of hope and light overcoming darkness and evil that permeated the rally. Speaker after speaker voiced the same sentiment, including Erica Reyes, representing Congressman Salud Carbajal, and Rabbi Janice Mehring, who was especially mindful of the fact the tiki torches carried by the white nationalists in Charlottesville were eerily reminiscent of the torchlight parades of Nazi Germany.

"Love Trumps Hate" read another sign carried at the rally. And while that phrase has almost become a cliché, there was no better way to convey the message of the rally. As an unknown author said, "Hate is easy. Love takes courage."

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