

**Remarks at an Easter Prayer Breakfast**

*April 14, 2014*

Please, please have a seat. Thank you so much. Well, good morning, everybody.

Welcome to the White House, and welcome to our annual Easter prayer breakfast. As always, we are blessed to be joined by so many good friends from around the country. We've got distinguished guests. We've got faith leaders, members of my administration who are here. And I will once again resist the temptation to preach to preachers. [*Laughter*] It never works out well. I am reminded of the admonition from the Book of Romans: "Do not claim to be wiser than you are." [*Laughter*] So this morning I want to offer some very brief reflections as we start this Easter season.

But as I was preparing my remarks, something intervened yesterday. And so I want to just devote a few words about yesterday's tragedy in Kansas. This morning our prayers are with the people of Overland Park. And we're still learning the details, but this much we know. A gunman opened fire at two Jewish facilities: a community center and a retirement home. Innocent people were killed. Their families were devastated. And this violence has struck at the heart of the Jewish community in Kansas City.

Two of the victims, a grandfather and his teenage son [grandson],<sup>\*</sup> attended the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, which is led by our friend Reverend Adam Hamilton. Some of you may know that during my Inauguration, Reverend Hamilton delivered the sermon at the prayer service at the National Cathedral. And I was grateful for his presence and his words. He joined us at our breakfast last year. And at the Easter service for Palm Sunday last night, he had to break this terrible news to his congregation.

That this occurred now—as Jews were preparing to celebrate Passover, as Christians were observing Palm Sunday—makes this tragedy all the more painful. And today, as Passover begins, we're seeing a number of synagogues and Jewish community centers take added security precautions. Nobody should have to worry about their security when gathering with their fellow believers. No one should ever have to fear for their safety when they go to pray.

And as a government, we're going to provide whatever assistance is needed to support the investigation. As Americans, we not only need to open our hearts to the families of the victims, we've got to stand united against this kind of terrible violence, which has no place in our society. And we have to keep coming together across faiths to combat the ignorance and intolerance, including anti-Semitism, that can lead to hatred and to violence, because we're all children of God. We're all made in His image, all worthy of his love and dignity. And we see what happens around the world when this kind of religious-based or -tinged violence can rear its ugly head. It's got no place in our society.

So this Easter week, of course, we recognize that there's a lot of pain and a lot of sin and a lot of tragedy in this world, but we're also overwhelmed by the grace of an awesome God. We're reminded how He loves us, so deeply that He gave his only begotten Son so that we might live through Him. And in these Holy Days, we recall all that Jesus endured for us: the scorn of the crowds and the pain of the crucifixion. In our Christian religious tradition, we

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<sup>\*</sup> White House correction.

celebrate the glory of the Resurrection, all so that we might be forgiven of our sins and granted everlasting life.

And more than 2,000 years later, it inspires us still. We are drawn to His timeless teachings, challenged to be worthy of His sacrifice, to emulate as best we can His eternal example to love one another just as He loves us. And of course, we're always reminded each and every day that we fall short of that example. And none of us are free from sin, but we can look to His life and strive, knowing that "if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us."

I'll tell you, I felt this spirit when I had the great honor of meeting His Holiness Pope Francis recently. I think it's fair to say that his—those of us of the Christian faith, regardless of our denomination, have been touched and moved by Pope Francis. Now, some of it is his words: his message of justice and inclusion, especially for the poor and the outcast. He implores us to see the inherent dignity in each human being. But it's also his deeds, simple yet profound: hugging the homeless man or washing the feet of somebody who, normally, ordinary folks would just pass by on the street. He reminds us that all of us, no matter what our station, have an obligation to live righteously, and that we all have an obligation to live humbly. Because that's, in fact, the example that we profess to follow.

So I had a wonderful conversation with Pope Francis, mainly about the imperatives of addressing poverty and inequality. And I invited him to come to the United States, and I sincerely hope he will. When we exchanged gifts, he gave me a copy of his inspired writings, "The Joy of the Gospel." And there is a passage that speaks to us today: "Christ's resurrection," he writes, "is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world." And he adds: "Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope!"

So this morning my main message is just to say thank you to all of you, because you don't remain on the sidelines. I want to thank you for your ministries, for your good works, for the marching you do for justice and dignity and inclusion, for the ministries that all of you attend to and have helped organize throughout your communities each and every day to feed the hungry and house the homeless and educate children who so desperately need an education. You have made a difference in so many different ways, not only here in the United States, but overseas as well. And that includes a cause close to my heart, My Brother's Keeper, an initiative that we recently launched to make sure that more boys and young men of color can overcome the odds and achieve their dreams.

And we're joined by several faith leaders who are doing outstanding work in this area, mentoring and helping young men in tough neighborhoods. We're also joined by some of these young men who are working hard and trying to be good students and good sons and good citizens. And I want to say to each of those young men here, we're proud of you, and we expect a lot of you. And we're going to make sure that we're there for you so that you then in turn will be there for the next generation of young men.

And I mention all this because of all of our many partners for My Brother's Keeper, it's clergy like you and your congregations that can play a special role to be that spiritual and ethical foundation, that rock, that so many young men need in their lives.

So I want to thank all of you who are already involved. I invite those who are not to get more information, see if you can join in this effort as brothers and sisters in Christ who "never tire of doing good."

And in closing, I'll just recall that old prayer that I think more than one preacher has invoked at the pulpit: "Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff, and nudge me when I've said enough." [*Laughter*] The Almighty is nudging me. I thank you for joining us this morning of prayer. I wish you all a blessed Holy Week and Easter, and I'd like to invite my friend Joel Hunter to deliver the opening prayer. Come on up, Joel.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:27 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Frazier Glenn Miller, Jr., suspected gunman in the April 13 shootings at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City in Overland, KS; William L. Corporon and his grandson Reat G. Underwood, who were killed in the shootings; Adam Hamilton, founding pastor, United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS; and Joel C. Hunter, senior pastor, Northland, A Church Distributed, in Longwood, FL.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Easter prayer breakfast.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Corporon, William L.; Francis, Pope; Hamilton, Adam; Hunter, Joel C.; Miller, Frazier Glenn, Jr.; Underwood, Reat G.

*Subjects:* Civil rights : Freedom of religion; Civil rights : Minorities :: Anti-Semitism; Faith-based and community organizations : Programs and services; Holidays and special observances : Easter; Holidays and special observances : Passover; Holy See (Vatican City) : Pope; Kansas : Shootings in Overland Park; White House Office : "My Brother's Keeper" initiative.

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