



GAMALIEL

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

January 8, 2021

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Gamaliel Statement on the Exoneration of Rusten Sheskey

Kenosha, WI — The members of the Gamaliel Network stand with our brothers and sisters in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Once again, a victim of police abuse of power is on the wrong side of justice. For Jacob Blake, his judgment is lifetime paralysis after being shot in the back seven times, and two years probation after pleading guilty to lesser charges. The officer who shot Mr. Blake avoided charges after the Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley refused to file charges against the officer. For far too long African Americans have been the victims of inhumane treatment by law enforcement who are shielded by qualified immunity, biased prosecutors or both. We cannot, and we will no longer tolerate unequal protection under the law. Everyone deemed culpable should be held accountable in this heinous form of domestic terrorism also known as police brutality--from mayors to police chiefs, prosecutors and judges. This imprudent decision by the District Attorney further supports the need to call for the dismantling of qualified immunity.

As people of faith, united in the Abrahamic tradition, the image of God is not distributed discriminately to where people of color have been left out. The image of God is just as present in Black bodies as it is in White bodies and until this country agrees to stand on the principle of one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all, we will continue to live among the unbalanced scales of justice.

We share here the statement issued on January 6, 2021 by Gamaliel affiliate Congregations United to Serve Humanity (CUSH) in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

“TO THE COMMUNITY OF KENOSHA —

Kenosha District Attorney Graveley expounded Tuesday on the legal and factual reasons that neither officer Rusten Sheskey nor his colleagues would face charges for their involvement in the paralyzing shooting of Jacob Blake. While we understand the basis for the decision and we recognize that the law was on the side of the officers, we are troubled by the forces that caused this tragic situation.

We have seen, time and again, law enforcement committing crimes more egregious than those they were trying to prevent, protected by statutes and policy that insulate them from accountability for their actions. The recent dismissal of charges for officers responsible for the murders of Tamir Rice and Breonna Taylor were apt prelude to the decision in the Jacob Blake case and only add to the frustration and grief we in the Kenosha faith community feel for all who have been denied justice.

As religious leaders committed to pursuing peaceful ends through peaceful means, we implore all who protest to do so responsibly and without violence. Further, we are all the more steadfast in our belief that laws and policing policies that legitimize what happened to Jacob Blake are unjust and need to be rectified.

We believe that, while the actions of the officers involved in the incident on August 23, 2020 have been deemed to conform to the letter of the law, there were other options open to the officers that would have caused less harm to Mr. Blake and less trauma to the witnesses, including children. We call for disciplinary action against all three officers involved in the incident of August 23rd, 2020 for not taking those other actions.

We are further concerned about the actions of law enforcement in the days that followed this incident, specifically the welcoming of armed citizens to our city and the disregard of their violations of the law while protestors and others out after curfew were subject to arrest and treated harshly. We call for an examination of these actions and ask that Chief Miskinis and Mayor Antaramian take responsibility for failing to address these deficiencies and inequities. These oversights show complicity in perpetuating a culture of fear and the suppression of citizens' voices which privileges property over people.

Furthermore, we call for a commitment to divest 20% of the city budget currently allocated to law enforcement to invest in black and brown communities in Kenosha, including but not limited to areas affected by the protests in August, ensuring that current residents are able to remain through expanded affordable and subsidized housing even after redevelopment has been completed.

Finally, while the Mayor has established task forces to examine some of the racial issues that persist in Kenosha, we call (yet again) for a reestablishment of the Human Rights Commission in order to better supervise and direct inquiries into human rights abuses by municipal authorities. Until such a group exists and has the resources necessary to perform their duties, no positive change will be lasting.

It is our utmost hope and most sincere prayer that we might take this moment of great pain and use it to fuel a more just and equitable Kenosha for all who live here.

In Faith,
Religious Leaders Caucus,
Congregations United to Serve Humanity
Rabbi Dena A. Feingold, Beth Hillel Temple
Rev. Paul Petersen, St. Mary's Lutheran Church
Rev. Matthew Buterbaugh, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
Pastor Patrick Roberts, First Baptist Church Kenosha
Pastor Kara Baylor, Campus Pastor, Carthage College
Cassie Oliver, CFS Carthage College
Rev. Jonathan Barker, Grace Lutheran Church
Rev. Dr. Monica L. Cummings, Bradford Unitarian Universalist
Rev. Erik David Carlson, Bradford Unitarian Universalist
Russ Hahn, Trinity Church Kenosha
Rev. Jim Lynch, Lakeside Lutheran Church
Judy Seiberlich, OP, Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa
Erica Jordan, OP, Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa
Rev. Dr. Grace Cajiuat, Wesley United Methodist Church
Rev. Susan Patterson-Sumwalt, First United Methodist Church
Fr. Gerald Hessel, St. Mark Catholic Church
Fr. Carlos Florez, St. Mark Catholic Church

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Gamaliel is a grassroots network of non-partisan, faith-based organizations in 15 states and 45 regions that has, for more than 35 years, trained ordinary people to effectively participate in the political, environmental, social and economic decisions affecting their lives.