

# In letter, area clergy call for police restraint

June 17, 2020

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MASSACHUSETTS – Three dozen area clergy joined 800 rabbis and cantors from across North America in signing a letter on June 9 urging police and law enforcement not to interfere with peaceful protests taking place throughout the U.S. in response to the killing of George Floyd on May 25.

“Clergy of all faiths have joined in and supported protests happening in cities nationwide,” noted the letter, circulated by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. “Mr. Floyd was a victim of the nation’s long history of brutality against people of color, and particularly Black men. Protests are a just response to all-too-familiar anger, frustration, and pain.

“I stand for the right to peaceful protest and call on our nation’s law enforcement and elected officials not to interfere with this bedrock First Amendment expression,” the letter concluded.

“Free speech is the lifeblood of America,” said one of the local signatories, Cantor Vera Broekhuysen of Temple Emanu-El in Haverhill. “It is also a Jewish value. It deserves protection. I believe that the first care of every police officer and member of law enforcement must be to deescalate violence.

“I hope that the letter reminds those American police and members of law enforcement who need reminding, that peace is not kept by tear gas, by rubber bullets, by slashed water bottles, by wearing riot gear to a protest whose purpose is nonviolent. I hope it inspires them to wage peace,” Broekhuysen added.

Among the signatories from our area are Rabbis Sharon Anisfeld of Hebrew College, Bernard H. Mehlman of Boston’s Temple Israel and Barbara Penzner of Boston’s Temple Hillel B’nai Torah.

“Clergy are called to be a moral voice, lifting up the wisdom in our Jewish texts and history that clearly tells us that the dignity of each person is a part of the dignity of God, as we are all created *b’tzelem Elohim*,” Broekhuysen said. “To deny or degrade

that dignity is *chillul Hashem* – a profanation.”

“I encourage my congregants to find the ways and spaces in which we are able to join the work of dismantling racism in America, and to listen deeply to one another as we do so,” she said.

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