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How We Can Defeat Radical Hate Through Radical Love

4 ways the faith and policy community can work together

by Aaron Graham And Joshua W. Walker • Dec. 11, 2015 • 3 min read • [original](#)

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Standing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee only a few miles away from where the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is today, Jesus preached one of history's most radical messages. The Sermon on the Mount may be more applicable this Christmas season than at perhaps any other time in history. Jesus blessed the peacemakers and the persecuted, while teaching his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. When we have been at our best, Christians and churches throughout history have always been able to respond to the evil and injustice we see in our world and in our communities with love rather than with fear. In short, we should be able to absorb all the bad news and return it with love.

This holiday season, after senseless acts of violence in San Bernardino, Calif., Paris, Sinai, Ankara, Beirut, Syria, Iraq, and too many more, it seems Americans are more fearful than ever. A [new poll](#) finds that Americans are more afraid of terrorism than at any time since Sept. 11, 2001. This fear is beginning to alienate us within the U.S. and make us even more unsafe in the face of ISIS's attacks. America has faced far worse evil than ISIS and triumphed before, but it took a unity of which Washington, D.C. seems incapable at the moment.

This disunity is playing out not just between political parties but between the policy and faith communities. The policy community often sees the faith community as narrow-minded and out of touch; and the faith community often fears that the policy community will reduce their faith or use it as a means to an end. Yet both communities have at their core the motivation to make this world a better place and

serve the public good. Here are four practical ways that the two communities can better partner together to implement common-sense policies that would make us all safer.

1. Start showing up to each other's events with no agenda other than to learn and build relationships. Ceremonial or symbolic gestures between our communities are no longer enough; we must do more to break the very real silos in which our communities live.

2. Invite one another to speak at each other's events. Having policy experts come and speak at our church events, and having faith leaders speak at policy events should be the norm far more than it is. Churches should have an interest in learning how the conflict in the Middle East is destroying the holy sites and hurting people who are made in the image of God. The policy and development community should have an interest in understanding the religious motivations of people to stop the spread of extremism and hate, and create partnerships to deliver aid to those in need on the ground.

3. The faith community can show the policy community how to lead by example. We can encourage policy makers to give their time, expertise and finances to help advance the causes we both care about on the grassroots level. For example, as we prepare for Advent this Christmas season, [The District Church](#) is participating in [National Refugee Sunday](#) and collecting a special offering to help care for Syrian refugees who are fleeing persecution and war. Whether we consider ourselves people of faith or not, we all can respond to the needs of the people of Syria who are living in what has become the greatest humanitarian crisis happening in our world today.

4. The policy community can educate the faith community. They can help correct the narrative of fear that is leading people to refuse to welcome refugees on national security grounds. Many people do not realize [how few people](#) have been arrested for terrorism since 9/11. Refugees are the most vetted group of people to enter America. We are right to think about our national security, but we are wrong to jump to conclusions so quickly.

ISIS represents a very present evil in the world, and our national security establishment is charged with confronting it in a very real way across the globe. But, to paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: the way you drive out darkness is with light, not with more darkness.

For Christians, the Christmas season is when we are reminded of God's extravagant welcome of us, that God sent his one and only son into the world so that we all can be brought into relationship with God. Jesus was a refugee himself and the most revolutionary leader to live in the history of the world. He walked in many of the same places where we see terror and war today. And he taught us to not respond with fear but with love, to not respond with hate but with relationship. May we go and do likewise.

Rev. Dr. Aaron Graham is the Lead Pastor of The District Church in Washington, D.C., and holds a Master's in Public Policy from Harvard's Kennedy School. Dr. Joshua W. Walker teaches National Security at the George Washington University's Elliot School of International Affairs, is a former Senior Advisor at the U.S. Department of State, and was a founding member of the District Church in Washington, D.C. Both graduated of the University of Richmond and are the children of Southern Baptist missionaries.

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