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CONTACT: WardHill Omni Media

LaToya Henry, (313) 447-6404 (c)

Tonie Bell, (313) 802-1817 (c)

America Must Not Surrender to Fear

DETROIT – In 1895, Katharine Lee Bates wrote:

*“America, America, God shed His grace on thee, and crown
thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea.”*

We have been blessed as a nation by the strength and brilliance of a diversity of people. Some arrived here by force, others have migrated here by choice. Nonetheless today, we are all in this great ship called the United States of America, together.

As a minister I am reminded from the book of Matthew 2:13:

*“Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there
until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”*

I am here to stand with my colleagues today to remind our nation and those policy makers that America is composed of a nation of refugees, seeking sanctuary, opportunity and relief just like the celebrant of December 25th, whom many of us know as Jesus the Christ. Lest we forget, many African Americans who are now living up North, left the South to escape 100 years of lynching resulting in thousands of deaths, racial discrimination, and hard times. Let us never forget, the descendants of the German transatlantic liner *St. Louis*, sailing from Hamburg, Germany for Havana, Cuba in 1939. History records there were 937 passengers aboard. Almost all were Jews fleeing from the Third Reich. Most were German citizens, and some were from Eastern Europe. Cuba refused to admit them. The United States Government refused to accept them. There was a great deal of hostility and resentment fueled against these individuals at that time in history. It was stoked by anti-Semitism and xenophobia from agents of Nazi Germany and members of an indigenous right-wing movement. It was hyped in various publications, demonstrations, and other claims that incoming Jews were communists. The *St. Louis* was forced eventually to sail back to Europe. After a month at sea, Britain admitted 288, Holland

181, Belgium 214, and France 224. Of the 288 admitted by Great Britain, all survived World War II except one, killed during an air raid in 1940. 620 passengers returned to Europe. 87 managed to emigrate before the German invasion in 1940. Just over half: 278 survived the Holocaust, 254 died, 84 in Belgium, 84 in Holland, and 86 who had been admitted to France.

We might ask, if we had opened up our hearts and our doors to those huddled masses yearning to be free, from both the American South and the European East, would many more be alive today? The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it so well:

“An injustice to anyone, anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere.”

America is a better nation. We are a better people and our Constitution is the best historic document reflecting the fundamental American values. It stands in the gap against using a religious, racial, or gender barrier for any people. I encourage everyone to read once again the First and the Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. We must not succumb to fear. We must not surrender to the demagoguery and the salacious temptation to turn our backs on the least of these.

Today we have a choice. **WE AS A NATION CAN FORGET EVERYTHING AND RUN, OR WE CAN FACE EVERYTHING AND RISE.** I believe that when good people come together, they have the ability to rise. It must not be about our individual fears and rejection. It must be about our collective faith and conviction, from sea to shining sea.

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