

Dear Colleagues,

We are dismayed concerning the acts of hate and insult directed toward members of the African American community that took place in Opelousas, Louisiana recently. We offer the members of the congregations of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, St. Mary's Baptist Church, and Greater Union Baptist Church our deepest sympathies. We grieve with you and the African American community. We recognize how frightening such crimes are and the devastating impact that they can have on communities who are directly and indirectly touched by them. All of us must stand against hatred in all its forms.

The individual who allegedly set fire to three historic Black churches has been charged with hate crimes. The burning of black churches represents a form of domestic terrorism that at times goes unacknowledged. It is not only a form of hatred it is also an act designed to instigate fear for one's safety. African American churches have traditionally been a source of safety, support, hope, and survival from slavery to present day. These acts are deplorable. The Emory Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee (DISC) Hate Crimes workgroup supports a culture of acceptance and tolerance for all religious viewpoints and perspectives and condemns any act in which anyone feels threatened or scared. We endeavor to strengthen a community culture in which values of empathy, unity and support for every member prevails.

To our members of the African American community impacted by this horrible crime, we recognize that these events occur all too frequently. In 2017, the most recent year for which there are data, the largest number of hate crimes in the US were against African Americans/Blacks. We must join together in the fight against racial intolerance and hatred.

We recommend utilizing the family, community, and faith resources available to you. Should these resources be difficult to access or should you require more assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to behavioral health professionals in our Emory community or throughout greater Atlanta.

Together, we must strive toward a future in which everyone can worship in peace.