

## Statement from the Aspiring White Allies Group Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence

### *How the world will know we are against racism*

August 16, 2017

Dear white person in the middle,

This is for you, the one who's outraged but you're afraid to say something; the one who has friends who might be shocked and offended if you did; the one who just wants to live a good life and stay out of politics and race relations because such things are messy and uncomfortable.

We know where you're coming from. Most of us, at one point or another, have felt just like you feel. We're not here to make you feel guilty or to shame you into doing or saying anything. You see, white person in the middle, we're not perfect. Not even close.

As aspiring white allies, we like to spend a little bit of time calling out highly visible, national examples of racism (such as the terrorism committed in Charlottesville), condemning them, exhorting our fellow white people to stop being racists, lifting up grandiose yet empty promises to people of color that we will do better, and then going about our day.

We need to stop this. Seriously.

We are failing miserably in large part because we are focusing our efforts on the wrong people. Instead of igniting and nurturing the moral conscience of white people like you, we are wasting time speaking to white people who embrace racism.

You see, white people who embrace racism do not believe they are racist. For such people, "racist" is a disparaging adjective that they vehemently deny should ever be applied to them. If anything, they believe that "racist" is a word that should be used to describe *people of color* who dare to exercise their rights as human beings and react angrily or choose to defend themselves against violence and bigotry – i.e., "people of color are constantly claiming whites mistreat them, so they are the racist ones." Furthermore, many racist white people tend to believe that their faith both justifies and absolves them of responsibility for their actions. They care for their families, they go to church, and they involve themselves in community affairs, often giving generously of their time and money. They also march with torches at white supremacist rallies without bothering to conceal their identities and they do it with a genuinely

clear conscience, believing that how they feel about, what they say about, and how they behave toward people of color is not only appropriate, but what God and country intend.

While we must continue to publically call out and condemn these people and what they do, our condemnation of them is not likely to change their hearts, minds, or actions. Nor are we likely to affect the “quiet racists,” those white people who comfortably condone, excuse, and rationalize the racist rantings of friends, partners, and family members.

In the middle are a whole lot of white people like us, those who believe that racism in America is pervasive, is disgusting, and is never, in any circumstances, justified. But when it comes to racism in America, we are by and large invisible because it’s not always clear how we feel about it. We may not be out there chanting racial or ethnic slurs, but neither are we going out of our way on a regular basis to say that such a thing is wrong. We may not wake up next to card-carrying white supremacist partners each morning, but neither are we stepping outside our kitchens, family rooms, or offices to rock the boat enough to get wet.

In other words, if we are truly against racism, how is anyone to know that we are?

So, what exactly are we aspiring white allies to do? What are we asking of you, white person in the middle? Should you hold a vigil or organize your own rally, decorating signs and chanting phrases denouncing racism? Sure, if that’s your thing. Should you make a bold statement on social media or share articles or blogs? Absolutely, if the online world is where you find the widest audience. Should you have discussions with your fellow white friends in the middle about all of this? Most definitely and frequently.

But before, after, and in between all of those things, maybe the most important thing we can do is humbly, genuinely, and visibly invest no less than the remainder of our lives as white people authentically connecting with, listening to, and sharing ourselves with the people who experience the racism that we condemn. In other words, the most important thing we can do is develop genuine relationships with people of color. This is not the insidious tokenism behind proud claims like “I have a Black friend,” nor is it a periodic activity engaged in by an organization in order to appear “culturally competent.” No, this is authentic one-on-one human connection beyond anything that can be captured in a meme, blog, or organizational policy.

If we can do this – if we can invest ourselves in genuine relationships with people of color – *that* is how the world will know that we are against racism. That is how racism in this country can begin to be dismantled once and for all. You see, investing our lives in authentic relationships with people of color ultimately leads us to caring about people of color in ways we’ve never experienced, which in turn leads us to confront racism with a boldness and a purpose that transcend hesitation or discomfort. We white folks already have power because we’re white. If that power is collectively exercised in confronting racism, then racism will not survive.

Every prejudice, every form of bigotry, and every expression of hate are born of the same scourge: fear of the unknown and an unwillingness to face that fear. White supremacists have no interest in getting to know people of color, and because they don't, they will never regard people of color as human beings.

We know better. Now it's time for us to do better. And until we actually do, we must stop promising people of color that we will. So, let's put down our phones, open our eyes, and dare to connect with our fellow human beings.

You won't regret it, white person in the middle. Nor will we who call ourselves Aspiring White Allies.

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