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A Statement by
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Two of our daughters, Carolyn Layton and Ann Moore, and our grandson, Jim Jon, died in Jonestown on November 18, 1978. We knew others, most of whom died, and some of whom survived including Larry Layton, our former son-in-law, Michael Prokes, and Tim Carter. Sharon Amos and her beautiful children died in Georgetown. Patty Cartmill, always a barrel of fun, and her daughter Patricia died. My wife and I will always carry with us memories of other good human beings, not so different from the rest of us, who died in that tragedy. The memory of the beautiful, innocent children who were murdered is the most painful memory of all.

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I write to make my contribution to our common struggle to understand what moved nine hundred brothers and sisters to end their lives. I do not presume to understand, but our experience is part of the data which must be considered by any who would understand.

We all have difficulty with ambiguity. Something within us wants to see the world divided between the good and the evil, between the life-affirming and life-destroying forces. Almost all of the reporting about, and reflection upon Peoples Temple has perceived only one side of this ambiguity. The destructive forces at work in Peoples Temple are so obvious that we fail to discern the constructive forces which were also present in Jonestown. These life-affirming and life-destroying forces were in conflict until the very end.

The assassination of Congressman Ryan and the others shocked and horrified us. That horror was infinitely compounded with news of the mass murder and suicide. We feel the rage of all who rage. We feel the hurt and grief of all

who suffer and sorrow. Unlike most others, we have also known of the humane and caring work of Peoples Temple through the years. The evil and destructive forces, and the good and constructive forces have been a part of the history of Peoples Temple.

How did our children become involved in Peoples Temple?

Through the years all kinds of human beings were attracted to and became members of Peoples Temple including people of all races, Jews as well as Christians, young and old, rich and poor, well educated and others with little schooling, strong and weak, adults who were stable and productive in their vocations as well as people whose lives had been chaotic. It is important to remember this diversity as I relate how our children became involved in Peoples Temple.

There's no simple explanation for the course of peoples' lives. We are all given our genetic inheritance, our family ancestry and social history. We are all on our personal journeys. We all make choices.

The relationship between the events of the sixties and this tragedy can be seen in our family. Our children learned that mothering is caring for more than kin. More than fifteen teenagers and young adults shared our home with our children. Some were normal, but others had problems. From childhood our girls saw their mother respond to people in need from unwed mothers to psychotic adults, and the poor.

Carolyn loved to play, but as president of the church youth group she pushed the members to deal with the serious issues in their lives and in our society. She had a world vision. She traveled to Mexico with her high school Spanish class. Four years later she spent a year studying in France. At the University of California in Davis she majored in political science. As a member of Peoples Temple she stood with the poor as they prepared for and appeared in court. She expressed her caring both in one-to-one relationships and in working to influence legislation.

From 1963 until 1972 when Annie left home, Annie and Becky walked with us in civil rights and anti-Vietnam War marches. We were together in supporting the farm

workers' struggle to organize. They stood in silent peace vigils. In high school they bore their witness to peace with justice in our world. Every year their church youth group provided camping experiences for foster children. When Annie was sixteen, she worked as a volunteer in Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. One who observed her said: "She was a miracle with the children." She decided that she wanted to work in a burn unit, which she did as a registered nurse in the San Francisco General Hospital.

As a member of Peoples Temple, Annie worked with other nurses in taking blood pressure checks and providing sickle cell anemia tests. Education about nutrition was an important part of the teaching program of the church. We visited church homes for the aged and one for retarded boys.

Our children took seriously what we believed about commitment, caring about a better, more humane and just society. They saw in Peoples Temple the same kind of caring for people, and commitment to social justice that they had lived with. They have paid our dues for our commitments and involvement.

Why did the people go to Jonestown?

The people went to Jonestown with hope, hope which grew out of a loss of hope in the United States. There can be no understanding of movements such as Peoples Temple and Jonestown apart from this loss of hope. They migrated, because they had lost hope in any commitment of the American people or the Congress to end racial discrimination and injustice. They had lost hope in the people and the legislatures to deal justly and humanely with the poor. They saw the nation turn inward after the civil rights struggle. They saw the glorification of self interest and affluence. They saw less and less place in our society for people with marginal skills. They saw indifference and callousness in leaders and institutions toward the hopes of the weak and oppressed.

Older people went to Jonestown hoping to become free of purse snatchings,

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muggings, and the harshness of the urban scene. Some young people hoped to learn new skills, or to become free from pressures of peers in the crime and drug scenes. People went to Jonestown to find freedom from the indignity our society heaps upon the poor. They went with hope for a simple, quiet life. They anticipated life in a diverse community. They saw themselves leaving a materialistic society where things are valued more than people. Many went as pioneers to create a new community in the jungle. Still others saw in Jonestown a vision of a new society, a wave of the future.

The letters from our girls, which are attached, reveal something of the life in Jonestown. Our girls liked Jonestown. They often spoke of wanting us to retire there. Their letters speak of the agricultural development, concern for nutrition, with frequent references to the excellent care provided by Larry Schact, child-care, the library, medical services, /school, classes for all ages, the band and entertainers, the beauty of the place, visitors, critics and conspiracy.

We spent four days with members of Peoples Temple in Georgetown and three days in Jonestown last May. Two reports of that experience are attached. It is my impression that our favorable reports were not significantly different from the reports of other visitors to the agricultural project. Outward appearances encouraged us to hope in the viability of the project. The attached publication of Peoples Temple, "Peoples Temple Agricultural Project, Progress Report-Summer 1977" is a straight forward report of the life and work of the project.

It is my judgment that Jim Jones and Peoples Temple chose Guyana as the location for their community, because English is the language, ninety-five percent of the population is either East Indian or Black, the socialist government seemed compatible with their views, and because they had something to offer the government and nation of Guyana.

The Meaning of Jonestown

Scholars who will be trying to understand Peoples Temple and Jonestown will find clues in utopian societies, religious orders, religious movements

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such as the Mennonites and Latter Day Saints, and in Marxism. It is my judgment that they will find more similarities between Peoples Temple with the first phenomena than with Marxism. The principle difference between Peoples Temple and Marxists was their establishment of a community first in the United States and later in Jonestown. I believe that they devoted all of their energies to developing Jonestown as a self-supporting community. In moving from the United States to the jungle, they moved away from influencing any society except by example.

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Every community exercises discipline over its members. The only knowledge I have of discipline in Peoples Temple, other than from what I have read, came several years ago when our youngest daughter lived in a church dormitory while she studied nursing. One of the twenty-five students living in the dorm was a "gold brick." He refused to pull his oar. He was brought before the church for judgment. I don't know what the consequences were, but I assume that the church acted to push him to carry his share of the load as a member of the community.

I do know both how we fail to hold people accountable in our schools, communities, and industry, and also how we discipline members in our society whose behavior is deviant. I know something of the cruelty and brutality and dehumanizing powers which are endemic to our jails and prisons. Whenever I pass judgment upon the way other communities deal with deviant behavior, I am conscious of the ways my society deals with behavior it regards as deviant. This consciousness is not a restraining influence on judgment, but it is a safeguard against self-righteousness.

Peoples Temple supported its members and held them accountable. There was no place for liquor or drugs, other than those used for medicinal purposes, either in the United States or in Jonestown. We were told that at some point in history the young people agreed to abstain from the use of drugs and the adults agreed to abstain from the use of liquor and tobacco. Peoples Temple property in Redwood

Valley had "No Smoking" signs posted. Peoples Temple taught abstinence, because it objected to the use of food grains for liquor as well as because of its damage to the body and mind. The church supported its members as they lived in accordance with its principles and values.

The community which provided support also provided little room for disagreement. We were told that groups working with pigs or chickens, or ground crops, or in the mill would review and evaluate their work, and decide upon changes to improve quality and production. On the other hand, I doubt if there were serious challenges on major community issues. However, according to one report of the tape, opposition to the suicides was expressed.

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Every church calls upon its people to take their vows seriously. One of the most common laments of church leaders is the lack of commitment of the people. The same discouragement is heard from civic leaders who sense a lack of commitment of Americans to the Constitution and to serving their communities and the nation.

Members of Peoples Temple have been deeply committed. Eight years ago our oldest daughter told us that she was giving 25% of her income to her church. Years later our daughters gave everything to their church. In return, the church provided for their needs. Their life style, as that of all Peoples Temple members, was simple. We never regarded our daughters' decisions either as strange or as though they were being manipulated. The practice of Peoples Temple holding possessions in common and distributing resources according to need is as old as the Christian Church. Furthermore, our daughters freely chose to give their possessions to the church. There were characteristics of Peoples Temple which did disturb us, but this decision to share in the common life of their church was not one of them.

It has been a common practice for churches in our country to enter into irrevocable trusts with individuals in exchange for housing or total life care.

Peoples Temple's provision for life in its community in exchange for property has not been fundamentally different from procedures of other churches. Furthermore, social security income has been used by residents of church and fraternal homes, and private facilities, as well as by members of Peoples Temple as payment for their care. I have been told that in addition to the medical services provided in Jonestown that the residents were covered with major medical insurance. The elderly in Jonestown lived in a community with babies and children, young people and adults, a fact which made their experience different from life in segregated communities for the aged.

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Jonestown struck us as similar to homesteading. The major difference, of course, was that Jonestown was a large community in contrast to single family homesteaders. Homesteading is not for everyone, nor was Jonestown. I assumed that some people did not like Jonestown, but it was not easy to leave; because of its geography, but also because of peer pressure. It was a serious mistake to keep unhappy people there. It impressed me as significant that so few people chose to leave with Congressman Ryan.

Homesteading in Jonestown was not like Alaska. No energy was needed to provide for heating. Jonestown was in instant communication with the world. Its medical services, library, educational program, entertaining as well as educational films made it different from family homesteading. I assume that the work was hard as it is on farms especially where much of the work must be done by hand.

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Peoples Temple has always been hyper-sensitive to criticism. I must say several things before proceeding. In my judgment members of Peoples Temple, most of whom are Black, have known injustice and discrimination all of their lives. Second, the church has known harassment and opposition. Third, whereas I am among the last

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to believe in conspiracies, it is possible that people and groups did conspire to destroy Peoples Temple. While this is a possibility, and whereas criticism was strong, I believe that Peoples Temple fell because of what was wrong within the community.

It strikes me as significant that Jim Jones and Peoples Temple have been on the move for twenty years. They moved from Indiana to Redwood Valley, and from Redwood Valley to San Francisco. In the spring of 1977 they began a major migration to Jonestown. I suspect that in each instance mounting pressure upon the church was related to the moves.

The move to Jonestown put a different but an enormous pressure upon Jim Jones and the church. Providing food and shelter and economic undergirding for a thousand people is no small endeavor. Jonestown was under pressure to become self-sustaining. Even large financial resources would eventually run out unless the project became self-supporting. They worked to increase their income through the sale of crops and products of their cottage industry, and transporting materials by boat and truck.

While in San Francisco many, if not most, of the people in leadership positions worked in secular jobs. In Jonestown very few church members had day-to-day contacts with people outside of the community. Although they kept abreast of the news by way of radio, I suspect that there was little variety in their interpretation of events. Jim Jones was probably the major interpreter of the news. When we sat at the table one evening in May, I sensed that no dissenting voice was heard. I wrote our daughter saying how important I thought it was for them to be in serious dialogue with people outside of their community.

As they became more convinced of threats by those whom they believed were bent upon destroying them, they probably became more controlling of their own members. This is the usual response of leadership under pressure: the greater the threat, the greater must be the internal control. People who left Jonestown and survivors

report that this is what happened as the months passed in Guyana.

Looking back now I realize how weary Jim Jones was in May. I am persuaded that his personal exhaustion played a significant role in the events leading up to and culminating in the mass self-destruction.

Idolatry brought down Peoples Temple. Jews and Christians affirm that God alone is worthy of our ultimate trust and loyalty. Idolatry is pervasive and universal. Peoples Temple was not unique, but the people placed in Jim Jones their ultimate trust and gave him their ultimate loyalty. When a human or an institution is treated as ultimate, order, law, justice and freedom become dependent upon the god. Means are rationalized and justified, because the god decrees that they serve the end. Idolatry is quicksand which leaves us no place to stand to criticize the gods. When the gods falter and fall, they bring down their followers with them.

The Significance of Jonestown for Us

All of us are concerned with protecting the lives of Congressmen and their staffs, as well as other Americans. There is also the question: "How can we protect people from the extremes of religious movements?" This is a legitimate question, but it is not nearly so important as the question: "How can we protect ourselves from the destructive forces which erupted in mass murder and suicide on November 18 in Jonestown, and which are working now in our society?"

What happened in Jonestown was a human and historic phenomenon. The tragedy erupted from deep within the human psyche and also from out of a particular history. The event is being treated as a religious phenomenon unrelated to the same forces which are working in every society. The world is not threatened by religious movements, not even the Jonestown tragedy. The world is threatened by the forces of self destruction which are working in every city and in every capitol.

Jonestown is a sign, a warning of the powers of death which are present in every soul, every institution, and every government.