

# MARKHAM-NATHAN FUND for SOCIAL justice

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*Funding grass roots social justice and peace in Western Massachusetts.*

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**PRESS RELEASE**

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“Civil rights leaders to speak in Western Massachusetts for 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of Greensboro Massacre.”

NORTHAMPTON. Nationally respected civil rights leaders Dr. Joyce and Rev. Nelson Johnson will speak at Edwards Church in Northampton on Sunday, October 6, on “The Greensboro Massacre: Lessons for Today”. The two are survivors of the attack by Ku Klux Klansmen and neo-Nazis on a march they had organized that was to have ended at a labor conference dedicated to organizing Black and White workers in North Carolina to oppose the KKK. The white supremacists shot and killed five people, all of them young radical union and community leaders. Dr. Michael Nathan, the 32-year-old husband of Northampton physician Marty Nathan, was one of those murdered.

In August, the Northampton City Council passed a [resolution](#) declaring “Sunday October 6 a Day of Commemoration of the 1979 Greensboro Massacre and encourages the residents of Northampton to gather that day in remembrance of the historical victims of hate crimes and in rededication to the ongoing struggle against white supremacy and all forms of bigotry.”

While two all-white North Carolina juries in criminal trials acquitted the Klan and neo-Nazi killers despite videotape evidence of the shootings, a federal civil rights suit resulted in a historic judgment against the shooters, a paid police KKK informant who organized and led the attack, and 2 police officers. The City of Greensboro paid the penalty.

The Johnsons have for over two decades built and directed the Beloved Community Center, a Greensboro non-profit dedicated to racial and economic justice. They led a groundbreaking [community-labor coalition to win a contract for low-wage K-Mart distribution center workers](#), [stood with the victims of police violence](#), have fought the mass incarceration of young people of color and originated and guided [the country's first Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#). That Commission found the police responsible for the 1979 violence, having paid the Klan informant who recruited and led Klansmen in the Massacre and then withdrawing protection from the victims as the white supremacists approached.

Nelson and Joyce Johnson have been long-time partners with Rev. Dr. William Barber and founding members of the [Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival](#).

They come to Western Massachusetts as part of a nationwide commemoration of the Greensboro Massacre and its significance in today's movement building to defeat white supremacy, impoverization, militarism and environmental disaster. Their message of love, solidarity across social divides, courage and dedication echoes in the developing struggle for human rights and sustainability that is being seen in the recent Global Climate Strike, the immigrant rights movement, the Movement for Black Lives and LGBTQ and women's struggles.

They will participate in an Intergenerational Dialogue with younger Western Mass organizers, to share experience and lessons useful for today's burgeoning work. Then on Sunday, October 6 they will incorporate that conversation into a public address at Edwards Church, 297 Main Street in Northampton from 2 to 3:30 pm on Sunday, October 6. The forum will be followed by a reception with light refreshments in the basement of the church.

At 10 am on October 6, Rev. Johnson will preach from the Edwards Church. The Johnsons will also visit classes at Smith and at UMass during their stay. On Wednesday, October 9, at 6:30 the film "Greensboro: Closer to the Truth" will be shown at Forbes Library as part of the Resistance Film Series.

Both the October 6 forum and the film showing are free, open to the public and handicap-accessible.