

An Invitation to Stand in Solidarity with Our Muslim Neighbors

This past week, I met again with our neighbors from the Institute of Islamic and Turkish Studies (www.iitstudies.org). Their Imam, Bilal Ankaya, and another member of the community came to our office bearing gifts to say goodbye to me as I finish serving as Pastor of MCC NOVA, and to reiterate their desire to build relationships with our community in the future. I was once again humbled by their graciousness and sincerity.

One of the things we talked about in this meeting was a recent report released by the Center for American Progress called Fear, Inc.:

The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America

(<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/08/islamophobia.html>). This report outlines the work of a small group of very vocal and influential conservatives who produce anti-Muslim propaganda. Their goal is to “rouse public fears by consistently vilifying the Islamic faith and asserting the existence of an Islamic conspiracy to destroy ‘American values.’” The report includes details of several acts of anti-Muslim violence that have been encouraged by this group. Bilal shared with me about the concerns people in his own community have that they or their mosque may be victims of violence or persecution fueled by Islamophobia.

I shared with him my genuine sympathy for them, experiencing that kind of threat and the fear that comes along with it. I told him we could certainly relate. We have also known fear in the face of very real threats of acts motivated by ignorance and phobia (in our case, homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia). In fact, we share much in common with our neighbors. We are also trying to be our authentic selves, practice our faith, serve the God of our understanding, and make the world a better place. We have also had to contend with lies being told about us by the religious right. We have also been accused of trying to destroy “American values.” And, we are also afraid when we see other people being rejected, harmed, or murdered because of a characteristic they share in common with us.

I told Bilal that I would share a bit of our conversation with you, and also let you know where you can read this report. I assured him that we share a commitment to eradicating this kind of hatred and ignorance, and that we will pray for the members of IITS who experience prejudice and fear. I hope you will join me in this prayer, and that you might take the initiative to challenge anti-Muslim sentiments any chance you get. We stand in solidarity with our neighbors in seeking peace, promoting good will, and wanting to do all we can to make our community a place of inclusivity and opportunity for all.

We are still planning to reciprocate the invitation for members of the IITS community to visit MCC NOVA and learn more about us. We are also exploring the possibility of participating in a joint service project in the future. Stay tuned for more information.

Peace,



Rev. Kharma