

Interfaith Opportunities Network (ION) Press Release

As the tenth anniversary of 9/11 approaches, Muslims in the Amherst area have received an unprecedented expression of support. Thirteen local religious congregations, including both Christians and Jews, and two campus religious organizations, have formally and publicly endorsed a statement opposing any mistreatment of Muslims and calling for solidarity and friendship. The statement reads:

"As people of faith, we voice our support for Muslims in our community and beyond. We deplore anti-Islamic harassment, prejudice, hate-speech, and hate-based-actions. We stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers and oppose any mistreatment or exclusion based on religion. We welcome opportunities to grow in our understanding of each other's faiths, and to build relationships of mutual respect, trust, and friendship."

Sponsors of the statement have explained, "This statement is a response to the fact that some of our local Muslims have at times felt unwelcome, stereotyped, and/or misrepresented, while nationally Muslims have been targeted by hate speech and action, encountered opposition to establishing mosques, and in some cases been accused of all being violent terrorists." Members of the Hampshire Mosque in Amherst have welcomed the statement of solidarity. They have been reaching out to the larger community with events featuring both education about Islam and generous hospitality.

The statement was developed by the Interfaith Opportunities Network (ION) which also gathered the formal endorsements. The Interfaith Opportunities Network (ION) is a lay interfaith network in the Amherst area that since 2005 has strengthened communication among participating religious congregations in the Amherst-Hadley area. The Hampshire Mosque and Turkish Cultural Center/UMass Rumi Club are two ION participants. Representatives from each congregation meet monthly for education and collaboration. More information can be found on the ION website www.interfaithamherst.org or by contacting the convener Joan Lindeman, 549-7056; lindemanJW@aol.com

One ION participant said, "We believe that this represents historic cooperation among local Christians, Jews and Muslims."

The groups endorsing this statement include: United Church of Christ churches First Congregational, South Congregational and North Congregational, Amherst, and North Hadley Congregational and First Congregational, Hadley; Grace Episcopal, Amherst; Immanuel Lutheran, Amherst; Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst; Jewish Community of Amherst; Wesley United Methodist, Hadley; First Baptist Church, Amherst; Hope Community Church, Amherst; Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is, Amherst; the Office of Religious Life at Amherst College; Reverend Dr. Paul Sorrentino, Director of Religious Life, Amherst College; Chris Clark, DHM, Catholic Religious Advisor, Amherst College and United Christian Foundation at UMass/Amherst. In addition, the Mount Toby Friends Meeting published a similar statement of support in December 2010.

For more information please contact: Joan Lindeman, 549-7056; lindemanJW@aol.com

The Interfaith Opportunities Network encourages participation in a special commemorative event organized by area interfaith clergy -- *Memory, Healing and Hope: An Interfaith Gathering on the Tenth Anniversary of 9/11*. Various congregations will process from their buildings to meet at 4:00 p.m. for a procession around the north end of the Town Common. People will then move into Grace Episcopal Church across Boltwood Ave. for the interfaith service at 4:30. Anyone who does not wish to participate in the procession is invited to enter Grace Church directly to be seated before 4:30. The entire community is invited to join in the procession and/or to attend the service.

For more information, please contact Rev. Vicki Kemper at 253-3456; pastor_firstchurch_amherst@comcast.net