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At interfaith vigil, religious leaders unite against pastor Terry Jones

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Islamic Center of America Imam Hassan Qazwini (left), Archbishop Allen Vigneron, of the Archdiocese of Detroit, and Rev. George Shalhoub, of St. Mary Antiochan Orthodox Church, lead a procession into the center Thursday for a vigil sponsored by the mosque and the Interfaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit. The meeting was in response to Florida based Pastor Terry Jones who has said he intends to protest in front of Islamic Center of America Friday. The protest, according to the permit request, is against Sharia and jihad. If it happens as planned, it would be in front of the largest mosque in North America in a city that claims one of the most densely populated Muslim enclaves in the United States. (Photo by Millard/P&G)

DEARBORN — Hundreds of people gathered Thursday at the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn as religious leaders representing area Christians, Muslims and Jews came together to speak out against Pastor Terry Jones' planned Friday protest there.

Jones is the Florida-based pastor who gained media attention after planning to burn a Quran on Sept. 11 last year. The burning was cancelled but he oversaw a Quran burning in March this year. He is due in Dearborn's 19th District Court Friday for a trial for refusing Thursday to post a peace bond for his protest.

The attendees were from different religion and ethnicities; among them were Dearborn Mayor John O'Reilly and Congressman John Dingell. Chairman of the InterFaith Leadership Council Bob Bruttell led the ceremony and introduced the speakers.

Archbishop Allen Vigneron of the Archdiocese of Detroit, the Rev. Charles Williams from King Solomon Baptist Church, the Rev. George Shalhoub of St. Mary Antiochan Orthodox Church, Imam Mustapha Elturk of the Imams Council of Michigan and Imam Sayed Hassan Al-Qazwini of the Islamic Center agve speeches denouncing Jones, who is known for burning the Quran.

The event, each speaker, said, was an act of solidarity among the different religious and ethnic groups in Southeastern Michigan. Al-Qazwini said they must confront hatred with love and bigotry with understanding.

“Burning the Quran is indeed an insult not only to the Muslim community but also it is an insult to the followers of all monotheistic religions,” Al-Qazwini said. The Quran, he said, mentions Moses and Jesus respectfully over 100 times each.

Vigneron said he wanted to let Muslims know the Christian community supports them during a time that is difficult for them.

“While some voices choose to promote intolerance and hatred, I come as a voice of peace,” he said. “I come also as a Roman Catholic Archbishop upholding the teachings of the Catholic Church as they apply to the relations of Catholic Christians and the followers of Islam.”

He quoted the Vatican Council, which was conducted in the early 1960s, when Christian leaders released a decree about being respectful of Muslims and how they strive to be faithful through fasting, praying and sacrificing.

“I am committed to this respectful attitude and worthy goals,” Vigneron said. “The mutual respect and the common purpose should not just be the hallmarks of relations between Catholics and Muslims. Rather, they should be the hallmarks of relations for peoples of all faiths living together in our community.”

The Rev. Charles Williams compared Jones to someone trying to get attention any way they can, even if it is for negative reasons. Despite the hateful message Jones is sending, Williams said, as they stand against him, there is a benefit.

“This is our time to go to work,” Williams said. “Why? Because there are problems we have to solve together. If there is one thing we have to be thankful for Mr. Jones is, ‘thank you for bringing us together.’”

Al-Qazwini thanked in particular the non-Muslims who were present and said their support is not unnoticed.

“They came to tell us that we all stand as one community and one bigot does not represent the Christian faith,” he said.

As people who revere holy books, Shalhoub said, they have an obligation to spread a message of peace and goodwill to everyone.

“As people of faith, we believe that our community and our religious life is inclusive, not exclusive,” he said. “Any radical fundamentalism which undermines the highest aspiration of our humanity is not with God.”

The Islamic Center is the largest mosque in North America, spanning over 70,000 square feet and includes a prayer room, school, offices and banquet rooms.

Between speakers, Bruttell presented to O'Reilly, Hajj Victor Ghalib Begg, chairman emeritus of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, the Rev. Kenneth Flowers, president of the Michigan Progressive Baptist Convention and Richard Nodel, president of the Jewish Community Relations Council with the InterFaith Leadership Council's statement condemning Jones.

"We are affirming that we will continue to stand together," Bruttell said. "There is a need for us to come together to express our faith together, (to) express our hope together.

The event was also a celebration of religious freedom in the United States, Bruttell said, and, in particular of the diversity of religions being practiced in the metro Detroit area

"We are the model for the world, I think, to show people how , a group of people from all over the world, with all different religions, have come together to live in this community," he said.

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Rev 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

Rev 14:7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Rev 14:8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Rev 14:9 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

Rev 14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

Rev 14:11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Rev 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

Rev 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

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