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Leaders hope to make 'a welcome place for all people'

[Stephanie Dickrell, sdickrell@stcloudtimes.com](mailto:sdickrell@stcloudtimes.com) Published 6:16 p.m. CT March 24, 2017 | Updated 8:36 p.m. CT March 24, 2017



(Photo: Dave Schwarz,
 dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)

A group of interfaith leaders presented a tangible sign of support for Central Minnesota's Muslim community on Friday. The group presented a letter of support at the Central Minnesota Islamic Center, with more than 700 signatures collected from area faith communities.

Bishop Donald Kettler read the letter to the crowd after prayer services Friday afternoon.

"There was an absolute, deep-seated desire to support the Somali-American community here in St. Cloud," said Kathy Langer, director of social concerns for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud. She helps coordinate the interfaith group.

"We hope that it helps them feel supported and feel a little more safe than they did before they got this letter," she said.

In February, a member of the interfaith group presented the idea, which they had heard about in other communities. The group members liked the idea. Many have personal relationships with the Muslim community, Langer said.

"The people around the circle felt very strongly the need to reach out strongly and say in some way, 'You're not alone. You're supported,' " Langer said.

The proposal came around the time tensions around Muslims in America was growing, as President Donald Trump attempted to ban immigration from several predominantly Muslim countries.



Bishop Donald Kettler reads a letter with members of the Greater St. Cloud Area Faith Leaders group members Friday, March 24, at the Central Minnesota Islamic Center in St. Cloud. The letter was written in support of the local Islamic community and was signed by more than 700 people. (Photo: Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)

"We wanted to make a difference in this time where we knew that there was an escalation in some of the harassment that Muslims were feeling," Langer said. "I don't know that I felt that much emotion before, or that much concern, in that group before."

The faith leaders all signed and then opened up the letter to their congregations.

"We (wanted) to offer people the opportunity to express their support and to show that to our Muslim neighbors," said Charlotte Stephens, a member of the St. Cloud Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. "I felt that people were very supportive."

She was pleased with the response from her congregation.



"Overall, the group is trying to help this community be a welcome place for all people," Stephens said. "I think this is just part of that."

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Full text of the letter

Dear Muslim sisters and brothers,

People listen as Greater St. Cloud Area Faith Leaders group members read a letter of support for the Islamic community Friday, March 24, at the Central Minnesota Islamic Center in St. Cloud. (Photo: Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)

We realize that this is a very difficult time for you and your community. We recognize that there are people in this country who have negative feelings about Muslims and about Islam. We also see how these negative feelings are being used to justify the mistreatment of Muslims.

We want you to know that we do not agree with those who mistreat you. We want you to know that we are with you. We want you to know that you are loved and that you are cherished and that you are valued members of this community.

Please remember that you have allies here – people who truly and sincerely care about your well-being. We ask you to please stay strong in these challenging times and to please take care of yourselves and your loved ones. As your allies, we promise to do everything that we can to stand up for your rights and to ensure that you are treated with the dignity and respect that you deserve.

Thank you for being such an important part of our community, and thank you for your enduring willingness to help preserve the freedoms that make our country great.

10/16/2018

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With sincerity, your neighbors,

Fr. Michael Peterson, OSB; Sr. Michaela Hedican, OSB; Rev. Dee Pederson; Charlotte Stephens; Rev. Darin Seaman; Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB; Sr. Bernadette Weber, OSB; Bishop Donald Kettler; Rev. Leah Rosso; Fr. William Vos; Mayuli Bales; Rev. Randy Johnson; Rev. James Alberts II; Randal G. Baker; Joe Towalski; Kathy Langer

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