

DEFYING THE NAZIS

THE SHARP'S WAR

CONGREGATIONAL STORIES

ALL SOULS UU CHURCH, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

Type Action:
Protest and Guest Speaker

On March 22, 2016, Rev. Nori Rost and members of All Souls UU Church in Colorado Springs joined 120 community members at City Hall in support of Syrian refugees. The action was organized in response to an anti-refugee resolution proposed by City Councilman Andres Pico. The Belgium terror attacks, tragically occurring the same day, unleashed a new wave of Islamophobic rhetoric, yet again highlighting the need to offer refuge to thousands of victims of violence. Rev. Rost, quoted in the Colorado Springs Gazette ¹, said, the Belgium attacks are “what our Syrian brothers and sisters experience every day in their homeland. This is what they are fleeing; this is not what they are.”



Photo courtesy of the "Colorado Springs Says Welcome FB page. Used with permission.

1 <http://gazette.com/colorado-springs-residents-rally-at-city-hall-for-acceptance-of-refugees/article/1572732>

Councilman Pico's resolution would have declared the city inhospitable to all refugees until supposed "security threat[s]" in the resettlement program could be addressed.² The resolution was one of countless other local and state-level efforts across the country to deny welcome to refugees. While these efforts are only symbolic (refugee resettlement is a federal program, and states and cities cannot bar refugees on the basis of nationality), they can still do harm. These fear-mongering policies fuel Islamophobic bigotry and spread dangerous misconceptions about the refugee program, putting innocent lives at risk.

The members of All Souls UU and their multifaith allies raised their voices in protest. In partnership with community leaders and former elected officials, Rev. Rost began co-creating a "Colorado Springs Says Welcome" Facebook page³ in early March.



Photo courtesy of the Colorado Springs Says Welcome FB page. Used with permission.

² Security vetting in the U.S. refugee program is already a thorough process more than a year. Additional information about the reality of this process and for other ways to counter common misconceptions about the refugee program can be found in the UU Service Committee's guide to "Talking About the Syrian Refugee Crisis" at <http://www.uusc.org/talking-about-refugees#terrorism>.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/Colorado-Springs-Says-Welcome-414520915408232/>

“And their Lord hath answered them: ‘Never will I suffer to be lost the good work of any of you, be he male or female: You are members, one of another: Those who have left their homes, or been driven out therefrom, or suffered harm... verily, I will admit them into Gardens beneath which the rivers flow.’”

The Qur'an, Surah Al-Imran:
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This simple first step led to connections between the refugee and LGBTQ communities in Colorado Springs. After seeing the Facebook page, Lawrence Powell, a Colorado Springs resident who had fled Syria seven years ago, offered to share the story of his escape. “Colorado Springs Says Welcome” organized an event for Powell to share his experience as both a refugee and a gay man as a way to counter stereotypes.

These events are part of the anti-Islamophobia work Rev. Rost has done this year, beginning last November, when a local mosque in Colorado Springs was flooded with toxic hate mail after the Paris attacks. In an act of courageous hospitality, the mosque hosted an open house event educate the public about the teachings of Islam. Rost attended, showing solidarity, and has since partnered with her Muslim neighbors. In early April, Rost led a worship service in memory of the Holocaust (referred to in Hebrew as Shoah). She spoke to the parallels between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, drawing connections relevant to UUs and the legacy of the Sharps.

When asked what core insights she gained from her interfaith organizing and solidarity actions, Rev. Rost suggested looking to “natural allies.” If a speaking event has to do with countering Islamophobia, connect with the local Muslim community. Remember that there are progressive faith voices among all traditions, though we may have to step outside of our familiar circles to find them.