

Northern Nevada Interfaith Community launches Build for Unity project



PHOTO: Jim Eaglesmith

Local leaders of several faiths announced a new effort to make common cause in the Reno religious community and combat those who want to pit religions against each other.

The announcement took place during a press conference held at the Northern Nevada Muslim Community Center on the afternoon of February 19, 2016 to launch the local Build for Unity project, an interfaith collaboration to build homes for families in need and bring together members of the interfaith community who share the values of diversity, inclusion, and community.

Collaborators are the Truckee Meadows Habitat for Humanity and the Nevada Clergy Association. Bishop Gene Savoy Jr., president of the Nevada Clergy Association, helped organize the event and emceed it.

At the event it was announced that substantial funds had been committed by various religious groups to build a home in Reno through Habitat for Humanity while also building amity and joint cooperation among the faiths.

Habitat spokesperson Christine Price thanked the group for “help in welcoming home one more family.”

To make sure no one missed the message, a flyer announcing the event read, “In light of today’s political climate and national rhetoric, we are making a statement about our shared values in Northern Nevada: diversity, inclusion, and community.”

“It is important to counter the notion that America hates Muslims,” said Catholic diocesan spokesperson Rita Sloan.

The Reno News & Review article on the event, “Cooperation trumps polarization,” noted that the effort was organized in part by News & Review owner Jeff vonKaenel, who set up a similar initiative in Sacramento and is now working on others for urban areas around the nation. He said the ease with which churches and leaders joined in and committed funds surprised him. “They were like—‘Jeff, we love this idea.’ ... So why should we not come together and build a hundred homes?” vonKaenel said. “A hundred homes, a hundred communities coming together.”

Imam Abdul Rahim Barghouthi said of the effort that “this is a blessing and it comes with responsibility. And that responsibility is to take care of one another.” He added, “I see Islam in America and I see America in Islam.”



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