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Call to action to religious and political leaders

*The Rev. Stephanie Rutt*

As minister to an interfaith community, I am increasingly concerned ­ even alarmed ­ at what I am hearing from those who would unilaterally claim to represent our most integral national and religious values. Alarmed because what they say appears antithetical to all I have understood and held dear.

At a time when we have been called to rise and represent the best of what we are as a nation, to minister to one another in the name of goodness and mercy, we, a largely Christian nation, appear to have faltered, succumbing to a siege of rhetoric driven by fear and divisiveness.

To the many Syrian refugees desperately seeking shelter from terror, just as the cold of winter is settling in, please know that while some might close our borders to you, many of us would not. While you may see some avert their gaze and turn away, there are those of us who would welcome the opportunity to see you, know you, to serve you, to help alleviate your suffering in any way we could.

To my fellow American Muslims, know that we stand with you and would welcome the opportunity for dialogue to learn and to work together to highlight that which unites us, not divides us. We owe you and the Syrian refugees, our brothers and sisters all, our deepest apology and we owe our God even more ­ our most humble accountability.

Sadly, it appears we have forgotten we are a nation founded on the backs of immigrants. Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. And, sadder still, some claiming to represent Christian values appear to have put aside the most fundamental teaching of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34) and to have disregarded completely his charge in Matthew 25:31­40: "For when I was hungry you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

I have long been a proponent of the separation of church and state. But, that was before the political arena became the expressed platform for one particular religious ideology breeding exclusion and polarization. Religious leaders: Catholic and Protestant Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Native Americans, and all others wishing to participate, I call on us to join together in a show of multi­lateral unity to reclaim and reaffirm our fundamental values of inclusion and tolerance.

Political leaders: Gov. Hassan, Sens. Ayotte and Shaheen, Reps. Guinta and Kuster, we invite you to stand with us to explore ways the common values expressed across faith traditions can be protected.

Perhaps, just perhaps, New Hampshire could become the first in the nation not just to vote for our next president but to lead a concerted movement to bring people, from all faith traditions, together to engage in interfaith dialogue and understanding.

Perhaps, by sitting with one another, listening to one another, a common bond could be created to help heal the scars of hatred, discrimination and prejudice currently being perpetrated. And, perhaps, just in doing so, we could begin to reclaim the very values upon which this nation was founded.

Lest you think such a challenge naive ­ or worse yet, impossible ­ recall the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in "Loving Your Enemies," The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate. Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love.

Will we be strong enough? Committed enough? Unwavering enough to stand for the only truth capable of setting us all free ­ that we all are called to inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love ­ even as we strive to live together in one nation, under God, indivisible, offering liberty and justice to all.

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