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Two Sundays ago, during our 11:00 a.m. service at Plymouth Congregational UCC, I was handed a note by one of our deacons, telling me that our next-door neighbors at the Islamic Center of Fort Collins, had been vandalized in the early hours of the morning. I was stunned, though aware that this may have been coming, given the heightened sense of Islamophobia in our nation. I invited members of the congregation to walk next door after the service to provide a ministry of presence and support and prayer for our neighbors and friends at the Islamic Center. And that evening, I was heartened by the turnout of more than a thousand members of the wider community as we encircled the Islamic Center in love and support.

Over the past several years, Plymouth has developed a deepening bond of friendship with our Muslim neighbors: We share parking, shared fellowship in a men's retreat, and women from our church recently attended Friday prayers and a luncheon at the masjid. And in the days after the shootings in San Bernardino in December 2015, we gathered with our sisters and brothers from Congregations Or Hadash, Har Shalom, and Foothills Unitarian Church in support of the Islamic Center of Fort Collins.

In 2015 and again this year, I have said publicly that we at Plymouth will stand between the Islamic Center and anyone wishing to do them harm. As Christians, we are the dominant religious tradition in this nation, and our faith demands that we stand up and defend the rights of those who experience violent prejudice. With a president attempting to ban travel from predominantly Muslim countries, it is no wonder that the climate of anti-Muslim sentiment has been on the rise and that more than 30 mosques in our nation have been vandalized or burned down since January. Hate has no place in our community.

The growing relationship between our two congregations is based on trust and love and faith. It is a relationship that will continue to develop. We don't have to agree on everything, and our differing perspectives do not keep us from forming loving bonds of friendship.

The Rev. Hal Chorpenning
Senior Minister
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ

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sources, not for publication unless you think it necessary:

gathering after San Bernardino shooting:

<http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2015/12/13/hundreds-gather-vigil-supporting-muslim-community/77257954/>

number of mosques damaged or burned down in 2017

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/20/us/mosques-targeted-2017-trnd/>