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Honoring Sacred Time unites United Church of Christ, Muslim faith communities in Pacific Northwest

(June 8, 2016) —As the holy month of Ramadan begins, there's a concerted effort of interfaith hospitality and solidarity in bloom in the United Church of Christ, particularly in Washington, with signs and banners proclaiming "Blessed Ramadan" and "Love Your Muslim Neighbors as Yourself" posted as part of the Pacific Northwest Conference's Honoring Sacred Time Campaign.

"Over 20 churches in the conference have made at least some commitment to the campaign, and we want to increase that participation over Ramadan," said the **Rev. Mike Denton**, conference minister of the Pacific Northwest Conference, one of the UCC's 38 conferences, with 82 churches in Washington, Northern Idaho and Alaska.

This interfaith Ramadan campaign, a celebration of solidarity, is the result of a partnership between representatives from the Northwest Chapter of the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ, and denominational leaders. UCC churches, to honor Muslim neighbors' Ramadan commitments, have been invited to do three simple things during this holy month:

- Hang a banner or change their message boards in a way that honors our Muslim neighbors.
- Take time to make an appointment to visit a local mosque or Islamic center to bring greetings from their local congregation.
- Consider hosting an event to learn more about Islam and make a special effort to speak up against anti-Muslim rhetoric.

"Part of the idea of this is relationship building," said Denton. "As the trust is being built up, relationships are established, the hope and intent of this campaign being that most of our churches will have begun to establish a relationship with our Muslim community by the end of Ramadan."

The campaign has a Facebook page [where public displays of extravagant hospitality](#) are evident.

Eastgate Congregational United Church in Bellevue, Wash., was one of the first congregations to join this campaign, posting a sign wishing a "Blessed Ramadan to our Muslim neighbors." And Denton says this is not the first time Eastgate has voiced public support for their Muslim brothers and sisters. Six months ago, the small congregation also put a positive message on that reader

board outside the church when a local elected representative said something disparaging about Islam.

Plymouth Church in downtown Seattle has been hosting Muslim prayers on Fridays for 15 years now and their Ramadan sign is hanging right at the entrance where folks go for Friday prayers. And Alki UCC, which shares a building with a local Jewish community in West Seattle, jointly purchased its sign with synagogue Kol HaNeshama.

“The response from the Muslim community has been very positive,” said Denton, “and this is just the first part of the campaign. The next step is participation in an interfaith Iftar on the evening of June 15.”

The Muslim Association of Puget Sound (MAPS) has issued a public invitation to the UCC churches in the Pacific Northwest community to its 10th annual MAPS Ramadan Interfaith Iftar, the meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan.

“The United Church of Christ was birthed out of an impulse to unify,” said UCC General Minister and President the **Rev. John Dorhauer**. “Its motto, ‘That they may all be one,’ is a call to reshape human community in such a way that all barriers to understanding, acceptance, and love are removed. What began as an ecumenical invitation has broadened. We now see that God’s vision of Shalom, of creating the beloved community of full inclusion, is not limited by religious boundaries. In this time, changing the narrative of how faith communities relate to one another is so very important. When in our current political climate leaders use race and creed to engender fear of the other, the United Church of Christ must steadfastly maintain its clear commitment to unity, to justice, and to equity. *Ramadan Mubarek! A Salaam Alaikum!* We stand in solidarity with our Muslim family of faith.”

“The good deed is not equal to the ill deed. Put forth that which is best, and you shall find that the one with whom you have enmity is a close ally.” — Quran [41:34]

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About the United Church of Christ The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC and its members are tireless advocates for social issues such as immigration reform, racial equality, LGBT rights, marriage equality, environmental protection and economic justice.