Good News Letter
September 11, 2011

Dear Friends in Christ,

On this 10th anniversary of the tragedy of 9/11, we have a choice. We can mark this day in a way that renews fear and suspicion, feeds blame and self-righteousness and allows the wound of grief to fester. Or we can honor those who died by rejecting the insidious hate and violence that killed them. We must decide for our part what the fruit of all that death and destruction will be? More war, more hate, more violence? Or have we the hope and courage to honor those who died by practicing the ways of justice instead of revenge, mercy instead of self-righteousness, reconciliation instead of retribution, and compassion instead of fear. In the context of today’s American landscape what fruit will we bear in Christ’s name?

…Islamophobia in the United States appears to be rising. Incidents of Quran burnings, communities attempting to ban mosques, prohibitions of Muslim women from wearing traditional covering, ballot initiatives targeting "sharia" (Islamic law), workplace discrimination, and hate crimes are all frequently occurring.

This rise of intolerance toward Muslims in our national political discourse increases the importance of elevating voices committed to peace and interfaith understanding. We must continue to assert the American dream of pluralism and religious freedom. America should be a safe place for people of all faiths. We can increase U.S. Christians’ understanding of Islam and counter stereo-types about Muslims by lifting up positive stories of interfaith cooperation, and by getting to know members of other faiths in our communities.

The media prefer conflict to stories of positive engagement and shared service between our diverse faith traditions. Many Christians, Jews, and Muslims -- especially younger believers -- have more interest in one another than they have fear, and many share a commitment that their faith must make a difference in the world. In some ways we are doing better since 9/11 than before; many churches know more about their Muslim neighbors, and their faith, and are learning to work together to make their communities better.

excerpt “9/11: What Have We Learned?” by Jim Wallis
Sojourner’s Magazine September/October 2011

Let us lift up our positive stories of dialogue and fellowship with our Muslim neighbors in New Jersey and our growing friendship with the al Falah Center who shared our worship space for Ramadan prayer. Today let us reject hate and share our stories of the challenges of faith in the face of fear as we walk together in a simple act of hope and courage called a 9/11 Walk. “Walk on, O people of God! A new law, God’s new alliance, all creation is reborn. Walk on, O people of God!…”

~Pastor Susan
Last year, when that yahoo from Florida was threatening to burn copies of the Qur'an on Sept. 11, my friend Sara Burke from the Presbytery office and I sat on a bench on Oak Tree Road and read the Qur'an together.

We had or Bibles with us, of course, and greeted anyone who stopped by with friendship. After that, we went into one of the local eateries and had lunch.

What my friend Susan Rack is doing is directly in line with this, and I applaud her efforts. The Muslim community in Bridgewater has been seeking to establish a mosque there, and went through all the proper channels, but has now been stymied by a xenophobic outcry from fearful and narrow-minded people. Susan and her church are trying to respond to that situation with love.

I hope you all come to church in Iselin on Sunday. But if you do happen to have friends in Martinsville or that general vicinity, please tell them to think about joining Rev. Rack’s community in their walk for peace and friendship.

It would be just about the best thing you could do to honor not only the 3000 dead on 9/11, but the more than 6000 US servicemen and women and the tens of thousands of others dead from two wars since.

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