

From Pastor Karen's Desk



OCTOBER 2010

Now that a few weeks have passed, some of the furor has died down. Or at least I hope it has, from my vantage point two weeks before you read what I write. Which furor is that? The one where a pastor of a church in Florida planned to burn copies of the Koran as a "statement of faith."

I affirm making your faith known, and doing it with actions, not just words. My problem is that I am embarrassed to be associated with the faith that is stated through this particular set of actions. I don't want to be identified with the hatred and intolerance that is expressed by taking what so many people hold as holy and destroying it in a way that flaunts how disrespectful they are being. What was this man hoping to accomplish? If he loves Christ so much that he wants others to follow Jesus too, it is a strange form of evangelism. I follow a Christ who taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves. I can imagine how we would feel if someone took copies of the Bible and tossed them in a barbecue grill. Not loved. And certainly not likely to convert to the faith of those who would show so little understanding of us.

In the paper, not long after that pastor called off his plan (perhaps because he had gotten all the attention he craved), I saw another statement of faith in our local newspaper. Someone had gone to the mosque in Marshfield (did you know there is a worshipping group of Muslims in central Wisconsin?), and left a message for its members to find when they came to pray on a Saturday afternoon. Unlike the Florida pastor's message, this one was anonymous, its giver apparently not needing to be in the spotlight. And unlike that pastor's message, this is one I would be pleased to be associated with. It was a pot of blooming flowers and a handwritten card that said, "You have friends in Marshfield."

Putting down the faith of others does nothing to build up our own – often it has just the opposite effect, giving Jesus the reputation of being hateful, cruel and judgmental. And likewise, befriending those of another faith does nothing to weaken your own. Again, it can have the opposite effect, causing others to gain in love and respect for you and the one you follow and leading you yourself to look more deeply into what it is that Jesus taught.

On October 24, our Healing Service will focus on healing from hate. We have this particular incident of hatred in mind. And we hope that as part of that service, we can make a statement of faith – an action that really expresses the heart of the one who came because He so loved the world. All of it.