

This past Monday night the vestry met for a special meeting to discuss the recent Presidential Executive Orders and how, if in any way, we might respond. For me, part of the reason for the meeting was that my good friend, Dr. Kareem Adeeb, and his Muslim community (the American Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies) who pray at St. Francis, were anxious about what the implications of these orders would mean for them. Furthermore, given the recent violence at the mosque in Quebec City, they were also rightly concerned for their own safety. Also, and this is not least in my mind, I was feeling that many people were on edge and uncertain about what these early actions of the new administration meant or could mean, what one could do, and the exhaustion that comes with such a heightened level of stress.

Thus, we met at the Historical Church for our pre-meeting reading of Prayer at the Close of the Day—Compline—and after praying we made our way to the meeting room. In instances like this, one is not sure what people are thinking or feeling. Therefore, the first part of our gathering was an informal check in with what it was that people were thinking about and what their feelings were around these issues. As with past vestry meetings where we discussed difficult or sensitive topics, I was heartened by the civility and respect offered each person as he or she shared with the group. I don't know that there was anything earth-shattering that we learned and there certainly was no blazing light directing us in the way that we should proceed. We listened. We talked. We listened some more. And we discussed what we might do.

Fortunately, the bishops of Connecticut had sent out a very thoughtful and thorough letter regarding the Executive Order concerning refugees and the ban on travel to the United States by individuals from seven predominantly Muslim countries. (You should have received this by email on Tuesday, and you can access it [here](#).) As our conversation developed, it became clear that promoting the bishops' letter among the parish and on our website was an obvious first step. Regardless of what you think about the Executive Order, the history and the biblical basis that the bishops offer for opposing the order resides at the heart of our Christian belief and practice. We cannot deny God's dictate to Israel to welcome the aliens, because they were aliens in Egypt (Exodus 22.21), that Jesus was a refugee in the very beginning of his life (Matthew 2.13-15) and that the very place that Christ meets us in the world is in the guise of the other (Matthew 25.31-46). Indeed, I couldn't help but think of my friend Kareem and his community as I read these scripture passages.

Furthermore, the bishops offered ways that people could get involved or act in this time, and there are offerings that run the gamut. I hope that you might peruse them and decide how you can get involved.

Beyond posting the bishop's letter, other ways of engaging or acting became apparent. One was the possibility of offering a prayer service during this time to allow people a safe and quiet place to pray and find support. To that end, I would ask you to let me know what day and time would work best for you if you are interested in this. One individual thought a Wednesday evening, brief service that was more meditative and quiet would be a very helpful offering. Personally, I concur, but I would appreciate your input.

Secondly, the need to find ways and opportunities to recognize and understand the "other" in our congregation, our community, our region, and the larger world was a clear take away. One

opportunity that is already in the works is the *Cross and Crescent* discussions?? that we are having with Kareem Adeeb and the American Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies. We will host our second gathering on **Sunday, February 12, at 4:00 PM in Assisi Hall**, and I hope that you may be able to join us. These gatherings are informal and a simple way to hear how others make sense of life and faith. I suspect that given the current climate that our conversation on the 12<sup>th</sup> will focus on concerns that AIIAS are feeling and dealing with. Needless to say, this is not the end of what we can and should do. We will be working with other faith communities to develop opportunities to understand more fully the richness, diversity, and reality of others in our midst.

What I appreciated most of all during the meeting on Monday was the clear passion that our leadership has for embodying the heart of our faith, rooted in compassion, mercy, and love. The generosity of spirit, the respect for divergent views, and the desire to reach consensus was very much alive. I value this in any community, and I believe that it has to be at the heart of any community that claims to be Christian. This does not mean that we will always agree, and it certainly doesn't mean that we will never wrestle over difficult issues. What it does mean, however, is that there is a sense of something larger that holds us together and transcends our personal opinions and allows us to be community. I am thankful for the leadership of our parish, and I am thankful for your part in our life together. Let us continue the conversation and finding ways to support each other and love our neighbors—particularly at this time and most especially in the diversity with which they meet us—for no other reason than that *this* is holy work.