

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Witness for Justice #541

August 15, 2011

For the Sake of our Children and the Purity of their Souls

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I have vivid memories of that tragic September 11 morning ten years ago. It was early in the morning in my hometown of Portland, Oregon. The waking news blaring from my radio seemed like a dream. I jumped out of bed and ran into the living room to turn on the television. Sure enough, there it was. The first plane had blasted its way through the north tower, seemingly a terribly unfortunate failure of the airplane's radar system that led them off course. Then the second plane was in sight, crashing into the south tower. It became clear that this was no accident. The shock of such a horrible sight had not even set in when we heard the news stories about two other high-jacked planes, one crashing into the Pentagon, another into a field in Pennsylvania.

Were there more? Who was capable of such mean spirited destruction? Little did I know then what would follow.

Every year on September 11, I feel the emotional disbelief and fear that I experienced that morning. However, two days prior to that fateful day is still equally alive in my memory—September 9, 2001.

Our local congregation, Ainsworth United Church of Christ in Portland, Oregon, was offering adult forums on diverse faith traditions on Sunday, September 9, we welcomed two leaders from

the Muslim community to share the key tenets of their faith. We learned about the importance of peace and harmony in their teachings. During our discussion, it became obvious that we shared a mutual understanding of God's unconditional love for everyone and our responsibility for the common good of humanity. As Christians and Muslims, we agreed to journey together and continue to learn from one another toward deeper solidarity in the midst of our differences.

In the days following September 11, it became clear that all Muslims were being held responsible for the tragic acts of a violent sect of Islamic fanatics whose values and interpretations of the Qur'an are radically different than the majority of Muslims. Our Muslim friends went into hiding in Portland, just as others did in cities across the nation. They feared going to the grocery store, sending their children to school, or worshipping in the local Mosque that had previously been relatively safe. My fear and disbelief was revived as I saw the universal hostility being directed at our neighbors.

I joined a group of Latino and Latina leaders who gathered with neighbors from the Muslim Educational Trust led by Wajdi Said (who continues to be a close friend to this day). We wanted to offer support to a community whose complexion is much like ours. We knew what it was like to be singled out for ridicule and exclusion. We had experienced similar verbal and physical attacks for no other reason other than the color of our skin. We prayed for forgiveness and healing and pledged to teach one another and our children about our shared understanding of goodness as opposed to evil.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I have seen children successfully surmounting the effects of an evil inheritance. That is due to purity being an inherent attribute of the soul." As we approach this 10th anniversary, my prayer is that in our disbelief, we will strive to overcome the fear and hatred that has resulted—for the sake of our children and the purity of their souls.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,277 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.