We wish to welcome all of you to the Amistad Chapel at the United Church of Christ’s national offices, here in Cleveland. The Amistad Chapel honors the legacy of our church’s history in the struggle for human rights and human justice. It was Congregational church members who raised the funds for the legal defense of the people brought to the U.S. on the Amistad ship - enslaved Africans, who were suing for their freedom. It is likely that many of them were Muslim, from Sierra Leone. The episode resonates today, and our commitments to fighting racism, countering religious-based bigotry, and supporting freedom and justice for all people are just as urgent in 2020 as they were in 1839.

Today, the UCC identifies as a church of “extravagant welcome” and we are honored to host this morning’s Global Cleveland press conference. “Extravagant Welcome” is more than a phrase; it is a value that the United Church of Christ aspires to live out in all that we do. “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” And that goes for immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers of all faiths, heritages, and races.

We believe that God does not discriminate against any of God’s children, and that God desires for all of us to uphold and honor the dignity of every person. The UCC is committed to love our neighbor, whether that neighbor is local or global. And the UCC is engaged and committed to interreligious dialogue and relations, to speaking clearly to denounce, and acting against, religiously based bigotry, whether that is in the form of anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim attitudes or actions, or directed against any other faith community.

Three years ago today, President Trump signed the first “Muslim Ban” Executive Order. It was struck down by the courts, but the Administration redoubled its efforts to discriminate with a multitude of both refugee and asylum bans that have dramatically altered the shape of our nation’s welcome, mangling it beyond recognition. The UCC’s General Minister and President, the Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, serves as Chair of the National Council of Churches, which joined nearly 400 national, regional, and local organizations—both secular and religious—in signing a letter in April 2019 supporting the No Ban Act. That legislation is “a clear and unequivocal response to the Muslim Ban that would ensure no one can be banned from our country based on religious or nationality-based discrimination ever again. The bill seeks important changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act. It would outlaw discrimination in the entry of immigrants or nonimmigrants based on religion, in addition to the protections against discrimination based on race, sex, nationality, place of birth, and place of residence already in place.”

UCC leaders met with Senator Portman’s staff last September with colleagues from the Cleveland chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations to express concern about the Muslim Ban. At that time Rev. Dorhauer said, “As members of the United Church of Christ, we believe strongly that one’s religion should not affect their ability to take advantage of all the resources provided by our country. Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and anyone on the move from predominantly black and Muslim countries should not be singled out by our government and refused entry into the U.S. This ban, currently in effect, has a deep and profound effect on the lives of many, including a young law clerk here in Cleveland whose children have still never met their grandparents.”

Now is the time to support the No-Ban Act. We need to let Congress know that the administration can no longer enact racist and discriminatory policies. That our nation and communities of faith are ready and willing to open our doors and offer welcome.

The UCC stands strongly against any form of discrimination. We stand for a society and country that is welcoming of the diversity of God’s people.