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INTERFAITH ALLIANCE OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

2017 MAY 2 AM 8 21

CITY CLERK, FRESNO CA

May 1, 2017
Fresno City Council
2600 Fresno St,
Fresno, CA 93721

This letter is sent on behalf of the Board for the Interfaith Alliance of Central California stating its opposition to the proposed posting of the motto "In God We Trust" placed on the wall behind the council chamber's dais. We are represented by Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Unitarian Universalist, Buddhist, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Native American religious traditions, as well as the Multi-faith Exchange. We also recognize Humanists and Atheists as part of the vital mix of our Fresno community, all of whom are under the protection of the separation of church and state.

Those of us professing a faith in God agree with non-faith-based citizens that freedom of religious expression is something that has a place in the "public square." But a legislative chamber is entirely different from the public square. A notion of legislative deliberation that is blind to the religious nature or character of one particular interpretation of God becomes blatantly coercive as a supposedly unbiased process when the proposed signage is made so dominant. One look at the list of Christian voices in support of this proposal offers a "tell" as to the assumed nature and character of God as would be portrayed in that signage. This was especially telling in one comment made in a public media quote that the proposed phrase is a good statement, "...especially in this season..." The statement was posted two days prior to the Christian celebration of Easter, a season for explicitly one religious body.

As an alternative, we would propose that a principle shared by those who hold to a notion of God, as well as by those who do not hold to a notion of God, is the principle of "justice for all." Each of the major religions represented in our city, as well as most of the minor religious populations, have within their faith traditions a notion of justice as a principle characteristic of their God. Humanists and others likewise strongly embrace a notion of justice that is to be extended to all citizens. It is a deeply patriotic phrase embedded in the original Pledge of Allegiance. To see that imprimatur on the wall behind the council dais would be an affirmation of the freedom, of the democratic process that recognizes an inherent dignity which ought to be embedded in our government functioning as a healthy instrument on behalf of an entire community's good. Diverse faith traditions can find a characteristic representative of their God in such a phrase that in no way denies one's faith perspective. People of no faith can see in it an open invitation to bring general ethical and moral perspectives to the deliberative processes in this chamber that is respectful of all- without denying the opportunity to speak or deliberate without fear.

We, therefore, encourage you to defeat the proposal put forth by Councilmember Bredefeld, and if the Council would see fit, to substitute "...and justice for all..." - if anything at all needs to be added to that wall.

Respectfully,

Rev. Norman Broadbent, Irfan Ali— co-chairs of Interfaith Alliance of Central California

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Babs Eskin
Dr. Alfred Evans

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Dan Yaseen

Become a Member!

If the work of the Interfaith Alliance of Central California is important to you, support that work by becoming a member today!

IACC is a membership organization open to individuals in concert with the IACC mission. We do not have corporate or organizational memberships.

Become a member by making a contribution of \$50 or more, if you are able. Those wishing to serve on the Board are asked to make an annual contribution of \$100. Mail your contribution to the address on the back of this brochure, or join via our online web site:

www.interfaithalliancecc.org

To get involved:

- Check regularly our Facebook page for upcoming events
- Take part in one of our sponsored events
- Attend a monthly meeting, the third Thursday of each month, 4:45 p.m., at the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno, 2111 E. Nees Ave **Fresno**, CA 93720 (559) 297-9535



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Current co-chairs of the IACC:
Norman Broadbent and Irfan Ali.



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PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM



IACC Quilt produced by interfaith youth alliance project group. Available for display in area places of worship and prayer. To schedule, contact IACC at address below.

IACC
2111 E. Nees Ave
Fresno, CA 93720

info.interfaithalliancecc@gmail.com
www.interfaithalliancecc.org

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness;
only light can do that.*

Hate cannot drive out hate;

only love can do that.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

WHO WE ARE

Interfaith Alliance celebrates religious freedom by championing individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

- We believe that religious freedom is a foundation for American democracy.
- We believe that individual rights and matters of personal conscience must be held sacred.
- We believe that religious and political extremists are a threat to individual liberty and democracy.
- We believe that celebrating religious and cultural difference is the way to achieve a vibrant community.

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Interfaith Alliance is the only national interfaith organization dedicated to protecting the integrity of both religion and democracy in America. We stand for faith and freedom.

- **National Policy** – We promote legislation that protects the boundaries between religion and government, so that politics doesn't infringe on your faith and matters of faith don't infringe on your freedom.
- **Grass-Roots Activism** – Our local affiliates mobilize individuals on the grass-roots level to make a difference in their own communities. We offer a forum to challenge bigotry and defend religious freedom on local issues, including candidate education, religion in the public sphere, and interfaith relations.
- **Elections** – We help religious leaders and politicians navigate the boundary between politics and religion in a way that safeguards the separation of church and state.
- **Education** – We facilitate interfaith dialogue to enhance mutual understanding and respect for religious differences.

IACC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

IACC annually organizes and sponsors a *Community Thanksgiving Celebration* with a dozen faith traditions taking part. These highlight the value of gratitude and thankfulness across faith perspectives from across our Central Valley.



The first Thursday in May, we sponsor an annual *Interfaith Day of Prayer*. In 2015 and 2016 we did this as part of the city-wide Art Hop, utilizing M Street Gallery, a local art gallery. In 2015 we featured a quilt done by youth representing various language groups in Fresno translating the phrase, "I am lost in God, and God is found in me!" - Rumi. We return there in 2017.



IACC has publicly responded to incidents of intolerance and vandalism directed against innocent people, and/or sacred places of worship. We host and co-sponsor films that highlight interfaith themes.



IACC has endorsed and/or partnered with various faith communities in presenting public and civil dialog regarding matters of faith and public policy. We organize orientation dinners for newly-arrived international students at Fresno State, and provide panel discussions for FSU classes.



IACC takes part in interfaith and cultural fairs throughout the Central Valley.



IACC representatives are often called upon to take part in educational and informational presentations before small groups, and sometimes before a microphone on radio.



In the fall of 2017 we will reintroduce a Multi-Faith Exchange, drawing local residents into conversations rotating among various houses of worship



In response to past incidents of proselytizing on public school campuses, we continue to monitor both the Fresno Unified and Clovis Unified School Districts to ensure a policy is maintained honoring the separation of church and state.

IACC CORE VALUES

IACC seeks to work together to fulfill our core values:

- ◇ Affirming religious pluralism and celebrating difference
- ◇ Protecting minority rights
- ◇ Defending separation of church and state
- ◇ Encouraging civility in public discourse and debate

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<https://www.facebook.com/IA.CentralCalifornia/>