

# Presidential Message

October 2018

## What Are We Afraid Of

Many of you noticed that I've started leading off services with a public service announcement letting everybody know where the emergency exits are in the building. Honestly, this is something that the Fire Marshal would probably tell me that we should have been doing for years. However, as you probably can guess, the real motivation for making the announcement is in response to the attacks that have occurred in houses of worship and other gathering places more and more frequently over the past few years.

We prepare ourselves because of what we're afraid of. Unfortunately, we're also easily sucked into thinking about who we're afraid of. We're afraid of those who are "not like us." Ironically, a couple of days after we celebrated the High Holidays without a threat to our safety, the Islamic Center of New London at our old home on Fort Street in Groton was threatened. On September 21, they received an envelope filled with white powder. As with similar threats the powder was not dangerous. The intent of the threat seems to have been to scare and intimidate. The police are investigating this as a hate crime.

I'm writing this tonight having just attended a large impromptu vigil at the Islamic Center with Rabbi Marc, Sherry, and an impressive number of your fellow congregants. The vigil was also attended by neighbors, church-goers, clergy, police, and politicians from all over Southeastern Connecticut. The leadership of the Islamic Center expressed their gratitude for the outpouring of support. The entire community stood with a fellow house of worship to say with our presence that we are all afraid of the same kind of thing, but that we were not going to be afraid of each other. We all want to live together in peace, and for one night we were united in the belief that those who are different from us are not the threats to that peace.

This week, it was our friends at the Islamic Center who were under threat. Tomorrow it could be Sacred Heart. The next day, it could be Temple Emanu-El. Regardless, I'm confident that our community partners will be there for one another to say that hate and violence have no place in our civil society. Regardless of our differences, be they religious or political, we have to find a way to a more intelligent form of dialogue than cowardly intimidation or mindless arguing. If we can all understand that we're all afraid of the same things, maybe we can stop being afraid of each other.