

## Members of local communities and clergies come together at Burlington temple

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Peace and unity were the predominant themes of an Interfaith meal last Friday night at Temple Shalom Emeth in Burlington.

Approximately 60 residents, friends and clergy shared a pot luck dinner, participated in the traditional Jewish Sabbath prayers, and heard local religious representatives speak out against hate, racism and intolerance.

Shalom Emeth Rabbi Susan Abramson and Rev. Angela Wells of United Congregational Church (UCC) planned the event in response to the recent acts of hatred and violence in Charlottesville, VA.

The evening included singing of familiar songs, including "Blowing in the Wind," "This Land is Your Land," and "We Shall Overcome," led by cantorial soloist David Smerling of Lexington. With little prompting, the entire audience stood up, and held hands in a circle during the singing.

They also created small individual paper flags which include each person's hopes and dreams for America. The flags, which will be displayed in the temple and at UCC, include the following messages:

"Let us all keep singing together;" "Our diversity is something to be valued rather than feared;" "The melting pot made this country great; let's keep it that way;" "My hope for my new country is for it to live up to its true greatness;" and "I wish for only peace; show love and respect. No more hate."

Wells thanked the audience for, "Taking the time to be here," on a summer evening, and noted, "your presence," shows "you know something is wrong (with our country) and you are ready to fix it." She identified, "A divine spark in us,

and a moral responsibility to speak out against intolerance wherever we encounter it." Wells concluded, "We must be vigilant, and work to stem the tide of hate."

Bishop Jared Koyle of the Church of the Latter Day Saints of Billerica, said, "We are all united in our purpose, our vision, and our understanding." He said, "It is with sadness and concern that we view the events in Charlottesville," and the ideas of the white supremacists, "are morally wrong and sinful. We pray for peace, and that we treat one another with compassion and goodness."

Kashif Ahmed of Burlington, representing the Islamic community, noted that 70 years ago, we went to war against the Nazis, and yet, "We are fighting that fight again on our own streets." Despite this hatred and violence, he urged the audience not to be discouraged. They (white supremacists,) "are misguided idiots," and don't reflect what the majority of Americans believe. They will be repressed, he predicted, and "we will beat their ugly chants with louder and more reasonable chants."

Father Rick Piatt of the Augustinian order at Merrimack College, said he came to the peace meal "to listen, learn, and be supportive." He added that we celebrate what it means to be human beings and not tolerate demonizing anyone. "They will not win," Piatt said.

Abramson said that what happened in Charlottesville "made my stomach turn," and "I was horrified by how far evil has permeated our country and government." She was "offended and saddened" by the viciousness of the demonstrators in Charlottesville. But being together at the Interfaith peace meal affirms our values, she said, and "I thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for joining us tonight."

Veronica Savage, a Temple Shalom Emeth member and a transgender woman, also spoke Friday evening, thanking the temple "for embracing and accepting me."

She described President Donald Trump's stand on transgenders in the military "ridiculous," and emphasized that "everyone has value."

In her closing prayer, Rev. Wells said, "we are grateful for our diversity," and "may tonight inspire us to spread love, kindness, and understanding."

She concluded with one word: "Peace."