

Taking time in worship to counter bigotry

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [June 14, 2011](#) issue

Religious and human rights activists are asking U.S. churches to invite Jewish and Muslim clergy to their sanctuaries June 26 to read from sacred texts in an initiative designed to counter anti-Muslim bigotry.

The initiative, called "Faith Shared: Uniting in Prayer and Understanding," is cosponsored by the Interfaith Alliance and Human Rights First. Leaders of the two Washington-based groups said the event is intended to demonstrate respect for Islam in the wake of Qur'an burnings in recent months.

"As a Christian minister who is a pastor in a local congregation, it is important to me for our nation and our world to know that not all Christians promote hate, attack religions different from their own and seek to desecrate the scripture of others," said Welton Gaddy, a Baptist pastor and president of the Interfaith Alliance, on May 17.

"We believe that demonstrating our commitment to those core American values will help counteract the intensified level of negative stereotypes and anti-Muslim bigotry in recent discourse," said Gaddy.

More than 50 churches in 26 states already have committed to the event, including the Washington National Cathedral and New York's Riverside Church.

The regional variety includes two churches in Hawaii as well as Anchorage First Christian Church in Alaska, Boise First United Methodist Church in Idaho and

Decatur First United Methodist Church in Georgia.

"Few things are more important for the future of our world than to respect, to honor and to commit ourselves to the well-being of every person," said National Cathedral dean Sam Lloyd. "As Americans and people of faith, we must use our great traditions to come together for mutual enrichment and understanding."

Working with the Interfaith Alliance, Human Rights First has a website at faithshared.org. "Congregations will send a clear message to the world that Americans respect religious differences and reject bigotry and the demonization of any religion," said spokesman Tad Stahnke of Human Rights First. —RNS/ABP