

"Next time you see me, I won't be wearing this shirt."

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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[It starts off as a standard writeup](#) of a protest and counter-protest of a mosque's Friday prayers. An accompanying video portrays the two sides as polarized not just in rhetoric but in various cultural markers, starting with the fact that one side is packing the kind of firepower that would have shocked people not so long ago (and would still if the heat-packers weren't so white).

You know, just a slice of 21st-century American life.

Then comes something pretty incredible:

Jason Leger, a Phoenix resident wearing one of the profanity-laced shirts, accepted an invitation to join the evening prayer inside the mosque, and said the experience changed him.

"It was something I've never seen before. I took my shoes off. I kneeled. I saw a bunch of peaceful people. We all got along," Leger said. "They made me feel welcome, you know. I just think everybody's points are getting misconstrued, saying things out of emotion, saying things they don't believe."

Paul Griffin, who had earlier said he didn't care if his t-shirt was offensive, assured a small crowd of Muslims at the end of the rally that he wouldn't wear it again.

"I promise, the next time you see me, I won't be wearing this shirt," he told one man while shaking his hand and smiling. "I won't wear it again."

Usama Shami, the president of the ICCP, invited anyone to join him and the 800 members of the mosque for a prayer.

[At least some of the shirts](#) said “Fuck Islam!” Profanity laced, yes, but that hardly captures just how offensive and aggressive this is. Even before accessorizing with an assault rifle.

Yet Shami responded with hospitality. [Here’s Fred Clark](#):

They didn’t tell these strangers to come back some time, without the guns and without the deliberately offensive slogans on their clothing. They didn’t say, “Go home and change your shirt, and then you’re welcome to come back some day after you’ve calmed down.”

I don’t know what these protesters expected as a response when they showed up with their guns and their “F-k Islam” T-shirts, but whatever they expected it wasn’t that they would be greeted with, “Ah, you’re just in time for Friday prayers. Come inside, come inside.”

And this brave response didn’t just make Shami look like the bigger person to all of us who weren’t involved. It actually had an effect on some of the protesters. “*It was something I’ve never seen before*”—this guy was aggressively protesting a religious ritual he’d never even witnessed. I bet he won’t do that again, just like the other guy won’t wear that awful shirt. It’s amazing what a personal encounter can do.

New rule for Christians: If this kind of hateful spectacle of misguided patriotism comes to your town and you don’t actively take the side of your Muslim neighbors, you don’t get to talk about religious liberty anymore.