

WATERBURY REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

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Let's treat each other with kindness, the way it should be, the way it's intended for us to live as mankind.'

UNITED AGAINST HATE



**Eman Beshtawii, left, of the Al Heydaya Islamic Center, watches Mariam Beshtawii give a reading during a Peace and Unity Community Gathering at St. John's Episcopal Church in Waterbury on Wednesday. The event, sponsored by the Naugatuck Valley Project and the United Muslim Mosque, was attended by more than 200 people and featured Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith leaders decrying Islamophobia. Story and more photos on Page [1B](#). Video at [rep-am.com](http://rep-am.com)**

NOT TOLERATING INTOLERANCE

People of different faiths gather at church to support Muslims

**BY MICHAEL PUFFER**

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — More than 200 people filled the pews at St. John’s Episcopal Church Wednesday night for a rally expressing support for Muslims.

The event featured Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith leaders calling for a stand against rising intolerance.

Bishop Lionel French, president of the Naugatuck Valley Project, spoke of his dismay of reports of bullying of school children and threats phoned into people’s homes.

“We are here tonight as a first step,” French said. “Not as a last step, but as a first step to prevent this from ever happening again.”

There was a strong sense of support among the crowd. It strongly applauded a beautifully sung passage from the Koran by 10-year-old Mariam Beshtawii from the Al Heydaya Islamic Center; and a similarly harmonious reading by Rabbi Shaul Marshall Praver from the Newtown Interfaith Clergy.

“The man that says I love God, but hates his brother, he is a liar,” Pastor Rodeny Wade of the Concerned Black Clergy said. “For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God, whom he has not seen. And this is the commandment we have from him, that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

Mingled with the sense of unity and goodwill was a strong sense of foreboding and *See RALLY, Page 3B*



**Saifuddin Hasaan, with Masjid Al Islam of New Haven, second from left, greets Farhan Memon, with the Council on American- Islamic Relations, during a peace and unity community gathering in Waterbury on Wednesday. Also in the photo are Fahd Syed, left, of United Muslim Mosque, and the Rev. Michael Carrol of St. John’s Episcopal Church. The event was sponsored by the Naugatuck Valley Project and United Muslim Mosque.**

**CHRISTOPHER MASSA REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN**



See video of this story at

[rep-am.com](http://rep-am.com)

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## **RALLY:**

‘We are worried about what the future is going to bring’

defiance of intolerance given voice in divisive and anti-Muslim rhetoric used by President-elect Donald Trump.

“Reflecting on what we are about to see in less than 48 hours, I think we are all a little bit worried about what the future is going to bring in our country,” Saifuddin Hasaan, of the Masjid Al Islam in New Haven, said, in a reference to the pending inauguration.

Hasaan spoke of discrimination faced as a Muslim and an African American, of being chased out of certain neighborhoods as he grew up in the 1960s and 1970s. He said he doesn’t want a return to those days.

“I believe we need to stand up for justice, every single one of us,” Hasaan said.

Trump has refuted claims of intolerance while promising to take a hard line against “radical Islamic terror.”

Trump, however, centered on Islam as a threat during his campaign, during which he pledged to shut down Muslim immigration, called for surveillance of “certain mosques” and claimed he watched in Jersey City while “thousands and thousands” of Muslims cheered the fall of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

Farhan Memon, chairman of the Connecticut chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, predicted attempts to shut down mosques and Muslim political and advocacy organizations under President Trump. He urged people to stand united against hate and fear.

“Our enemies can never destroy us, we can only destroy ourselves if we allow fear and hatred to turn us against ourselves,” Memon said. “We have to work harder to express our love than others work to express their hatred.”

The rally was attended by local Republican and Democratic officials, including members of the boards of Education and Aldermen, along with State Representatives Stephanie Cummings, R-74th District, Geraldo Reyes, D-75th District and Larry B. Butler, D-72nd District.

“Please let’s not repeat the mistakes of the past,” Reyes said. “Let’s treat each other with kindness, the way it should be, the way it’s intended for us to live as mankind.”

Wednesday’s rally was organized by the Naugatuck Valley Project, the United Muslim Mosque and other community activists. These organizers are asking city officials to form a task force to review city policies relating to hate crimes, to better prevent and record abuses.