

TOWN FORUM

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GUEST OPINION

Rev. Robert Moore

Applying the Golden Rule to our current situation

The Coalition for Peace Action co-sponsored a Rally against Islamophobia and Bigotry at Trenton City Hall on Feb. 6. A wonderfully diverse group of 250 people attended, and heard speakers from area faith communities, Hispanic and civil rights groups, and political leaders including Trenton Mayor Eric Jackson.

What brought so many together on very short notice was a deeply troubling executive order by President Trump, immediately banning immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the U.S. Thankfully, a federal appeals court has stopped implementation of the order as of this writing.

While appropriate security measures, such as thorough vetting of those wanting to immigrate, should be used to keep the American people safe from possible terrorist attackers, over the past four decades not a single terrorist attack in the U.S. has been committed by anybody from the seven countries banned.

On the contrary, by alienating America's most important allies in fighting terrorism, mainstream Muslims in the U.S. and abroad, President Trump's order is almost certainly making Americans less safe. Most of the terrorist attacks that have been discovered and stopped before they could take place were because Muslims of good will tipped off authorities in time.

I am reminded of a core teaching of Christianity, where Jesus says "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35). The Golden Rule means we are called to empathize with strangers (as immigrants are often viewed), and welcome them instead of excluding them. Think of the thousands of children who are refugees from wars, as in Syria. Jesus teaches that however we treat the stranger/immigrant, we are treating him.

Before September 11, 2001, I didn't know many Muslims. But since that horrifying terrorist attack — among whose victims were numerous Muslims — I have met many and not only learned about their great religion of peace, but also got to know them as wonderfully caring people. It is in welcoming and getting to know the stranger that we can experience "the beloved community."

I also think about the Golden Rule when I hear alarm about North Korea or other "rogue states" seeking to obtain nuclear weapons. Certainly we in the Coalition for Peace Action, and all people of good will, are against such states having nuclear weapons. That is one reason we worked intensively to support the

Iran Nuclear Agreement, which through peaceful means is preventing Iran from having enough nuclear weapons materials to make even a single warhead.

But 90 percent of the 16,000 nuclear weapons in the world today are possessed by the U.S. and Russia. The U.S. is planning to spend \$1 trillion over the next 30 years to upgrade those to be deployed for another century, and Russia is also provocatively developing new nuclear weapons. More immediately worrisome, President Trump has said, "If we have nuclear weapons, why can't we use them?"

An important opportunity to restrain the possibility of the U.S. using its nuclear weapons is the Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act (HR 669/S200) that was recently introduced in the U.S. Congress. This bill would require a Congressional Declaration of War, which explicitly authorizes use of nuclear weapons, before the president could use them first in a conflict. It is a sensible restraint on this most awesome of all decisions, whether to start a nuclear war — which could still end all life on earth.

Another step forward is based on in Article 6 of the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, in which the nuclear "haves" agreed to negotiate the elimination of their arsenals. Otherwise, there is a permanent double standard, and we aren't treating the "other" as we want to be treated.

United Nations negotiations are about to get underway toward the goal of verifiable global abolition of nuclear weapons. Global bans on chemical and biological weapons were previously agreed to, and landmines were also globally banned.

As with the landmines ban, the countries that have nuclear weapons have so far not agreed to participate in the nuclear abolition negotiations. But eventually, the countries with landmines felt enough pressure to join the ban treaty, and the Landmines Ban Campaign won the Nobel Peace Prize. We can help generate enough pressure to also make that happen with a Treaty to Ban Nuclear Weapons.

Readers who want to work for welcoming the stranger, and toward global abolition of nuclear weapons are encouraged to visit peacecoalition.org or call the Coalition for Peace Action at (609) 924-5022.

The Rev. Robert Moore is Executive Director of the Coalition for Peace Action and Treasurer of the Princeton Clergy Association.