



INTERFAITH ALLIANCE OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

April 28, 2017
Fresno City Council
2600 Fresno St,
Fresno, CA 93721

This letter is sent on behalf of the Board for the Interfaith Alliance of Central California stating its opposition to the proposed posting of the motto “In God We Trust” placed on the wall behind the council chamber’s dais. We are represented by Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Unitarian Universalist, Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon, Zoroastrian, and Native American religious traditions. We also recognize Humanists and Atheists as part of the vital mix of our Fresno community, all of whom are under the protection of the separation of church and state.

Those of us professing a faith in God agree with non-faith-based citizens that freedom of religious expression is something that has a place in the “public square.” But a legislative chamber is entirely different from the public square. A notion of legislative deliberation that is blind to the religious nature or character of one particular interpretation of God becomes blatantly coercive in that supposedly unbiased process when the proposed signage is made so dominant. One look at the list of Christian voices in support of this proposal offers a “tell” as to the assumed nature and character of God as would be portrayed in that signage. This was especially telling in one comment made in a public media quote that the proposed phrase is a good statement, “...especially in this season...” The statement was posted two days prior to the Christian celebration of Easter, a season for explicitly one religious body.

We would propose that a principle shared by those who hold to a notion of God, as well as by those who do not hold to a notion of God, is the principle of “justice for all.” Each of the major religions represented in our city, as well as most of the minor religious populations, have within their faith traditions a notion of justice as a principle characteristic of their God. Humanists and others likewise strongly embrace a notion of justice that is to be extended to all citizens. It is a deeply patriotic phrase embedded in the original Pledge of Allegiance. To see that imprimatur on the wall behind the council dais would be an affirmation of the freedom, of the democratic process, and of the recognition of an inherent dignity that ought to be embedded in our government functioning as a healthy instrument of community good. One can find a characteristic representative of their God in such a phrase and in no way denies one’s faith perspective. People of no faith can see in it an open invitation to bring general ethical and moral perspectives to the deliberative processes in this chamber that is respectful of all without denying the opportunity to speak or deliberate without fear.

We, therefore, encourage you to defeat the proposal put forth by Councilmember Bredefeld, and if the Council would see fit, to substitute “...and justice for all...” if anything at all needs to be added to that wall.

Respectfully,
Rev. Norman Broadbent, Irfan Ali— co-chairs of Interfaith Alliance of Central California

Supporting Board Members

Kaye Cummings	Cheryl Gardner	Rev. Tim Kutzmark	Joe Pulido
Rev. Arville Earl	Jim Grant	Rev. Anna Lopez	Dr. Negin Tahvildary
Babs Eskin	Karen Hale	Rev. Akiko Miyake-Stoner	Sally Vogl
Dr. Alfred Evans	Sudarshan Kapoor	Paul Pierce	

Non-Board Endorsers

Rev. Christopher Breedlove	Sukaina Hussain	Samuel Molina	Connie Young
Rev. Natalie Chamberlain	Katie Hymans	Reza Nekumanesh	Saul Eskin
Dr. Andrew Fiala	Allan Jendian	Deep Singh	Rev. Steve Ratzlaff
Imam Seyed-Ali Ghazvini	Yezdar Kaoosji	Thomas Weiler	Myrna Martinez Nateras
Rev. Art Gramaje	Nancy Key	Rabbi Laura Winer	
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