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STATEMENT

Supporting Our Muslim Neighbors' Right to Worship

ALBUQUERQUE—Monday, July 27, 2026 —IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Below is a statement from Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, supporting our Muslim neighbors' right to worship.

In recent weeks, I have heard concerns from some residents regarding the proposal to build a mosque and community center in the North Valley of Albuquerque. As Archbishop of Santa Fe and a resident of Albuquerque, I feel compelled to speak clearly and pastorally: our Muslim neighbors have the same God-given and constitutionally protected right to worship freely as every other faith community, including our own. Defending that right is not only a civic duty but a core element of Catholic teaching.

The Catholic Church has long affirmed religious liberty as essential to human dignity. In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council taught that every person "must be free from coercion" in matters of faith. This principle applies universally. It is not limited to Catholics or Christians; it extends fully to Muslims, Jews, and all people who seek to worship according to their conscience. Supporting the construction of a mosque is therefore entirely consistent with our own tradition and moral commitments.

At a time when divisions can easily deepen, I urge our community to choose respect, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence. We do not need to share the same beliefs to share the same neighborhood. What we do need is a willingness to listen, to learn, and to recognize the face of a neighbor rather than a stranger. Interfaith relationships enrich our civic life and strengthen the social fabric we all depend on.

I must also speak plainly: anti-Muslim sentiment has no place in the heart of a Christian. Any hostility toward Muslims—whether expressed through rhetoric, suspicion, or opposition to their places of worship—is incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who commands us to love our neighbor without exception. Fear of the other is not a Christian virtue. Hospitality is.

Our Muslim brothers and sisters have faced discrimination and hostility in many parts of the country. When such prejudice arises, Catholics are called to stand beside them, not apart from them. Supporting their right to build a mosque is one concrete way to affirm their dignity and to reject the forces that seek to marginalize them.

I encourage us all to welcome this project with goodwill. A neighborhood that makes room for the prayers of many is stronger, more compassionate, and more reflective of the values we claim to uphold.

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