



NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Vic Gutman, 402-708-1820, vgutman@vgagroup.com

**TRI-FAITH INITIATIVE OF OMAHA ANNOUNCES TWO MAJOR MILESTONES
TO LAUNCH NEXT PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT OF UNPRECEDENTED PROJECT**
Vision of Co-Located Synagogue, Church and Mosque to be Fulfilled

OMAHA, Neb., April 14, 2015 — The vision of Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha to fulfill an unprecedented intentional co-location of a synagogue, church and mosque on a collaborative campus is now nearing reality. The organization, which includes members of the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—has announced both the confirmation of the Christian presence and a ceremonial groundbreaking for the Islamic facility on the Tri-Faith campus at 132nd and Pacific Streets in the Sterling Ridge development. The new neighbors will complete the envisioned faith partnership when they join Temple Israel, who in 2013 was the first to construct a facility on the Tri-Faith campus.

Countryside Community Church (United Church of Christ) announced on Sunday that its congregation voted with a seventy percent majority in favor of relocating their church from their current facility at 8787 Pacific Street to the Tri-Faith campus, thereby becoming the Christian presence of the Tri-Faith Initiative.

“We have spent many months in prayer and discernment concerning God's will over this decision and as a congregation we have reached the conclusion that God calls us to relocate our church and become the Christian presence of the Tri-Faith Initiative,” said Senior Minister Eric Elnes, Countryside Community Church. “This momentous step means not only that we will be planning to build a new church on the Tri-Faith Campus, but we are excited about how our partnership with the Tri-Faith Initiative will create an expanded role for us in nurturing the community.”

Countryside Community Church was asked last spring by the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, the original Christian group associated with the project, to consider becoming the Christian presence of the Tri-Faith Initiative. In 2011, Tri-Faith Initiative announced that four entities had purchased land at the site: Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha, Temple Israel, the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, and the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture (now renamed American Muslim Institute). The Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska originally planned to build a church at the site and subsequently agreed to sell their land at the campus site to Countryside Community Church upon the congregational vote for relocation. The land transfer will take place in the near future and details of the construction of the new church building will be announced after the plan is finalized.

“The Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska remains fully committed to supporting the Tri-Faith Initiative,” Bishop J. Scott Barker said. “As a founding partner, we expect to participate in future programming at the planned interfaith center on the campus and to remain associated with this important project.”

With Countryside Community Church officially in place as Tri-Faith's Christian presence, another major milestone has been reached: American Muslim Institute, the Islamic partner, had secured funding for the construction of its nondenominational mosque on the Tri-Faith campus contingent upon the final determination of a Christian partner. A ceremonial groundbreaking on the new facility, which will also serve as an educational institute, will take place May 21 with construction starting in the fall.

“Education and research are key organizational components of our vision to create an institution which will affirm the core values of Islam: acceptance, compassion, equality, justice and peace. But perhaps the most distinctive feature of this Institute is its collaboration with the Tri-Faith Initiative. We look forward to an enduring, mutually respectful partnership,” said Dr. Syed Mohiuddin, founding member and AMI president. Mohiuddin also added that the organization’s new, simpler name will be reflected in the facility.

An acclaimed fourth building is also planned as a central anchor for the Tri-Faith campus. This shared interfaith center will welcome people of all Abrahamic faiths regardless of denomination and will provide social, educational and conference facilities enabling global study and communication. A capital campaign is planned to begin this fall. Ahead of construction, Tri-Faith Initiative is currently sponsoring activities that include speaking engagements, children’s programs, shared holidays between congregations and annual picnics.

Tri-Faith Initiative is currently governed by a local board of directors consisting of representatives from each faith partner and three additional community representatives. All funding supporting the project is from local sources.

“The Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha incorporated in 2006 and since then we have evolved from an optimistic concept to a memorandum of understanding to a 35-acre campus that is now firmly in development. The process of assembling this complex puzzle has brought every one of us closer to our respective faiths while fostering respect for members of other faiths. This is one religious interaction that brings people together, and offers a hopeful and specific plan for building long-term collaborative communities,” said Bob Freeman, chairman of the Tri-Faith board of directors.

“We are eager to welcome our new neighbors to this beautiful neighborhood we share. The property has an interesting history; it was originally developed in the 1920s as a Jewish country club, at a time when people of the Jewish faith were barred from membership in other Omaha clubs. We are proud that—generations later—our places of worship and community will reside together as a symbol of the relationships of trust, acceptance and respect that we share,” Rabbi Aryeh Azriel, Temple Israel, said.

“The community has shown tremendous support for The Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha,” Freeman said. “Omaha truly welcomes and supports collaborations like this and we appreciate the many individuals, foundations, and institutions who have provided unwavering support.”

About the Tri-Faith Initiative

The Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization incorporated in 2006 that includes members of the three Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Tri-Faith Initiative is a globally unique project that deliberately co-locates a synagogue, church and mosque with a common desire to foster mutual understanding, respect and friendship. The organization is committed to planning an interfaith center which will facilitate learning and respect from intentionally collaborative efforts.

The vision statement of the Tri-Faith Initiative is: In working together, our vision is to build bridges of Respect, Trust and Acceptance, to challenge stereotypes of each other, to learn from one another, and to counter the influence of extremists and agents of hate.

For more information on the Tri-Faith Initiative, visit the newly redesigned website at trifaith.org, like Tri-Faith Initiative on Facebook or follow @TriFaithOmaha on Twitter or Instagram.

About Temple Israel

to build on the campus. The congregation dedicated its new synagogue October 2013.

Temple Israel is a Reform Jewish congregation that strives to bridge tradition and modernity, linking a cherished Jewish history with fresh approaches to spirituality, lifelong Jewish learning and acts of justice. The congregation was founded in 1871 and nearly 750 families are members today. Temple Israel is the first of the Tri-Faith Initiative partners to build on the campus with the congregation dedicating its new synagogue in October 2013. For more information, visit templeisraelomaha.com.

About the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska

The Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska is an organization of 53 churches located throughout Nebraska, where diverse communities of people gather to encourage and support each other in worshipping Jesus, nurture each other through good times and bad, and reach out in service to the larger world. The Episcopal Church has been a presence in Nebraska since 1865. The Nebraska Diocese is part of the larger Episcopal Church, which is in turn a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska is a founding partner of the Tri-Faith Initiative and is in the process of transitioning its leadership role over to Countryside Community Church United Church of Christ. For more information, visit www.episcopal-ne.org.

About American Muslim Institute (AMI)

Formerly the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture, the American Muslim Institute's (AMI) mission is to promote a better understanding of Islam in the Western world. The AMI's educational, religious and social programs are grounded in faith and the core values of Islam: acceptance, compassion, equality, justice and peace. Founded in Omaha in 2006, the AMI is a local, non-denominational, autonomous nonprofit organization. For more information on AMI, visit americanmusliminstitute.org.

###