

## Chaplains unite to denounce ‘sad’ vandalism incident in campus prayer space



Brandeis chaplains, from left, Alexander Levering Kern, Rabbi Elyse Winick, Rev. Walter Cuenin and Imam Talal Eid.

By Dennis Nealon

In a public demonstration of unity, Brandeis University’s four chaplains gathered today in a Muslim prayer space on campus to denounce an incidence of vandalism there and to reaffirm the community's commitment to religious inclusion.

The chaplains, representing Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish community members, met in the Muslim prayer space and lounge in Usdan Student Center and issued a statement deploring the disturbance of furnishings and office equipment.

“All people of good will and conscience at Brandeis University — the president, the interfaith chaplaincy, students, faculty, staff, the provost’s Steering Committee on Diversity and the Division of Students and Enrollment — stand together in condemning the vandalism to the Muslim prayer space and lounge,” the statement said.

"We unite in solidarity with all our Muslim students and assure them that this kind of action will not be tolerated at Brandeis. Any act of vandalism, especially those that target a particular religious or cultural community, is deplorable. This is particularly true here at Brandeis where we place the utmost value on being a community of inclusion and religious pluralism," it added.

The statement was signed by President Jehuda Reinharz; the Rev. Walter Cuenin, Catholic chaplain; Imam Talal Eid, Muslim chaplain; Alexander Levering Kern, Protestant chaplain; Rabbi Elyse Winick, Jewish chaplain; and Jamele Adams, associate dean of student life. Adams joined the chaplains at the prayer space, one of four areas designed for religious observances on campus. Reinharz was out of state and unable to attend.

The Office of Public Safety is investigating the March 5 incident after it was discovered that an individual or individuals entered the space and unplugged and upended lamps, damaged a few pieces of silverware, moved and unplugged a computer, phone and printer and scratched paint on a sealed-off interior door. A copy of the Quran is also missing,

the police report said.

Brandeis police have advised the Waltham Police Department about the investigation and will be consulting other law enforcement agencies as necessary. The results of the investigation will be shared with the Brandeis community when they are available.

Eid characterized the incident as an "isolated" case. He said his three years working on campus have been marked only by harmony and sharing among students of different creeds, as well as a warm and cooperative relationship with his fellow chaplains. He credited the Office of Public Safety for launching its investigation.

Each of the chaplains and Adams took turns reading aloud segments of the statement. "This is a sad moment for our Brandeis family, but we will emerge from this time with a renewed spirit of understanding and cooperation," the statement concluded.