

## ‘We should all work together’

Island’s religious leaders gather to pray for peace

BY TIFFANY CUSAAC-SMITH

tiffany.cusaac-smith@newsday.com

As protests over the Israel-Hamas war grip the country, Long Island religious leaders of Jewish, Muslim and other faiths formed a prayer circle.

The official reason for the Thursday morning gathering at the Tilles Center for the Performing Arts at LIU Post in Brookville was the National Day of Prayer, which is typically celebrated on the first Thursday of May, leaders said.

But what perhaps wafted in many of the minds and hearts of the more than 20 attendees was the Israel-Hamas war that has left tens of thousands dead and sparked demonstrations at places such as Columbia University and Stony Brook University.

“I’m hoping that this is a time for us to not only pray, but to build friendship and build bridges, especially during these difficult times,” said Sepi Djaveri, senior community mobilizer with the UJA-Federation of New York, which joined a number of organizations to put on the event.

For roughly an hour, religious leaders shared thoughts and prayers, including some in Hindi and Hebrew. Many of the themes expressed emphasized togetherness and conflict resolution. Early in the event, some of the clergy members lit candles on a table in the center of



Rabbi Lina Zerbarini of Kehillath Shalom Synagogue, left, talks with Urmila Shivaram of Hindus of LI.

the room.

“We pray for our nation, the United States of America, to remain loving [and] compassionate . . . to remove prejudice from our hearts and enable us to love our brothers and sisters,” said Imam Amin Rahman of the Muslim Council of Suffolk County.

The Rev. Natalie Fenimore of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock talked about extending understanding and care for one another.

“None should be held captive or hostage,” she said. “None should go hungry. None should be denied the means to

thrive.”

“Amen,” said some members after she spoke.

As the members of the circle prayed, some clergy members closed their eyes while calming music played. Others looked like they were in deep contemplation.

Some attendees broke out in song, with one in Hebrew that talked about hope coming from God.

Rabbi Michael Mishkin of Temple Beth Israel of Port Washington talked about releasing grudges that have been nurtured over generations.

He thanked God for helping him to see that “we should all

work together with our shared humanity to try to recognize and build a community in which we honor the dignity of all people.”

After the event, the Rev. Mark Bigelow of the Congregational Church of Huntington said the war has been a source of division, but the National Day of Prayer — the first such event he has attended — shows there is a different pathway where people of different faiths can come together.

He will bring back to his congregants the continued hope “that we can all work together to bring peace and justice,” he said.