

## **While the Media is Filled with Negative Attitudes Toward Muslims, Christians are Called to Love Them as Our Neighbors**

*By Ralph Keiser, Chairman of Race and Religion Commission*

CNN has been airing a program during the last month entitled "Unwanted: The Muslims Next Door." In the House of Representatives, Congressman Peter King of New York is holding hearings on the "Radicalization of the American Muslim Community". Across the US Capital Rotunda Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois is holding hearings on "Protecting the Civil Rights of Muslims". For any person to denigrate another person's religion is to attack the very moral underpinning which is the basis on which our Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were written. **The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees Freedom of Religion.** We as Americans are called to honor our diversity by personal example, showing that **tolerance and understanding of those persons different than ourselves is the key to equal rights for all Americans.**

During those fear filled days of WWII, President Franklin Roosevelt is quoted as saying, **"We have nothing to fear but fear itself!"** **Fear and lack of understanding are in fact the reason why many persons are so suspicious of Muslims.** I believe that if those persons who denigrate Muslims ever met a Muslim face to face at one of the Ramadan celebrations, at our Lenten Interfaith event at Grace Church, March 13<sup>th</sup>, or at the Interfaith Dinner held at Congregation Beth Shalom on April 9th, they would realize how wrong they have been to throw all Muslims into one category as terrorists. Many of our Muslim refugee immigrants have come to the USA for religious freedom just as our pilgrim forefathers did four hundred years ago. They left countries like Sudan and Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq so that they would not fall under the grip of militant right wing Muslims, who demanded that their wives and daughters wear a burke, and that their daughters not be allowed to attend school. I personally have met many of these moderate Muslims, as a volunteer tutor for Exodus World Service, helping them with their English as a Second Language, with US History and US Government so that they could pass their test and become US Citizens. These people are very grateful and proud that they have been granted the opportunity to become US Citizens.

Meeting a person of another religion face to face gives you the opportunity to see first hand that they are also a Child of God. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ said that the Two Most Important Commandments were to Love God and to Love our Neighbor as Ourselves. In telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus purposely chose a hated Samaritan to be the hero of that beloved Parable to lovingly show us that God calls us to accept and love our neighbors, even neighbors whom the world sees as undesirable and even enemies. As practicing Christians in a diverse country, we are called to that tolerance and understanding Jesus Christ demonstrates for us. That is how we will help God to answer our prayer when we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven." As Servants in God's Kingdom we are called to treat all

persons as Children of God. We are called to treat all persons with respect, with acceptance, with freedom from bigotry, and most of all with love.