

Ramadan Open House brings people of all faiths together

By Ralph Keiser, Chairman of Race and Religion Commission

In a story for the Naperville Sun, Kathy Millen and staff photographer Mary Beth Nolan covered the Ramadan Open House, held at the White Eagle Country Club for members of all faiths in the Naperville area this past August. The intent of that meeting was to form bonds between interfaith groups in order to promote greater understanding. Sponsored by the members of the Islamic Center of Naperville, approximately 160 persons of local Christian and Jewish faith communities, educators, community and elected officials, and interested residents filled the room to standing room only. Some came out of curiosity, but most came in a show of support for a group of people that are their neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and friends. Pastor Lisa Telomen, Bob Elazan, and Ralph Keiser attended this wonderful gathering, representing the Race and Religion Commission, and Grace United Methodist Church. Our good friend Bernie Neuman of Congregation Beth Shalom, came with a contingent of 26 other members of his Jewish congregation.

“Our goal is to reach out to the larger community, the good neighbors, and also to educate them more about Islam and Ramadan,” said Shoaib Khadri, of Naperville, and a member of the Islamic Center of Naperville. **“Hopefully on a one-on-one interaction, we can dispel any misconceptions people have about Islam.”** Does that sound like a militant Muslim terrorist talking to you? No! I think that it does not! It sounds like a man with a strong belief in his One True God, Allah, who shares that belief with his fellow Jews and Christians, wanting to work toward peace. **And that is what MOST MUSLIMS in this country want: PEACE! and the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God!**

So it was in this room filled with people **who all believe in the same God of Abraham**, that we shared a generous tasty middle eastern buffet dinner together at sunset, after prayers, and the breaking of the fast with a sweet date and a drink of water. Our Muslim brothers and sisters fast all day long, and break the fast at sunset, after meditating on God and the will of God for their lives throughout the day. **Ramadan** is a month long celebration, this year from August 11th through Sept 9th, during which time Muslims are required to fast and to attempt to draw closer to God. In that way, it is not unlike **Rosh Hashanah**, which our brothers and sisters of the Jewish faith time to ask God for forgiveness of their sins and to seek be reminded of the many blessings of God with a taste of apples and honey. And it is not unlike **Lent**, during which, some Christians fast, some Christians give up meat on Friday, and some Christians give up something which they would rather not do without, like chocolate. And during Lent, Christians are to meditate on the upcoming Holy Week, ask God to forgive them for their sins, seek to draw closer to God, and come to appreciate the great LOVE God has for us in giving His Only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins. Do you see that there are similarities between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam?

Christians, Jews, and Muslims are all taught that we are to Love God with All their Hearts, All their Minds, All their Strength, and All their Souls. And Christians, Jews and Muslims are all taught that we are to Love Our Neighbor as Ourselves. Do Christians and Jews ever break God’s Laws like some Muslims do? Of course they do! Do we want all non-Christians to judge all Christians by the atrocities that some Christians in Germany did to Jews during

WWII? Of Course we don't! Do we want non-Christians to judge all Christians by the atrocities that the KKK did to our African American Christian brothers and sisters across the south and in other places in the US during the 20th Century? Of course we do not! Do all Christians want to be judged with the right wing militant minister of a 50 member congregation in Florida who wants to tear and burn the Quran? I truly hope not! Similarly, all Muslims who are non-militant, do not want to be judged by the atrocities committed by the Taliban on 9-11 in this country. They don't want to be judged by the atrocities committed by women and even children wired with bombs, taught to walk into a crowded market place in the middle east, and set off the bombs, killing and maiming scores of people.

The fear and hate that filled Americans toward the Japanese after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the subsequent internment camps in the interior of the US, where Japanese Americans were taken, losing their homes and their possessions should be a warning to us of what fear and hate can do to the human soul. My Father told me that older members of my own family, who still spoke German in their small farming community of Mt. Olive, IL, in southern Illinois, were asked to kiss the American flag during WWI and WWII, and asked to kneel, place one hand on the Holy Bible, and swear that they did not support the German Kaiser during WWI and that they did not support the German Nazis during WWII. We can look at how the Polish, the Italians, and the Irish were all looked down upon and mistreated when they came to this country as immigrants and gain some empathy for how our immigrant refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and other Muslim countries around the world feel when they come to this country now to face religious intolerance they had chosen to leave behind in the country of their birth.

The refugee immigrant families I have tutored to become US Citizens, who have all been moderate Muslim families from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan came to the US to get away from intolerance and hatred they had to live with in their own country. They were mistreated by militant Muslims in their own countries and not allowed to worship God in the way they chose to worship Him. Their wives and daughters were required to wear burkes' and their daughters were not allowed to attend school. Those families came to the United States for the same basic Freedom of Religion which our Pilgrim Forefathers came to this country. And if we forbid our Muslim brothers and sisters to build mosques and worship God as they choose, if we distrust them, and think of them as terrorists, than, we are breaking their basic right as Americans, granted to them by the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the First Ten Amendments to the US Constitution. We owe it to ourselves and to them to uphold their rights, which are guaranteed to all Americans by the US Constitution.

The Quran does not advocate hate mongering and violence against their neighbors any more than the Torah or the Holy Bible do. The Quran, the Torah, and the Holy Bible all teach us to show love and charity to our neighbors. The Ten Commandments are still a basis for our Christian religion. And similar commandments to love God and love your neighbor are in the Quran. Jesus expanded on the Ten Commandments of Exodus and loving our neighbor, found in Leviticus. Jesus taught us that if someone asks us for our shirt, we are to give them our coat as well. Jesus taught us that if someone asks us to carry their heavy load for one mile, we are to carry it instead for two miles. Jesus taught us that if someone hits us on the

right cheek, we are to turn our face and allow them to hit us on our left cheek as well. Jesus taught us to be servants of the Living God loving our neighbor as ourselves. Mohammed taught Muslims to be hospitable to the stranger, and to go out of their way for a stranger; to feed him, if he is hungry, to give him a drink if he is thirsty; to give him warm clothing if he is in need of clothing. The Torah, used by our Jewish brothers and sisters is filled with similar teachings, which is where Jesus learned about them in the first place. People of God love each other. People of God trust each other. People of God seek to be Children of God in everything they do, so that one day, we may all find ourselves in the Glorious Presence of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ.

I ask that each of you open your hearts and seek to be a neighbor to our Muslim brothers and sisters. I ask that each of you consider how you would feel if the shoe were on the other foot and you were a stranger in a new land, and treated unfairly and unjustly, and be questioned about how you worship your God. I know that some of you have lost loved ones and friends to Muslim terrorists. I ask that you ask God to help you to find it in your heart to forgive them. It will make you a better person. And the next opportunity you have to meet a member of the Muslim faith, in person, and talk with them face to face, I pray that you will seek to take the opportunity to do so. You will be greeted by a warm smile and will see the light of God shining in their eyes. You may be surprised at how much you don't know about the Muslim faith. You may be surprised to know that there are stories about Jesus and the Virgin Mary in the Quran. It may surprise you to know that Muslims believe as Christians do, that Jesus Christ will be the Judge at the End of Time, and will reign in Heaven as the King of Heaven. It may surprise you to know that Muslims are asked to go out of their way for a stranger or a neighbor, to show kindness and tolerance toward them. Can we as Christians do any less?