

Finding hope in each other

Religious see interfaith relationship forming

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by Katherine Mullen
Staff Writer

Frederick Imam Yahya Hendi believes that the future of Muslim-Jewish relations begins with honoring and respecting one another.

“To honor our covenant with God we have to honor our covenant with each other,” Hendi said at a dinner last week.

To underscore his message, the religious leader of the Islamic Society of Frederick began to explain “Hajj” — the religious pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are required to make — to the members of Congregation Kol Ami of Frederick and Beth Sholom Congregation, two Jewish communities in Frederick.

Members of the Jewish and Muslim communities gathered at the Lynfield Events Complex in Frederick to break bread and make music together at “The Tent of Abraham,” an interfaith dinner. The dinner was two days before the start of Hanukkah, which began at sundown Friday.

While the “The Tent of Abraham” was the first time both religious communities came together for an interfaith dinner, many members in the Jewish and Muslim communities said they have positive relations with one another. Several members and religious leaders said they hope to work together on social action projects and to plan family-style events in the future.

Student Rabbi Dan Sikowitz of Kol Ami described his relationship with Hendi as “very warm” with plenty of open discussion through e-mails and phone calls. “I think keeping the lines of communication open can only be positive,” Sikowitz said.

Kol Ami has nearly 90 families in its congregation, Sikowitz said. The Reformed Jewish congregation was formed in 2003.

In comparison, the Islamic Society has more than 300 families and is rapidly growing, Hendi said, with many families coming to Frederick from across the country. Hendi also noted that the Islamic Society of Frederick’s relationship with the Jewish community is positive and good.

The idea for an interfaith dinner came to him two years ago, he said, but busy schedules made it difficult to plan. In August, Hendi decided the time was right for the event, and did not want to wait any longer. The recent war between Israel and Lebanon made his desire for dialogue even stronger, he said.

“I didn’t want the impact of the war to come here,” Hendi said.

Hendi looked forward to the future, and noted that he would like both communities to work together on social action projects that focus on education and the homeless in Frederick.

However, the interfaith dinner was an important beginning, he said.

“This is the first step in a 100-mile journey,” Hendi said.

Jamie Hendi, congregation president of Kol Ami, also wanted to see both faith communities work together in social action projects, such as hunger and homelessness. Other interfaith activities that are in the planning stages include a picnic and a sports league for children, Hendi said.

Interfaith community events are a priority, Hendi said, to create understanding and eliminate people’s fear of what is different and unknown.

“I really think that the unknown is fearful,” Hendi said. “It’s easy to not understand someone when you’re not standing face to face.”

Rachel Noor, a member of the Islamic Society, said that outreach is the most important factor in good relations between the faith communities. Noor said there has not been a lot of outreach among different religions in Frederick, although the

community's response to the Muslim community after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks was "amazing."

Outreach in the form of an interfaith dinner is something the community should have twice a year, Noor added.

"The Tent of Abraham" dinner also included an explanation of Hanukkah, a menorah lighting ceremony by Muslim and Jewish children, and traditional Israeli and Middle Eastern dancing.

In his closing remarks to the crowd, Imam Hendi urged his audience to work together for a future free of bloodshed and violence for the sake of their children, who happily played together while their parents discussed serious matters over dinner.

"Let us commit ourselves to working together for the sake of our children," Hendi said.

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