

# Christians Reaching Local Afghan Community in Northern California

**First Assembly of God in Fremont has spearheaded an effort to befriend the largest U.S. community of Afghans**

Less than two months after terrorists attacked the United States last September, Muslims and Christians in Fremont, Calif., broke bread together and started on a journey toward friendship.

Since then, cogent relationships have formed between members of the two groups, at least two San Francisco Bay area churches have found a ministry niche in this community that is home to more than 15,000 Afghans, and one pastor has seen a prophetic word for his ministry fulfilled.

“A prophet prayed over me and said I would be ministering at the boarder of Pakistan and Afghanistan,” said Terry Inman, pastor of First Assembly of God in Fremont, recalling an experience he had at a pastors conference in Buenos Aries in 1999. “I told the prophet I already was ministering to Afghans because Fremont has the largest concentration of Afghans in the United States.”

When Inman returned from the conference he intensified his efforts to forge relationships in the Afghan community. He befriended business owners in a section of Fremont known as “Little Kabul.” When the attacks occurred Sept. 11, 2001, Inman called on several of his Afghan friends, including Wahid Andesha, the owner of a local Afghan restaurant.

During the encounter Inman prayed for Andesha and broached the idea of a friendship dinner. A date was set, and he hired Andesha to prepare the meal.

Andesha invited his family, friends and patrons, but in early November only 50 people had reserved their seats for the gathering. Inman had hoped it would draw at least 200 Afghan community members.

The gathering received a boost after Inman met the organizer of a local humanitarian effort for Afghan nationals. Upon learning of a drive to collect blankets for war refugees in Afghanistan, Inman and others from the church made donations. While dropping off their blankets, Inman met the organizer—an Afghan-American woman—and told her about the friendship dinner.

“She ended up inviting a bunch of people,” he said. “God opened that door through generosity.”

Some 150 members of the Afghan community came to the dinner, held at Inman’s church on Nov. 17. Andesha served traditional Afghan cuisine as hosts from several churches greeted the guests. For many, the dinner marked their first social encounter with Afghans.

“We just wanted the Afghan community to know we are their friends,” said Joni Lyons, 52, a host at the dinner. “We didn’t talk about anything religious.”

Inman said the main goal of the dinner was to build relationships and bless the Afghan community. In doing so, Afghans were exposed to the love and hope of Jesus Christ,

Inman said.

“The dinner broke down barriers of fear,” said Sandi McCoy, 40, a host at the dinner, who noted that she saw for the first time Afghans as individuals rather than just a people group. “It wasn’t about what they believed or what we believed. It was about friendship.”

Andesha agreed. “The highlight was getting all those people together,” he said. “From that point on we have had nothing but support from the American people.”

Since then, First Assembly has co-hosted another blanket drive and shipped a container of goods to Afghanistan. Two other churches have joined First Assembly in creating the Afghan Coalition, an effort to start and strengthen friendships with Afghans and provide resources for Afghan refugees new to the United States.

The prophetic words Inman received in South America became reality in March when he traveled to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. There, he and his team ministered through prayer to victims of a terrorist attack on the Protestant International Church in Islamabad. They also visited an Afghan refugee camp near the border.

“The Christian community in Pakistan and Afghanistan have been threatened but emboldened,” Inman said. “We came back from our visit with even more of a burden to befriend and minister to our Afghan neighbors in Fremont.

“It’s not confrontational evangelism—it’s a relational approach,” he continued. “I think we are doing things the way

Jesus would.”

**Kirk Noonan**