

# Iranian Pastor Isn't Afraid to Reach Muslims

**Iran-born pastor Donald Fareed says democracy will prevent new Christians from being killed in Muslim nations**

Donald Fareed, a former Muslim, is used to receiving death threats during the call-in segment of his satellite TV show. But attempts at intimidation, illness and meager funding have not stopped the Iranian-born pastor from preaching the gospel to Muslims.

From his base in San Jose, Calif., Fareed reaches millions of Muslims in Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and parts of Iraq each week through his broadcasts. If his salvation message wounds radical Islam, his calls for democracy adds salt. "Without democracy, new Christians are killed," Fareed said.

Born in Iran during the Shah's reign, Fareed said the secret police arrested him at the age of 12 for complaining about government corruption. Though raised as a devout Muslim he fled a few years after the Iranian revolution in 1978-79, arriving in the U.S. with \$23.

After launching a successful janitorial business, Fareed drifted into Sulfism, an Islamic cult, and embraced several New Age religions, including Scientology. But when three ministers wound up in his home in 1990 he came to Christ.

A few months later he said Jesus appeared to him in a vision, explaining the meaning of the cross. Soon his wife, Rima, accepted Christ and both were baptized in a local Iranian church. Recognizing his zeal, church leaders sent him to

Istanbul, Turkey, in 1993 to do street evangelism. There, he met Bishop Heik Hovsepian, head of the Iranian Assemblies of God. They became friends, and Fareed began helping him get Christians, endangered by the new regime, out of Iran.

Then in January 1994 Hovsepian was killed in Tehran. "They carved his heart from his chest," Fareed said. "Before that I was afraid to speak out about the oppression. But right then and there I made a commitment to follow in his footsteps."

He soon planted two Persian churches in the Bay Area that have since brought more than 500 American Muslims to Christ. In 2000, he started the nonprofit Persian Ministries International and was soon struck by a sometimes-fatal muscle condition called Fibromyalgia Syndrome. Yet instead of slowing him, the thought that he might soon die intensified his efforts. So when longtime Muslim friend Sattar Deldar offered to sell him airtime on Deldar's Appadana International, Fareed started his broadcast.

Through his Bridging the Gap Ministries, he also teaches churches how to evangelize Muslims. His "Why I am Not a Muslim" sermon announcement on a church sign created a Bay Area controversy that put him on several TV stations.

"His ministry has had an incredible effect in Iran and the U.S.," said Kyle Windson, global ministries pastor at San Jose's South Valley Christian Church, which oversees Fareed's ministry. "The attack in London shows us how important it is to reach Muslims for Christ."

**Ed Donnally**