

Muslim Imam: 'We're About Peace'

While **racism** and culture differences continue to divide people worldwide, there are at least two factions in central Florida that have made an effort to bridge the gap between Christians and Muslims on the 11th anniversary of 9/11.

Tuesday evening, Holy Cross Episcopal Church, the oldest church body in historic Sanford, Fla., hosted a program called Understanding Islam: Reflections on **September 11**. The two-hour event, designed to educate Christians about Islam and Muslims on Christianity, drew a mixed crowd of more than 100 people.

Imam Muhammad Musri, president of the Islamic Society of Central Florida, praised the Christian community for the opportunity to come together and share their views on **9/11** and **Islam**.

"We really appreciate the invitation that was extended to us, and that you opened your hearts and your doors for us," Musri told the audience. "There are many churches that we have developed strong relationships with in this area. We welcome the chance to get together with Christians like this. Our hearts and our doors are open to you as well."

Rector Rory Harris of Holy Cross Episcopal Church extended the same gratitude toward the Muslim group, most of whom Harris said are Pakistani.

"We are grateful to Imam Musri and the members of his mosque for coming here and sharing their beliefs and their lives with us," Harris said. "We are praying for Muslims here in central Florida and around the world. Our heart and desire is to see us come together in peace despite our differences. As Christians, we need to let our love be a witness to them and let them know what we're all about."

Since 9/11, in which attacks on the United States were made by terrorists in the name of Islam, Musri said Muslims have faced heightened persecution and suspicion in America simply by their physical appearance.

“No religion condones terrorism, and that includes Islam,” Musri said. “What came out of 9/11 was the worst of a small percentage of Muslims. As a Muslim, I believe that a true Muslim would not fly a plane into a building and kill people. Islam by name is peace. Those people were extremists, and they used our religion to further their own goals and agenda.

“It’s a constant struggle. It’s very discouraging when someone looks at you with fear in their eyes because they think you could be a terrorist. It’s gotten much worse since 9/11. We are trying to educate Christians and others by coming together and showing them that’s not what we’re about. We’re about peace.”

Harris said stereotyping is indeed a problem for the **Muslim community** and compared it to another racism issue in Sanford. Six members of a Sikh temple in Wisconsin were killed during a service by a Caucasian man who allegedly mistook the group for Muslims.

“It’s all about profiling people, as we learned with the Trayvon Martin case,” Harris said. “You cannot judge someone by their outer appearance. We’re all neighbors—Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, etc. There is so much fear and ignorance that all Muslims are terrorists. We need to tear down those walls and educate people.”

Imam Musri also fielded several questions about Islam, and explained differences and similarities between the Bible and Islamic Quran.

Harris said he hopes that Tuesday evening’s event is only the beginning of a long and healthy relationship with the Muslim group. Other future events involving the two factions are in

the works.