

When Jews and Muslims Worship Together

Bob Roberts Jr., pastor of NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, isn't afraid of venturing into unfamiliar territories. In the mid-1990s, Roberts began making trips to Vietnam with teams from his church to pioneer medical, educational and orphanage-related work. After 9/11, he traveled to Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories and other Muslim-dominated regions to establish similar works.

Now the 51-year-old megachurch pastor is blazing a new trail back in his home state: a "triologue" between three vastly different congregations. In late January, Keller's Baptist-leaning congregation combined with those from Dallas' Temple Shalom and the Islamic Center of Irving for "multifaith" worship services dedicated to highlighting and discussing the similarities and differences among the three represented faiths.

The congregations met on a Thursday for a "typical" Jewish worship service at Temple Shalom; on Saturday, the Christians and Jews visited the Dallas-area mosque; and on Sunday, both the Jewish and Muslim congregations attended NorthWood. After each service, the leaders of the three congregations—who have become friends in recent months—answered questions about their unique faiths.

"The basis of coming together is not to minimize our beliefs but to hold onto our beliefs and make clear our beliefs," Roberts said. "But also it's to say that the best of our beliefs calls us to get along with one another."

And yes, Roberts is well aware of the criticism he has received and will continue to receive for supposedly watering down Christian doctrines or diminishing the inherent

divisiveness that is at the core of the gospel message. "I believe what the Scripture says," Roberts said, specifically referring to Jesus' comments in John 14:6 that establish Him as the single entry point to God. In fact, the Baptist pastor addressed this amid the three congregations on Sunday.

"The old conversation of interfaith basically said if we all agree on everything then we can get along. So what we need to do is minimize our differences ... and only talk about what we do agree upon," Roberts said. "But there's a problem with that. ... If I'm going to be a committed Muslim I can't pick and choose which parts of the Quran I believe. Or a Jew, for the Torah.

"Because truth is truth. Truth is not relative. Multifaith says 'we have differences.' What multifaith says is 'I don't want to try to be politically correct; I want to be honest about what I believe; I want to hold true to my truth. ... I want to build relationship on honesty.'"

It's this relational aspect between people of different faiths that Roberts believes is sorely missing and is at the heart of most of the world's conflicts. Responding to his critics, he asked: "Why do you go to restaurants where people get drunk? Why do you go to movies where people undress and do things on the screen that break the heart of God? ... Why do you want to get in a car built by an automobile industry driven by greed? But I don't want to have a relationship with someone who's trying to seek God? That makes sense, doesn't it?" [, 1/21/10; , 1/25/10]