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Some glimpses of Muslim-Jewish twinning this week

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Muslim, Jewish doctors team up to help Detroiters

Leonard N. Fleming / The Detroit News

Detroit - Wallace Shanklin, who is unemployed and lacks [health](#) insurance, said he was thankful for the free health screening he received today at a health fair at the Muslim Center in Detroit.

What he didn't know was that the Interfaith Health Fair concept was born out of Muslim and Jewish organizations seeking better relations with each other and also hoping to give something back to the impoverished community.

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"It's great because a person around here does not have insurance or a way to get the essential things checked like high blood pressure, sugar, cholesterol," said Shanklin of Highland Park. "They have a regular clinic here but this is even better."

The Interfaith Health Fair ran from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and was jointly sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council and the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan.

Organizers said more than a 120 people were screened for problems and more than 25 percent were found to need immediate medical assistance or a follow-up visit.

The organizations provided a litany of Muslim and Jewish doctors, nurses and social workers who were on hand to provide the health screenings. The fair also featured meals for the participants — many of whom are homeless.

This is the second event between the two faiths working together in Metro Detroit. Last Christmas, Jews and Muslims joined together on Mitzvah Day to do volunteer work.

"We believe as a community we have to get to know each other better and lower any kind of misperceptions," said Abdallah Boumediene of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan. "And what better way to do it than join together in this kind of initiative."

Robert Cohen, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, said he was pleased with the turnout and the effort of the two faiths and that more events are planned.

"There are things that push our communities apart but we have so much in common that we need to foster those things that bring us together," Cohen said. "We have similar religious core values of helping the sick for example and the importance of preserving life."

Many of the residents who attended the fair were thrilled that they were invited to attend because there's a dire need for the poor to see doctors.

"I don't have any insurance so it's very helpful to me," said Anthoneria Drain, 51, of Westland. She is now an unemployed cook without [health insurance](#).

As for the two faiths hosting the health fair, she lauded the effort. "It's very important because we've all got to survive together," she said.

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Islamic-Jewish 'twinning' brings faiths together worldwide

By [Marcus K. Garner](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Ariana Lewis had never met a Muslim before Sunday.

The Jewish teen got to interact with Muslims her age for the first time at her Sandy Springs synagogue, as part of an international interfaith outreach called a Weekend of Twinning.

"I didn't know we had so many similarities," said Lewis, 14, of Sandy Springs.

Friday through Sunday, more than 100 mosques and 100 synagogues in 22 countries joined together for a weekend of twinning -- pairing people of different faiths -- in an effort to bridge the gaps between Judaism and Islam and confront prejudice toward both.

"We really want to focus on our commonalities," said Asad Abdulla, a junior at Emory University and a member of the campus interfaith group, the Children of Abraham. "We have to dispel ignorance and share a mutual knowledge about one another."

The linking of youth from Congregation Or Hadash in Sandy Springs and the Roswell Community Masjid was one of five in Georgia, with twinings in Marietta, Buckhead, Decatur and Savannah.

Following a summer of increased anti-Muslim sentiments spawned from plans to build an Islamic community center near the site of the Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center tragedy, Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and an organizer for the Weekend of Twinning, said the world-wide activities are sorely needed.

"The targeting this summer of Muslim communities in New York, Tennessee and elsewhere demonstrate that we as a country have a long way to go until all men and women are accepted as equals," said Schneier, president of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and lead organizer of the Weekend of Twinning.

"I am proud to see so many join in on the Weekend of Twinning and rather than joining in the chorus of unacceptance choosing instead to confront Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and bigotry head-on."

In Sandy Springs on Sunday, Mona Khalef, 14, of Woodstock, was among the 30 high school and college students who paired up -- one Jew and one Muslim -- to discuss the things they loved about their faiths and the things that frightened them.

"I get nervous about wearing this," Khalef, a freshman at River Ridge High School, told David Micley as she motioned to her white hijab. "I'm scared when people come up to you and ask questions randomly, like 'are you planning to blow us up?'"

Micley, 22, an Emory senior and co-founder of the Children of Abraham, was taken aback by what he heard.

"I can't believe that her teachers haven't said something," he said when he spoke to the group. "That's a real problem that's not just in the schools, but in our society in general."

During the ice-breaking session at Or Hadash, Muhammad Elost, 17, a junior at Pope High School in Marietta, learned about one of his partner's favorite aspects of Judaism.

"He talked about these pancakes with potatoes in them," Elost told the group, referring to Cody Benbeniste's love of latkes. "We have similar foods to that. We have barrique."

Rabbi Analia Bortz pointed to the joint origin of both Jewish and Islamic faiths to illustrate their similarities.

"Who is really our father?" Bortz asked the group of youths.

"Abraham," the Jewish kids answered.

"Ibrahim," came the answer from Muslims, as the students sat in a circle at the auditorium of the Weber School.

"What is the first thing he does when people came to his tent?" Bortz asked.

"Offered them food," several students responded.

"So food, extremely important part of our traditions," Bortz said.

She and Roswell Community Masjid leader Bassem Fakoury pointed to other similarities Jews and Muslims share.

"Today is the first day the month of el-Hajj, which is translated to pilgrimage," Fakoury said, referring to the annual trip thousands of Muslims make each year to Mecca to reaffirm their faith. For the Jews faith, [Hanukkah](#) was "the recovery of our traditions," Bortz said.

Following the lunch and ice-breaker, students traveled to Big Tree Forest Preserve, about two miles away from Weber, and planted a dogwood tree together.

"Hopefully, this is the start of something," said Nisma Zbib, 16, an Alpharetta High School junior.

Ariana Lewis agreed.

"I want to do this again

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Morris County, NJ, Muslims, Jews and Christians build bridges at interfaith dinner

By MINHAJ HASSAN • STAFF WRITER • November 7, 2010

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BOONTON — The bridges between humans can be as far-reaching, if not longer than, the bridges that transport cars.

It was one of the descriptions Rabbi Donald Rossoff from Temple B'nai Or in Morristown used to describe the importance of being open to learn about different faiths.

The bridges between religions need to be continually expanded, since, to quote a famous poem, "no religion is an island," Rossoff said.

"God's spirit rests on all," he said.

That openness and acceptance is what the annual interfaith dinner Sunday at the Jam-e-Masjid Islamic Center on Harrison Street was all about. Attended by 100 people of Islamic, Jewish and Christian faiths, the dinner coincided with this year's "twinning" of mosques and synagogues program, the goal of which is to promote dialogue, cooperation and friendship among people of all faiths.

The mosque has been hosting the event for about 10 years, said organizer and member Taj Khokar.

"The purpose is to get a better understanding of the different faiths and to have an open discussion," he said.

Guests at the dinner said it's through human connections that one learns closely about different religions, rather than just reading or hearing speeches.

"Find a Muslim friend," said Ali Chaudry, founder and president of the Center for Understanding Islam and the president of the Islamic Center of Basking Ridge. "It's the only way."

Rossoff said the learning experience is personally rewarding.

"When you learn about another religion, you learn more about your own, as persons, neighbors, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters," he said.

For about 20 years, Rosoff said his Morristown temple and the Boonton mosque have had a partnership in which members of each center visit the other to learn more about the faiths.

As a show of their togetherness, Khokar said he and the temple, among other houses of worship, are working on a plan to provide free clinics to provide medical check-ups. While it is only in the talking stages right now, Khokar said it's another sign of the different faiths willing to work together for the common good.

The Rev. Mitch Trigger of the First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway said a lot more needs to be done to broaden the public's understanding of the different faiths. Many of the people at the dinner were already open-minded, he said.

Still, he acknowledged even steady progress through dinners like these can go a long way.

"It's like water on stone," he said. "All you can do is keep chipping away."

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