

## **RABBI, IMAM TO BE GUESTS AT MASS**

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When Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald comes to Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral for the noon Mass Sunday, there will be a kosher meal waiting.

While the archbishop doesn't normally insist on kosher cuisine, two of his guests that day will: Imam Jamal Daoudi, spiritual leader of the South Charleston-based Islamic Center of West Virginia, and Rabbi Victor Urecki of B'nai Jacob Synagogue in Charleston.

Daoudi and Urecki will sit up front in places of honor at the Mass, which the archbishop will celebrate, said the Rev. Edward Sadie, priest at Sacred Heart.

Sadie says that gathering spiritual leaders from these three religions in one Catholic church is a first for Charleston, and very unusual anywhere.

"It's important we get the Muslims involved in Charleston," said Sadie. "Let's face it, they're where we were 80 years ago. They're new and want to be understood and appreciated.

"We need to understand their deep faith and prayer life," Sadie said. "And they need to help us understand the true Islam. It's only through dialogue and close contact we're going to understand."

Daoudi could not be reached for comment.

"I thought it was a great honor, and I couldn't wait to accept the invitation," said Urecki, who, though a longtime friend of Sadie, will be attending his first Mass.

For centuries in Europe, rabbis feared to enter a church, Urecki said. "Not only feared to go, but to walk past. It shows how relations between Jews and Christians have evolved and changed for the better."

After Vatican II, the Catholic Church created the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, reaching out to Christian communities to repair frayed relationships and to Jews to build bridges where for centuries there had been chasms.

The church created a second group, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, to build bridges with all other religions that do not carry the name Christian and to all others who in any way possess a religious spirit. Fitzgerald heads that council and in his homily Sunday will speak about the common roots Christianity, Judaism and Islam have.

Sunday's meal will be kosher, because a meal that follows those guidelines is acceptable to Muslims as well as Jews.

Tracing back to the Hebrew Bible, kosher rules permit the eating of meat only from animals that chew their cud and have a cloven hoof. Pigs are out. The kosher rules allow fish that have both fins and scales — ruling out, for instance, the scaleless catfish — and forbid shellfish. The kosher rules insist on ritual slaughter and forbid the mixing of meat or fowl with milk, butter or cheese.

Muslims can mix meat and dairy but otherwise observe either by rule or custom a diet not much different than the one observant Jews follow. If the meal is kosher, Muslims can eat it, and if a neighborhood has a kosher butcher shop, patrons may include both Jews and Muslims.

“From a religious perspective, traditionalists would argue that the dietary rules for Islam and for Judaism are very similar because they come from the same God, and thus express the same underlying concepts of holiness,” says the Web site Straight Dope, which can be visited at <http://www.straightdope.com/mailbag/mjewishislamdiet.html>

“Historians would say that Islam sprang from Judaism, adapting much of Jewish tradition. The two religions, in fact, have lots more in common than politicians or hate-mongers would dare to admit.”

The Roman Catholic Church, which for centuries represented itself as the one true church, has been reaching out to others since the far-reaching reforms that the Vatican II conferences produced roughly 40 years ago.

After the Mass, the worshippers and visitors will go into Sacred Heart’s new annex, where the archbishop will bless four new tapestries that depict Abraham, father of the three monotheistic religions.

Sadie hopes the rabbi and imam will offer a prayer in the annex.

Each tapestry will bear the word “hospitality” in different languages, one in Latin, the others in Latin, Hebrew and Arabic. None says “hospitality” in English.

“I want people to ask what it says,” Sadie said. “Then I’ll tell them. That’s why we put Latin and Hebrew on the front of the church. English becomes common after a while.”

Although Christians take for granted the visual images of prophets and saints portrayed in great moments of Christian history, such religious imagery is foreign to the Jewish and Muslim traditions, Sadie explained.

“I had to cross that bridge in my mind,” Sadie said. “Christianity is an incarnational church. We believe God took on the form of a human. We don’t have a problem with images of Christ, Virgin Mary and the saints. Christian art helps us visualize God and those who closely followed him.”