

## **MUSLIMS CELEBRATE THEIR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY**

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At a special celebration Friday, the president of the Islamic Association of West Virginia said his mother asked him, when he returned to Palestine, "What does it mean to be an American?"

Dirar Ahmed said he thought about her question for a minute, and then he told her, "It's exactly like you raised me to be. To be a good Muslim and to be a good American is the same thing."

Ahmed shared the story as part of "A Celebration of Diversity" in the fellowship hall of the mosque in South Charleston.

"To be a Muslim is a way of life. It is not part-time. To be a compassionate and loving Muslim and a compassionate and loving American is a way of life," he said.

He went on to tell the audience that America "is the most unique nation in the world, and your presence here is proof of that."

The audience included Gov. Joe Manchin and first lady Gayle Manchin, as well as community leaders and friends of many faiths.

When he spoke, the governor continued the theme. He said as an Italian-American he was influenced by his grandmother, who helped people regardless of race or religion.

She also taught him "we had to give something back. Just like in your community," he told members of the Islamic community.

He said America always welcomes people from other countries. "The diversity props us up and pushes us a little higher," he said.

He noted that minorities constitute only a small percentage of West Virginia residents, but West Virginians welcomed minorities who suffered from the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

Manchin also told about meeting both an 8-year-old and a 13-year-old who were displaced by the hurricane. The 13-year-old, Imanie Scott, told him that she believed through her whole ordeal that God would take care of her.

But in the chaos, she was separated from her mother and younger sister. Scott came to West Virginia and talked to "Mr. Governor." She asked him about West Virginia schools and told him she liked school.

When her mother and sister were located in Austin, Texas, she told the governor that they would be coming to West Virginia instead of her going to Texas.

Manchin said, “Good things are happening to good people, and you are part of that good people.”

The printed program handed to each person who visited the center had a quotation on the back of it that stated, “If a people’s dignitary pays a visit, honor him.”

The Manchins had to leave the celebration early to take part in a fundraiser for hurricane victims. Members of the Islamic Association also held a raffle to raise money for hurricane victims.

Monsignor Edward Sadie shared with the audience a paper he wrote that encourages Muslims and Christians to see themselves as more alike than different.

Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi, who is the spiritual leader for the state’s Muslims, echoed that theme in his remarks when he reminded listeners that God could have made a single nation of people, but he chose to create diversity. “But we must abide with one another in doing good works,” the Imam said.

Before guests were invited to try foods from different Muslim countries, Dr. Saud Asharaf showed a multimedia interpretation of the 99 attributes of God. Asharaf said they always include scripture in their programs because “the scripture is the constitution we go by.”

God is, among other names, The Source of All Peace, The Compeller, The All Forgiving, The One, The Creator of Death, The Light, The First, The Last.

Guests were treated to a wide array of foods to sample and examples of beautiful clothing from the many countries represented within the Islamic Association of West Virginia.

The center was also decorated with posters and information that explained the contributions Muslims have made to culture, science, architecture and mathematics over the centuries.

Cory Saylor, who serves on the Council of American-Islamic relations in Washington, D.C., praised the members of the association when he spoke. “You are letting the community see the face of Islam.”

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