

NEWS

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## Teens seek common ground

by Tom Bragg  
Daily Mail staff

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Minds met and bread was broken as Jewish and Islamic teenagers gathered to learn about the two religions.

Rabbi Victor Urecki of the B'nai Jacob Synagogue and Ehteshamul Haque, Imam of the Islamic Association of West Virginia, brought the young people together Sunday to share their religions with each other.

"We wanted to do something different than just a normal service," Urecki said. "We wanted something unique. We've noticed that despite what you hear about the Middle East, the problems there, we have a lot of common ground religiously."

Urecki said the idea to have the teenagers meet came from one of the many meetings he has had with the Imam. In those meetings, he said the two often find common ground on religious topics and thought it would be nice to get young people together to find the same common ground.

"We had one of those 'Oh my God. We do the same thing' moments. A lot of the kids don't realize (how much the two religions have in common)," Urecki said. "From our dietary traditions to the prayers and how we are set up in terms of our religious worship and our belief system."

The group of 24 teens began their get-together at the synagogue, where Congressman Nick Rahall, D-W.Va., briefly spoke before the two groups sat together for brunch.

Rahall, who is of Lebanese decent, told the teens the story of his grandfathers coming to the United States from Lebanon and made note of West Virginians being able to come together, no matter their racial or religious backgrounds.

"Friends come together to help friends. Even enemies sometimes come and help," Rahall told the group. "That is just a characteristic of the West Virginia people. We have a willingness to help one another."

"I've always said that it is our young people that can solve any problems wherever they exist," he said. "When you get the governments out of the way and get the young people involved, they know how to communicate with each other."

Rahall said getting local young people together at events such as this was vital to mending some fences where, historically, people have not seen eye-to-eye.

"That's the only way you can get them off on the right foot and not have them, like so many in the (Middle East) region today, recall and never forget the hatreds of the past. You have to put that behind you," Rahall said. "These young people do not have that yet to put behind them. It's what is needed and it's a good start."

After the brunch, the group was given a tour of the synagogue by Urecki. The rabbi explained how a Jewish church services works and showed off the synagogue's Torah scrolls.

Imam Haque said being able to show members of his faith, particularly the young people, how the other side practices their faith, was an important step toward building a truly tolerant society.

"Having a healthy dialogue and healthy interactions to find similarities will absolutely enlighten their hearts," Haque

said.

"These meetings are so important because it gives them a place of guidance and also a place which can clarify their doubts. If they have a problem with another religion or faith, here there are in the center of that where they can talk to a responsible person who can clarify things for them."

After the tour of the synagogue, the group made its way to the Islamic Center in South Charleston to do the same.

Both Urecki and Haque emphasized they hoped this was the first of many meetings like it.

"If a person is having a problem with my religion, it would be much better for them to be able to come to a mosque and speak to the Imam there, rather than going somewhere else and expressing only anger," Haque said. "That can solve lots of problems.

"This is really important because it helps them understand their similarities from childhood rather than focusing on hate."

*Contact writer Tom Bragg at tom.br...@dailymail.com or 304-348-4886.*

COMMENTS (3) ON "TEENS SEEK COMMON GROUND"

POST COMMENT

Posted By: **PrettyTree** (5 hours ago)

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To neanderthalstud: Christians have been involved before. Catholics, too. Charleston Catholic students are always visiting the mosque. Just because you don't pay attention doesn't mean it isn't happening.

Posted By: **westfork3t** (5:43am 05-03-2010)

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A good point, neander. Christian youth do not understand either the Jewish or Islamic faiths. Christian youth need to have an understanding of not only the differences, but also what the religions have in common. It is ironic that all three faiths share the same roots, yet there is much discrimination between the followers for one another. Religion screws up a lot of people.

Posted By: **neanderthalstud** (12:48am 05-03-2010)

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DISCRIMINATION!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! why werent christians involved??