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9/11 Unity Walk shows our interfaith relations

Maureen Fiedler | Sep. 13, 2012 NCR Today

It?s probably the easiest way to be served cookies and iced tea at the Vatican Embassy: do the annual 9/11 Unity Walk in Washington, D.C. This event is part of an annual public witness with hundreds of people from all major faith traditions ? making a statement against religious bigotry and intolerance.

This year?s logo and T-shirt bore the message (inspired by a child): ?God has many houses.? And there are several of those ?houses? along Massachusetts Avenue where the Unity Walk takes place. In the Catholic realm, they include not only the Vatican Embassy but also Annunciation Catholic Church.

At this year?s walk, we remembered the bloody shootings at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis., the mosque that was burned to the ground in Joplin, Mo., and Jewish children who were terrorized at a camp in Pennsylvania. When will this stuff ever stop?

In an especially moving moment, Rabbi Bruce Lustig, in whose synagogue the Unity Walk begins every year, defended the integrity and patriotism of Mohamed Magid, executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society. Both were speakers at the opening event of the walk, and Imam Magid is well-known and well-respected by other faith leaders in the Washington area.

Magid is also the President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and that group has been linked to the ?Muslim Brotherhood? by Rep. Michele Bachman (R-MN). Her charge is an example of anti-Muslim McCarthyism at its worst. Rabbi Lustig took the occasion both to defend Magid and to link Islamophobia to anti-Semitism at its worst. Synagogues, he noted, had no windows in their worship space for many decades before for fear of violence.

In light of continued instances of bigotry, it was wonderful to see about 750-800 people of all faith traditions walking comfortably with each other. It was especially heartening to see St. Alban?s Episcopal Church open its doors to the local Sikh community, so that Sikhs could prepare their traditional food for the walkers. Sikhs everywhere ?feed the hungry? at kitchens in their houses of worship. Friends who have visited India tell me that some Sikh temples feed thousands in one day ? gratis.

And it was hopeful to see a large contingent of young people who are involved in interfaith service projects throughout the Washington area. They don?t limit themselves to interfaith dialogue; they do interfaith *work*, and then discuss how their faith tradition leads them to that.

We concluded, as always, at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi to hear a message from his grandson, Arun Gandhi. It is so appropriate: true interfaith respect leads to peace.

To read more about the history of the walk, click here [1].

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[1] http://911unitywalk.org/history/