

Here is what the Rev. Bryant Kaden of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Redwood Falls, Minn., wrote about Dr. Sayyid Syeed's visit to First Presbyterian Church and the community ...

We recently had the privilege of welcoming a man of great distinction in the Islamic Society of North America to Redwood Falls, Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed. He came at the invitation of Pastor Scott Prouty, my faithful colleague and partner in the gospel at First Presbyterian Church. I know many in our town and in our country are wary of welcoming people of the Islamic faith into our communities. We know that it is easy to be afraid when we come into contact with someone of a different faith or culture, particularly when our knowledge of them is shaped primarily by discord and tragedy. Unfortunately, the words and actions of a few have poisoned our hearts and minds to the point that many in our country no longer see our Muslim neighbors as human beings but simply as "the other." If nothing else, Dr Syeed's visit was an opportunity for us to meet a Muslim person and come to know him not just as an intelligent, kind, and funny man, but also as an American. I was inspired by his passion and commitment to the ideals of freedom and tolerance that make our country so great and have allowed people of all races, creeds, and nationalities to live in peace and prosperity like no other country on earth.

It was also an opportunity for us to think more deeply about what unites us and what divides us. You may be surprised to learn of the common origins of the three "Abrahamic faiths" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. You may be surprised to learn of the history of cooperation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the divine cause of peace and justice. Of course, we also know that there are differences between us. Unfortunately, we also have a darker history among us because of the exploitation of those differences out of an unholy lust for power and empire cloaked in religious zeal. This cannot continue.

Of everything I heard from Dr Syeed, the phrase that will stick with me is what he said when asked about the history of conflict between Muslims and Christians: "We know that we have had a bad past. We cannot afford to have a bad future." To have a future with hope, it's important for us to try to understand and live in peace with people who are different than us and to teach our children to do the same.

As Christians, Muslims, and Jews, we cannot continue to fight the unholy wars of the past. We know that there are differences among us, but we cannot let those differences be used by those in our traditions who have no interest in peace, but only want power for themselves. Instead, let's lift up the work of those who for centuries have been working together for God's true mission of peace and reconciliation. Let's remember that at the heart of our traditions is the belief that there is a brotherhood and sisterhood that unites us as human beings which transcends race and nationality. Let's remember that our scriptures teach us that all life is sacred and that love of God is rooted in our love of all our neighbors and our care for the outcast, the poor, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the least among us. Let's work within our respective traditions and together whenever possible to limit the influence of those who use faith as a wedge to divide people from one another and promote violence. These things are antithetical to the teachings of our traditions, they have been thoroughly rejected by the leadership of our communities, and they have no place in our houses of worship, our homes, and certainly not our hearts.

Finally, as Christians, let's once and for all put aside the notion that we cannot be in relationship or conversation with people of another faith without trying to convert them to our particular faith in Christ. We certainly do not give up on the mission of the church to proclaim Christ crucified and risen for the sake of a sinful and broken world. But if we want to "prove" that Christianity is the one true faith, we should do it not with words only, but by walking the path of Christ. Rather than simply using words that say "I'm right and you're wrong," we ought to seek first to express the genuineness of our

faith by showing love, promoting peace, and working toward justice for all people. Remember, the man we follow "won" the theological debate of his day, not with words alone, but ultimately by dying out of love for all people, even the people who were killing him.

I'm grateful for the courage of Pastor Prouty to bring Dr Syeed to our community and give us all an opportunity to engage the topic of Islamaphobia in our country. We hope to have further opportunities for reflection and conversation in the coming months. If you have any questions or would like to speak with me about this, please feel free to do so. For the sake of the future of our world, we cannot let fear and hatred of our human brothers and sisters rule our hearts. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also." - 1 John 4:18-21

Peace in Christ,
Pastor Bryant