

Duluth News Tribune

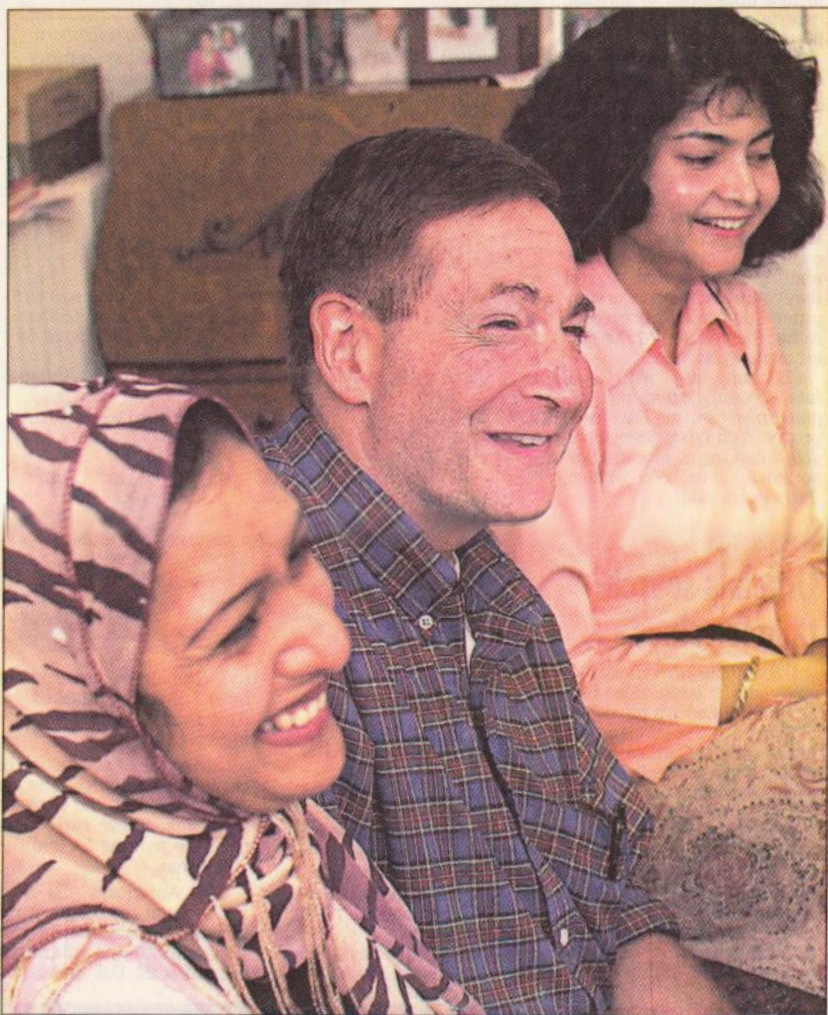
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SEPT. 11 ATTACKS: THREE YEARS LATER

After Sept. 11, paths of Jews, Muslims and Christians intertwine through interfaith play



PHOTOS BY JEANNA DUERSCHERL / NEWS TRIBUNE

(From left) Rubina Azam, Gary Gordon and Arshia Khan talk about how "The Children of Abraham Project" can bring together the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities. Azam and Khan are Muslim, and Gordon is Jewish.

Fear, anger linger years after attacks

Uniting under a common father

BY LINDA HANSON
NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

The group's members sat around the dining room table, sharing food as they worked out the many details it takes to bring a play to town.

Laughing and chatting, they seemed like members of an extended family. And that they are.

People of Faith

Religion
Roundup
and News
of Note.

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Muslims, Jews and Christians — like those at the table — share a heritage through Abraham, an ancestor whom people of all three religions claim.

"God created us for a reason. We need to learn to live with each other," said Arshia Khan, a Muslim woman who lives in Duluth. "In Abraham,

we all have the same great-great-great-grandfather. We are all siblings."

Khan and the others in the interfaith group are bringing "The Children of Abraham Project" to Mitchell Auditorium at the College of St. Scholastica for a Sept. 19 performance. The play and the discussion that follows are a way to help people of different faiths understand each other and realize they have much in common.

"We believe in the same God. The same message was sent to all of us. Our destiny is the same. We just follow different paths," Khan said.

"The Children of Abraham Project" was started by two friends from the Detroit area, peace activist Brenda Rosenberg and Imam Abdullah El-Amin, executive director of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan.

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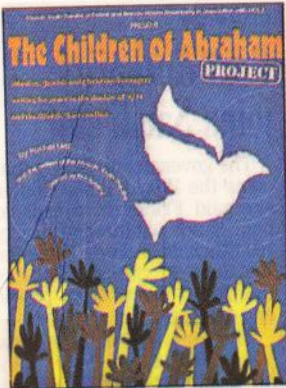
“The media focus on conflict, not on commonality.”

GARY GORDON of Duluth.



JEANNA DUERSCHERL / NEWS TRIBUNE

A group that's bringing “The Children of Abraham Project” to Duluth talks about the importance of tolerance and building bridges between faiths. Clockwise from lower left are Rubina Azam, Gary Gordon, Arshia Khan, Heidi Saleh, Elyse Carter Vosen, Jim Perlman, Doug Bowen-Bailey and John Sillanpa.



If you go

What: “The Children of Abraham Project,” Muslim, Jewish and Christian teenagers uniting for peace in the shadow of Sept. 11 and the Middle East conflict, play and discussion.

When: 1 p.m. Sept. 19.

Where: Mitchell Auditorium, the College of St. Scholastica.

Suggested donation: \$10.

Sponsors: St. Scholastica is the major sponsor, with support from Arrowhead Interfaith Council, University of Wisconsin-Superior Interfaith Council-United Campus Ministry, University of Minnesota Duluth, Islamic Center of the Twin Ports, Temple Israel, Ida and Arthur Silver Memorial Lecture Series and members of the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities.

FAITH | *Group explores its different faiths through drama*

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Over lunch, the Jewish woman and Muslim man were talking about what it would take for peace to exist between people of their religions.

El-Amin said he believes Jews, Christians and Muslims need to realize they all have the same father — Abraham — and they need to come together as Abraham's two estranged sons, Isaac and Ishmael, reunited at Abraham's death.

The two friends enlisted the help of Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit and playwright Rachel Urist of Ann Arbor, Mich., to bring their idea to life.

Over a couple of months, about 20 teenagers of different faiths met to discuss their faith and their lives. Urist wove some of their stories and ideas into a play about Abraham and his sons.

The show, which includes drama and music, explores what keeps the religions apart and what can be done to overcome prejudices and bring people together. After the play, a discussion builds on those themes.

The play had its premiere in the

Detroit area in March. The Duluth performance is the first outside that area.

INTERFAITH EFFORTS

In the three years since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, there have been numerous interfaith efforts in the Twin Ports. There have been panel discussions, conferences and Jewish-Muslim dinners. Members of the local Muslim community also organized fund-raising dinners for Churches United in Ministry.

Out of those efforts, relationships between people of different faiths developed. People who had worked together on some of the interfaith projects decided to bring “The Children of Abraham Project” to Duluth. They found sponsors and raised \$6,000 to bring the production to Duluth.

During one of the group's meetings last month at Gary Gordon's home in Duluth, people talked about the purpose behind the play.

“We want this to keep the ball rolling with interfaith dialogue,” said Doug Bowen-Bailey, president of the Arrowhead Interfaith Council.

These kinds of efforts are a way

to overcome the divide that separates people of different faiths, he said.

“It's a chance to build bridges and build relationships,” Bowen-Bailey said.

Gordon, another organizer, said it's a time in history when many people are polarized. Still, there are many peacemaking efforts that people don't hear about, he said.

“The media focus on conflict, not on commonality,” Gordon said.

Through an artistic production such as this play, people learn things in different ways and are pulled in through their emotions and senses, Elyse Carter Vosen said.

“This is just a starting point,” she said. “We want ongoing dialogue.”

Money raised from the play's staging will benefit an Arrowhead Interfaith Council fund for interfaith projects.

Through doing projects such as this play, people are setting a good example for children, Arshia Khan said.

“If they see us doing the right thing, they learn about love and respect for each other,” she said. “They learn about tolerance.”

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