

MUSLIM, AND AMERICAN LOCAL MUSLIMS INCLUDE SOCCER MOMS, TANNING SHOP OWNERS

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Majester Abdul-Jalil was born into a Christian household in the American South, but turned to Islam in his late teens, years before he went to medical school.

His wife, who is from upstate New York, wears a head scarf when she goes out. "People think she is Syrian. Even Muslims go up to her and start speaking Arabic," he said.

Abdul-Jalil spoke after Sabbath prayer services Friday afternoon at the South Charleston mosque that the Islamic Center of West Virginia calls home.

"People don't think of soccer moms when they think of Muslims," Abdul-Jalil said. "We have three soccer teams from this mosque. They have the same concerns as the soccer moms who voted for Bill Clinton. They want their kids to attend good schools, they drive a minivan, they want to live where it's safe."

As it happens, Abdul-Jalil's 8-year-old daughter plays soccer, and his two sons, 5 and 3, will join her on teams this year. Abdul-Jalil's wife drives the kids around in the family minivan with the license plate that reads "ALLAH."

And, Abdul-Jalil stresses, "We don't want bad things to happen to other people."

"Ninety-nine percent are the moderate ones," said Abdul Alquatub, who owns a tanning shop in Nitro. "One percent are hijacking Islam and committing the atrocities and ruining it for the rest of us."

That was the theme Friday when Imam Jamal Daoudi spoke at the 50-minute early-afternoon service during which his audience grew from about 20 when prayers began to 105 when he finished the message. Terrorism and the recent suicide bombings in London were not far from anyone's thoughts as the imam spoke to an audience of both Muslims and invited guests about common misreadings of the Quran by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The prophet Muhammad had to fight for survival in Mecca and then in Medina, where the surrounding pagans did not leap to embrace his message, Daoudi said. Times, places and context have changed, Daoudi said. If radicals can find a handful of verses in the Quran that appear to advocate fighting, he can find more than 200 that advocate peace, tolerance and forgiveness.

"Islam was not to chop off heads and hands," Daoudi said. "Islam was to pick up people from the darkness of ignorance."

The Syrian-born Daoudi arrived here in 2002 to become the mosque's first imam, leading a congregation that had originally been mostly Pakistani and Indian but which has lately become increasingly Middle Eastern.

Newspaper reports have indicated that radical Islam has thrived in urban centers where Muslims struggling economically live in large, self-contained enclaves. The Charleston community is heavily professional, Daoudi said, and scattered throughout the city and beyond.

Since his arrival, Daoudi has been active in the interfaith community and has visited by invitation, among other places, both St. John's Episcopal Church and Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral. The Rev. Karl Ruttan of St. John's attended the Friday worship service with his wife, Mary Barkalow, who entered through the women's door, a scarf over her head, and sat in the back with the other women.

After the London bombings, British Prime Minister Tony Blair reached out to the Muslim community, saying he wanted to help the majority moderate voice of Islam be heard, Daoudi said. Except for a single visit by President George W. Bush to the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C., American politicians have seldom reached out to the Islamic community since planes took down the World Trade Center towers nearly four years ago, Daoudi added.

The South Charleston mosque was the first in the state, but now there are ones in Beckley, Princeton and Morgantown. Huntington Muslims will soon move their worship from rented quarters into a new mosque.

"We have more than 10 million Muslims here," Daoudi said. "Your children are born Americans.... We will stay here. Yes, these are hard times."

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