

MUSLIM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

GOD DESIRES THE HEART

By Greg Barrett

In September 2016 two faith communities - ***Mary Mother of the Church*** and the ***Manitoba Islamic Association*** - met for two sessions of dialogue on the topics of – The Name of God is Mercy on September 14 and the Problem of Suffering, September 21. The conversations were led by Father Peter Genger of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface and Dr. Nazir Khan of the Islamic community.

The purpose of the event was to offer two faith communities an opportunity to communicate their truths to each other – not just to learn *about* but to learn *from*.

The concept was born out of a concern that multiple Islamic terrorist attacks give rise to the notion that these attacks are caused by the Muslim religion itself and have led to open hostility to the Islamic faith community.



On the evening of September 14 over two hundred people gathered at Mary Mother of the Church. Father Peter started by stating that from the Catholic perspective, Mercy is about recognizing that humanity is wounded and is in need of compassion. When we show mercy to others we transform

ourselves and each other. Dr. Khan shared the Muslim concept that the word for mercy is also a word that refers to a mother's womb – a mother's love for her child is an example of what it means to be compassionate. He made it clear that any action that is not compatible with compassion, justice and wisdom is not authentic Islam.

On September 21 over two hundred people gathered at the Grand Mosque on Waverley Street. People were welcomed and invited to join Muslims in the sanctuary for the evening prayer . After prayer Father Genger observed that while we suffer we are invited to walk in faith. Suffering is not caused by God but arises out of our woundedness. We accept suffering not as a defeat but as a way to God. Dr. Khan maintained that life's sufferings are a part of the human journey and every time you see evil you see an opportunity. Catholics and Muslims then gathered at tables together and were provided with an exercise dealing with the problem of suffering – death of a close relative. The participants were then invited to work on a response to the problem, appoint a spokesperson and report back to the larger group. The exercise was the highlight of the evening as Muslims and Catholics actively engaged and spoke to each other sharing their faith perspectives. It was a powerful moment in interfaith dialogue and, In the end, it was a public witness that two faith communities were willing to dialogue with each other honestly and respectfully.

