

Abraham brings major religions together

Rabbi, minister, imam discuss common forefather during interfaith event

By Rachel Gross Weinstein

Our forefather, Abraham, plays a major role not only in Judaism, but also Christianity and Islam. That's the reason clergy members at a "Connecting our Faiths" discussion last week at Northway Christian Church in Dallas urged practitioners of all three faiths to find commonality, rather than differences.

Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, executive director of the Jewish Studies Initiative of North Texas; Rev. Doug Skinner, senior minister at Northway Christian Church; and Imam Yahya Abdullah, founder of the Islamic Association of De Soto, all spoke about how Abraham is important to their respective faiths and why it is important for these three religious groups to build bridges instead of putting up walls.

In Judaism, Abraham was chosen by God to be a helper and companion leading the world to destiny and is considered the biological father of the Jewish people, Schlesinger said.

"It is through the Jewish people that Abraham becomes the father of a multitude of nations. He is the teacher of ethics and morality," Schlesinger said. "Jews, Muslims and Christians are all children of Abraham. From the Jewish perspective, Jews are biological children of Abraham, the seed, whereas Christians and Muslims are his spiritual children."

"I believe the three religions need each other and must see ourselves as partners, not only with God, but with each other. In today's world, none of us can do Abraham's work alone."

This event was the first of four scheduled over the next year, Skinner said. The next three topics to be discussed are how Moses, Jesus and Mohammed play a role in all three religions. The dates are to be determined.

Skinner said the goal of the interfaith dialogue is for the three communities to see each other as one large community, not separate ones.

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Skinner said in the New Testament, Abraham is mentioned primarily as the man of faith and the apostle, Paul, uses him as an example of the salvation of faith. The ones who have faith are considered to be the sons and daughters of Abraham, he noted.

He said even though Judaism, Christianity and Islam are very different religions, being able to embrace those differences and notice some commonalities are vital.

"My parents have three children and each one of us is different than the other two, even though we all came from the same source," he said. "However, we are family, and that creates a bond. I think about this every time I am part of one of these Abrahamic family reunions."

"We all believe different things and don't leave our differences at the door when we have a conversation like this. Although we do believe some of the same things, the differences are what make this conversation urgent and necessary. What makes this conversation possible is that behind all of those differences, there is one sacred fact — we share an ancestor, a common



Photo: Rachel Gross Weinstein

From left, Imam Yahya Abdullah, Rev. Doug Skinner and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger spoke last week about how Abraham is central to the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

father, Abraham."

Abraham is also an important figure in the Quran, as he is mentioned in 25 chapters. Muslims regard him as a prophet and patriarch, Abdullah said, and his purpose and mission through his life was to proclaim the oneness of God. He is also credited with establishing monotheism, the belief in one god, within Islam.

Abdullah added that highlighting the significance of Abraham in different faiths is wonderful for interfaith dialogue and hopes it can continue. Both Skinner and Schlesinger have visited his mosque in the past, and he hopes to participate in other discussions like this.

"Abraham is our faith father that connects us and we were all produced from one mother — Mother

Earth," Abdullah said. "Although Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac had different mothers, Hagar and Sarah, they had one father, Abra-

ham, just like we all do. It's such an honor to have a conversation like this with my faith brothers and sisters."

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