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9TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11

As U.S. debates, metro Detroiters push for peace

BY NIRAJ WARIKOO
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

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As Americans gather today, on the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, **metro Detroit religious groups are promoting tolerance and peace** -- in mosques, churches and community centers.



From left: Archbishop Allen Vigneron of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Bishop Edgar Vann, pastor of Second Ebenezer Church in Detroit, Imam Sayid Hassan Al-Qazwini of the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, the Rev. Daniel Krichbaum and Imam Dawud Walid of the Masjid Wali Muhammad and CAIR-MI gather Friday for an interfaith service in Detroit. (PHOTOS BY REGINA H. BOONE/DETROIT FREE PRESS)

As many as 1,000 Muslims packed a Detroit church on Friday as part of an interfaith gathering that included notable faith leaders.

PHOTOS: Detroit's call for peace

The striking scene inside Second Ebenezer Church, a predominantly African-American church, was a show of unity among the region's diverse communities as a Florida pastor stirred fears with plans to burn Islam's holy book, the Quran.

"I feel a sense of oneness in this room today," said Bishop Edgar Vann, head of the church. "Fear will not divide us."

Today, Central United Methodist Church in Detroit, near Comerica Park, plans to ring its bells at noon to protest the planned Quran burning and other forms of prejudice in the name of religion. Other mosques and churches plan to hold interfaith gatherings.

The Florida pastor doesn't represent Christians any more than "the KKK dressed in white robes burning crosses in the name of Jesus," said Central's pastor, the Rev. Ed Rowe. "Some use 9/11 as an excuse to hate and discriminate."

A world forever changed by 9/11

Sept. 11, 2001, is a day many of us will never forget.



A version of this story appears on page 1A of the Saturday, Sept. 11, 2010, print edition of the Detroit Free Press.

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Detroiters call for peace

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Americans everywhere can remember exactly what they were doing when they learned that planes had crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field, killing nearly 3,000 people. The images of smoldering wreckage, collapsed buildings and human casualties were seared into our nation's collective psyche.

To mark the ninth anniversary of the attacks, the Free Press asked metro Detroiters to share their memories and how that day changed their lives and their country. Here is what they said:

[more details.](#)

Suehaila Amen, 31, of Dearborn, educator and consultant

"On the morning of 9/11, I was at work in a Dearborn public middle school. As I sat in a team meeting, we received a call with someone urging us to turn on the television and watch the news. ... I recall each one of us grasping the hand of the person seated next to us and praying.

"Since 9/11, life has been filled with more work and blessed moments to enlighten others on my faith and culture. Immediately post-9/11, I found myself overanxious, more cautious of where I went, how I traveled and the people I associated with. I felt I had to constantly defend my faith, culture and fellow Muslim brothers and sisters who were being persecuted for the actions of a rotten few.

"As an American, I felt the same fears that all Americans felt, no matter their ethnicity or religious preference. My heart ached for the loss of humanity, and I slept with a heavy heart -- always wondering if there would ever be a sense of safety restored to the country. As an American with Arab roots and practicing the faith of Islam, I was thankful I lived in metro Detroit because the concentration of Arab and Muslim Americans was high and there has been long-established bridges of communication between the communities to promote understanding. ...

"This great nation ... has now become a country that seems, at times, angrier and less tolerant, accepting and understanding since 9/11."

Paul Ganem, 48, of Dearborn, Federal Emergency Management Agency training specialist

"I wanted desperately to leave work and go collect my children from school because I wanted them to be safe, and safety to me meant they were under my protection. Living in Dearborn, the constant din of airplanes taking off and landing was an annoyance. Three days of the ground-stop made me yearn for their noise because it represented normal to me. I wanted everything to get back to normal as quickly as possible.

"I am far more cautious and aware of my surroundings since 9/11. ... I hate to admit this, but it has made me less tolerant, too. I no longer tolerate those who abuse a religion to the extent where they justify the death of others, especially innocents. ...

"Initially, 9/11 changed the country for the better. We came together like no other time in my life. It seemed we were united on all fronts. Kind of like a big family. ... You mess with one of us, you mess with all of us. The problem was this sentiment was short-lived. Another thing that has changed is we are no longer a nation immune to the destructiveness of terrorism."

Rabbi Jason Miller, 34, of Farmington Hills, with Congregation T'chayah in Oak Park

"My life was in limbo on Sept. 11, 2001. My wife and I had spent our first two years of marriage living in a small apartment in Manhattan, just 12 blocks from the Jewish Theological Seminary where I was studying to become a rabbi. We planned to relocate to Jerusalem after the Jewish holidays. ... In the week prior to Rosh Hashanah, I traveled by plane to Chicago to visit my friend who had just moved there.

"I woke up on the morning of 9/11 in my friend's Chicago apartment. Jeremy told me to turn the television on to the 'Today Show' on NBC because a plane had just flown into one of the World Trade Center towers. I couldn't believe my eyes, and then we saw another plane fly into the other tower. ...

"We made the difficult decision ... to stay in the U.S. for the year rather than spend it in Israel. ... For us, 9/11 altered our plans. We never had the chance to live in Jerusalem for a year (at least not before children), but that is certainly no comparison to the way so many lives changed dreadfully as a result of the horrific events of that day. ...

"Our country will never be the same after being shaken from the acts of 9/11 -- as much as we came together as an American people in the weeks that followed, the events of that day have also torn us apart."

Gregory Bator, 56, of Beverly Hills, attorney

"On the morning of 9/11, I was defending a client in an administrative hearing at Michigan's state Capitol in Lansing. During a morning break we ... watched in silence and horror as the second tower collapsed.

"9/11 reaffirmed how life is fragile and delicate. Our everyday lives are a series of consecutive breaths. No one expects or wants an intervening force to interrupt those breaths. Yet, terrible

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things happen. I live life more fully, knowing that at any given moment we may breathe our last breath.

"9/11 stoked our country's best and worst sides. As a country, we mobilized with incredible speed and unity. We paid beautiful tribute to the people who lost their lives and sacrificed themselves to save lives. We lost our way through wars and still have not found the courage or means to articulate the strength of our country to ourselves and the world. Our religious hostility and fear continue toward the Muslim world. We have not convincingly articulated America's strength, goodness and promise. ... Our country began chasing demonic enemies, instead of leading ... with integrity and hope."

Amy Stegner, 26, of Dearborn, artist

"It was my senior year of high school. ... One of my teachers came into class and said, 'There's something you should know about that's happening.' They just knew the planes had hit. It was surreal to wonder whether it was some bizarre accident or on purpose.

"The traveling and the heightened level of security everywhere was very weird at first. But it seems very easy to deal with at this point, because it's been so long. ...

"I'd like to think it's made everybody more aware in a better way. But I think in some way, the paranoia hasn't helped."

Dr. Robert D. Cornwall, 52, of Troy, pastor of Central Woodward Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

"As is true for most Americans, Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001, is deeply etched in my mind. At the time, I was pastor of a Disciples of Christ church in Santa Barbara, Calif. ... Living on the West Coast, the first two planes had hit the WTC towers even before I had gotten up. ...

"In looking back over the past nine years, my thoughts go not only to the singular event so etched into our hearts and minds, but all that has occurred in response. ... It has instilled within our psyche terror and fear. As a result, it has turned nation against nation, neighbor against neighbor.

"The events of that day have ... led to the launching of two wars that continue unabated to this day, though the second one seems to be winding down, while the first one, launched almost immediately afterward, continues on with little hope of resolution. To this day, anti-Islamic attitudes continue to drive our political and religious culture. ...

"On a personal level, I became actively engaged in conversations with my Muslim neighbors. ... Upon moving to southeast Michigan, my opportunities to work closely with Muslims have only increased due to the much larger Islamic presence in this area. Yes, I do believe that 9/11 has changed me dramatically, and ironically I believe that on a personal level, that has been for the better. I am more engaged than ever before in interfaith conversations."

Staff writers Niraj Warikoo and Patricia Montemurri contributed to this report.

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