Oklahoma Muslims strive for understanding

CULTURE | EFFORTS SEEK TO OFFSET MISPERCEPTIONS, REACTIONS TO VIOLENT ACTS

BY CARLA HINTON
Religion Editor
chinton@opubco.com

As a Muslim American, Adam Soltani said he has been told to “go home” more times than he can count, particularly in the aftermath of violence perpetuated by radical Islamic extremists.

But Soltani, a native Kansan raised in Oklahoma, said he is home. “We get told a lot to ‘go home,’ and it is sometimes very difficult to hear that,” Soltani said, referring to those who have told him and other Muslims that they should live in Muslim-majority countries.

Soltani said he has lived in the United States his entire life and “to be told to go back home really hurts us because this is our home!”

The executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations Oklahoma Chapter said negative and bigoted comments about Muslims generally abound after extremists perpetuate violence in the name of Islam. Even after American Muslims and Muslim organizations such as CAIR-Oklahoma strongly condemn such bloodshed, anti-Muslim sentiments often persist in the aftermath of the nation’s murderous aggression.

Soltani, 44, said he and many other Muslims in Oklahoma continue to try to dispel the myths that...
Muslims: Continue to disperse myths, condemn violence

FROM PAGE 1A

Islam is a violent faith, and all Muslims are terrorists. He said that's why CAIR-Oklahoma, a Muslim advocacy organization, recently launched a campaign to distribute free copies of a film called "Islamophobia: The Truth Revealed" about the Prophet Muhammad.

The campaign comes in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Since then, American Muslims have been targets of hate and violence. The campaign is intended to educate the public about the Prophet Muhammad and the peaceful tenants of Islam.

Meanwhile, he said, several Oklahoma Muslim leaders said they will continue to publicly condemn the violent actions of extremists who say they are acting in the name of Islam. They also will continue to open their mosques to non-Muslims who wish to know more about Islam.

Tireless work

Imad Enchassi, imam and president of the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City, said he read a recent newspaper story that some American Muslims are exhausted from their efforts to reframe to non-Muslims that they strongly condemn anti-Islamic attacks such as that in Libya.

Enchassi, 47, said that four non-Muslims will salute against them in some way, such as verbal attacks, bat mail and even a violent attack at their local mosque at the Mercy School, a private Islamic school in southeastern Oklahoma City.

"We have our own alert system and we are very much concerned for our children," he said.

Enchassi said the recent murders of Americans in Libya brought with them a sense of deja vu for him, reminding him of the anti-Muslim atmosphere in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

However, Enchassi said he and many other Muslims have become acclimated — almost immune — to the media stories and sometimes hostile rhetoric or negative behavior from some non-Muslims who tar all Muslims with a terrorist brush.

Seyi Mapp-Maynard, operations manager for CAIR-Oklahoma, said she thinks Muslim women often bear the brunt of anti-Muslim attitudes because they are perhaps more easily identifiable as Muslims when they wear their hijabs, the traditional Islamic headscarf.

She said, however, many women count on poking starting by starting a conversation with the person doing the ogling. Mapp-Maynard said the other person often acts surprised but generally is receptive to polite conversation.

Building bridges

Seyi Mapp-Maynard, 28, operations manager for CAIR-Oklahoma, said she thinks Muslim women often bear the brunt of anti-Muslim attitudes because they are perhaps more easily identifiable as Muslims when they wear their hijabs, the traditional Islamic headscarf.

She said she sometimes counts on poke starting by starting a conversation with the person doing the ogling. Mapp-Maynard said the other person often acts surprised but generally is receptive to polite conversation.

Support in Oklahoma

Ilanit Shoval, an Edmond Santa Fe High School student and University of Oklahoma graduate, said she hopes the free documentary DVD his organization is distributing helps to combat both the anti-Islamic tone of the film that reportedly ignited the Libyan violence and the resurgence of myths about Muslims that occurred after 9/11.

He said in Oklahoma, with incidents such as a spear attack in July on an Oklahoma City mosque