

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

Peace conference promotes perspectives, understanding

By **Dave Groves**, staff writer

More than 50 presenters will welcome visitors from across the nation and from more than a dozen countries across the globe to the first-ever International Conference on Religion, Conflict and Peace on the campus of Oakland University March 13-15.

Subtitled "Walking the Talk through Fear of the Unknown to Understanding and Harmony," the event will involve a number of university academic departments and feature prominent scholars, religious practitioners, authors, conflict resolution therapists, peace brokers and others. "Religion is a way of life and everything else is connected to it for people who have a religious context or framework," said Imam Achmat Salie, coordinator of the Islamic Studies Program at Oakland.

"There is a religious perspective on every topic that is out there, and particularly on many of the prominent issues that we hear and read about each day. This is a way for us to open a dialog about these perspectives."

The conference, sponsored by the Islamic Studies Program, Common Bond Institute and International Humanistic Psychology Association, will engage participants in keynote addresses, workshops, panel discussions, dialogue groups, exhibits, social and cultural events and networking.

Through both intra- and inter-religious dialogue, conference attendees will explore the challenges of ignorance, stereotyping, intolerance, scapegoating and extremism, as well as how these things can lead to divisiveness and social paranoia. While discussions will have universal application, special attention will be placed on Islamophobia.

Participants will also examine how the faculties of reason, understanding, compassion and shared consciousness of peace can foster cultural harmony.

"The reality is religious communities share both common dilemmas and capacity to transform these dilemmas to a shared consciousness of peace – one based on understanding, familiarity and appreciation, not fear of the unknown," said Steve Olweean, director of CBI and co-coordinator of the conference.

"We each carry a piece of the problem and a piece of the solution, so engaging each other in compassionate dialogue is not only reasonable, it's absolutely essential."

Keynote speakers scheduled to present during the conference include John Esposito, a professor of international affairs and Islamic studies at Georgetown University; Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Cape Town and senior consultant for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town; and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, a professor in the International Peace and Conflict Resolution program at the School of International Service and director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute at American University.

Scholarships are available for students interested in attending the conference. Those interested in attending a panel discussion should contact their instructor for more information.

For more information about the conference, registration and fees, visit www.cbiworld.org, e-mail to SOlweean@aol.com or call (269) 665-9393.

SUMMARY

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