

BAHAIS SEEK BROWARD UNITY PEMBROKE PINES CONGREGATION DISTRIBUTES PLEA

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Warning that “the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration,” the Pembroke Pines congregation of the Bahá’i is working to distribute a seven-page call for religious unity to congregations of all faith in Broward County.

“Our international body has sent us the letter and asked us to present it to all religious leaders,” explained Nosrat Scott, a leader of the Bahá’i congregation in Pembroke Pines. “We want to present it to every priest, pastor, rabbi, Buddhist and Sikh leader,” she said.

Scott and other members of the Spiritual Assembly of Bahá’i recently presented a copy to Nassim Baksh, a leader of the Muslim Jamaat-ul-Muttaqeen organization in Pembroke Pines.

“I think that the concept is great,” Baksh said. “If we would all see eye to eye, the world would be a better place and there would be no room for hatred.”

The document calls on religious groups to move beyond appealing for religious tolerance and accept the reality that they are equal in validity. The organization’s statement goes on to challenge religions to renounce the notion of exclusive access to truth, which, it says, has caused much violence and hatred.

“Religion is a way of life for all human beings,” Baksh said. “All religions teach the same thing. If you are going to be a good Jew, you should be a good Jew. If you are going to be a good Christian, you should be a good Christian. If you are going to be a good Muslim, you should be a good Muslim.”

“There is only one god,” Baksh said. “We may call him a different name, but we all believe in the same god.”

“The document expresses the sentiments that most of us, especially clergy, espouse,” said the Rev. Tany Waldron, a Presbyterian pastor who works as the Chaplain at Memorial Hospital West in Pembroke Pines. “It promotes unity in diversity and focuses on the things we hold in common such as compassion for our fellow human beings.”

Waldron recently accepted a copy of the statement in a formal presentation from the Bahá’i group.

Explaining that grief is often expressed in anger, Waldron said that she appreciated the appeal to understand other groups, particularly Muslims. “In this time when we are singling out particular groups, some people think that all Muslims support Jihad, but that’s not true,” Waldron said.

Waldron acknowledges that “it would be most difficult for some people” to agree with the statements assertion that all religions are equally valid. “However, the point of all religions is to support a belief that there is more than just us,” she said. “Most religions have more in common than differences.”

Scott said that her group is approaching various religious bodies with a positive attitude. “We have found the response to be very positive,” she said.” “One person wanted to read a Bahá’i book. We don’t force it on anyone, we go with respect.”

The full Bahá’i statement can be found at www.bahai.org/article-1-1-0-1.html.

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