

# CONTINUED...



Semin Guzey, 16, a Turkish foreign exchange student living with Suzy Lull, 15, from Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Brighton, listens to a panel of members of the Islamic Center in Brighton Oct. 14.



Maryam Razvi explains the meaning of Islam.

## Religious

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place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."

Islam's supreme deity is Allah, the Muslim name for God. However, Kareem said Muslims don't regard Jesus as the Son of God, explaining, "Muslims don't believe

that God has children. But they do believe that Jesus was a very important person." He added that Muslims, like Christians, are taught that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus.

Participants also got to observe a prayer session and learn about Muslim customs: all who enter the Islamic Center must remove their shoes; men are asked, but not required, to wear beards; men are allowed to have more than one wife; and women must wear veils while inside the Islamic Center and customarily cover all but their faces and hands while in public.

One woman, Maryam Razvi, said she and other Muslims have spent considerable time since Sept. 11 visiting schools in an effort to educate people about their religion. "It's part of our rhythm now," she said.

Laura Cook, 16, from St. John the Evangelist, said she likes that idea: "I hope more people can see there's not much difference (between Christians and Muslims)," she said. "Going to the high schools and talking, they'll reach more kids."

Patrick acknowledged that he still has concerns due to the U.S.-led military retaliation in Afghanistan, as well as the threat of further terrorist attacks in this country. However, he said, "I already kind of feel better about Muslims. They're Americans, too, and they don't feel the (terrorist) attacks were right."

"Even if you know they condemn it, it just was good to hear them say it," Patrick's sister Sarah, 16, added.

Father McBrien's column and letters to the editor have been omitted this week due to space constraints.

## Afghan

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Due to political instability in Pakistan in the late '90s, Shinwari and his family decided to flee to America, and came to the Rochester area in April 2000. He and his relatives were resettled here by Catholic Family Center. Shinwari currently works part-time at the center, helping to translate for Afghan refugees like himself.

The Taliban, he said, are about as far from true Muslims as can be, tyrannizing women, persecuting educated Afghans and sheltering bin Laden, who blasphemed Islam by approving the Sept. 11 attacks on America. The attacks blasphemed Islam because they were made by men who killed both themselves and innocent people, Shinwari said, actions that contradict Islamic teachings against suicide and harming the innocent.

Shinwari expressed concern that Westerners may believe Afghans and the terrorists are one and the same, whereas, in reality, he said, the Taliban and their supporter, bin Laden, are the average Afghan's worst nightmare.

"They destroyed the Afghan community," the Muslim said of the Taliban during an interview in the home he shares with his relatives and five other Afghan refugees. "They destroyed Afghan culture. They destroyed the Afghan people."

He challenged Taliban supporters to show him one decent road or school built by the Taliban. Furthermore, he said, during the Soviet occupation, only three exiled Afghan political leaders of which he knew were killed in Pakistan, quite possibly by the Soviets. Since the Taliban have taken power, he said, 190 of their Afghan opponents have been killed in Pakistan, and he suspected the Taliban were behind the assassinations.

With his voice rising in apparent indignation, he also criticized pro-Taliban Middle Easterners for raising their voices in protest only now, when the United States and Great Britain are attacking Afghanistan. Where were such protests when it was well-known in the region that the Taliban were ruthlessly oppressing Afghans, he asked rhetorically. Protesters should separate their gripes with U.S. foreign policy elsewhere in the region — for instance, regarding Israel and the West Bank — from support for the Taliban, he said.

Shinwari has even more personal reasons for disliking the Taliban, whose supporters in Pakistan kidnapped his son, then 8, and broke the boy's arms, in 1998. The boy was missing for 10 days, he said, and left on a roadside to die before being rescued.

The kidnapers took his boy, he said, while he was away in Cyprus at a conference of anti-Taliban Afghan organizations. He said messages from the kidnap-

pers indicated they wanted to bully him into silence.

Currently, his uncle and three cousins are in Taliban jails in Afghanistan, said Shinwari, whose home serves as a de facto community center for the 200 or so Afghan refugees living in the Rochester area. Many have been visiting his home to discuss the war in the days since the United States and Britain began bombing Afghanistan, he said.

He added that he would like to return to his homeland someday, and help to rebuild it, and that he welcomed the U.S.-British assault against the Taliban. He said, however, that he would prefer the allies cut off the Taliban's supply lines from outside Afghanistan rather than directly take on the Afghan rulers. That way, in a few months, starved and desperate, the Taliban's members would turn on each other and destroy their regime from within, forestalling the need for a U.S.-led assault, he said.

He added that the United States, which backed the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance, should not make the same mistake it made in 1989 when the Soviets left Afghanistan. Then, he said, no U.S.-funded massive rebuilding effort of the country took place, but this time, such an effort must be made to ensure Afghanistan's recovery.

Shinwari's bitter feelings about the Taliban were shared by two refugees currently living with his family, Abdul Rahman, 41, and Abdul Karim, 17. Shinwari translated for both men.

Rahman is here now with his wife, who lost an eye during a Taliban rocket attack on Kabul, Afghanistan's capital. Karim had lived in Pakistan since 1994, and is now here with his mother and brother. He said he lost at least seven relatives in Afghanistan's wars since 1979.

Rahman served in a nonpolitical cultural post with Afghanistan's government under the Soviets as well as with the post-Soviet coalition government, and fled to India in 1995 when it looked like the Taliban would take over.

Karim's father was killed during the Soviet years by Afghan rebels when Karim was 2. Both men came to Rochester in the past several weeks, and said their homeland has known nothing but war and strife for much of their lives.

"Every day was very difficult," Rahman said of the last 20 years. "Every day was very troubled. We didn't have good news."

Shinwari said he was happy that President George Bush had stressed that the current war is aimed at the Taliban and bin Laden, and not the Afghan people, who, he stressed, are starving in great numbers. He added that he had one wish for his fellow citizens who have made countless sacrifices for the past two decades.

"I hope that this is the last war for the Afghan people."

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