



Common Ground: A Baptist-Muslim Conversation

VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 4/23/13)—Central Baptist Theological Seminary hosted a conversation between Baptists and Muslims at Prairie Baptist Church, Prairie Village, KS, on Saturday, April 20. The Committee on Christian Unity and Interfaith Relations of ABCUSA partnered with Central for the event, which was part of a national dialogue between the Muslim and Christian communities on “The Love of God and Pathways to Peace.” The initiative comes as a response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*, an open letter from Muslim religious leaders and scholars to world Christian leaders calling for peace and justice between the two religious communities.

Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, general secretary of American Baptist Churches USA said, "In the midst of the fears, anger and mistrust accompanying the attack on the Boston marathon, it ought to be heartening to all to know that we are actively involved in peacemaking. Peacemaking is an essential element of our Christian vocation and the biblical motivation for our many efforts to work for peace with our Muslim neighbors. We are grateful for the partnership with Central and our other ABC seminaries in this effort. Let us all rededicate ourselves to the often difficult but always essential efforts in local, national and international arenas to wage peace."

The conversation, held at the request of Medley, was one of three such regional events being held by schools with ties to ABCUSA, with a goal to “create an atmosphere where these two faith communities can live in peace and respect with one another and promote the common good in the society in which we live and in the broader world.” The previous events were held at American Baptist Seminary of the West on February 3, 2012, and at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Virginia Union University, on September 29, 2012. In addition to the regional events, two national events were previously held at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, MA, one in 2012 and one in 2009.

In her greeting to the participants, Central Baptist Theological Seminary president Molly T. Marshall said, “In light of recent events in Boston, it is even more urgent that we grow in understanding and respect of one another's traditions. Too often we demonize a whole way of faith because of the actions of a few. Our gathering today seeks to find common ground and common words, ‘Love of God’ and ‘Love of neighbor.’ Central Baptist Seminary wholeheartedly supports the promise of an event such as this.”

Common Ground: A Baptist-Muslim Conversation included interaction between 120 participants – about 40% Muslim and 60% Baptists and other Christians – as they ate together and then

participated in discussion guided by Vern Barnet, Minister Emeritus of the Community Resource for Exploring Spirituality (CRES). Quran Scholar Hafiz Nurdeen Lawal and Vice President for Religious Ministries and Dean of the Chapel at William Jewell College Andy Pratt were questioned about their respective faith's sense of need for this dialogue. They agreed that without sharing with one another, and then sharing with their communities what one has learned from the other, neither knows what the other has to offer. Mutual respect is a necessity for such conversation. Lawal stressed the need to teach our youth how to have this conversation. Pratt stressed finding ways for Muslims and Baptists/Christians to come together for humanitarian work.

A panel dialogue followed with Muslim leaders Bilal Muhammad, Manhaz Shabbir, and Ahmed El-Sherif, and Central Seminary President Molly T. Marshall. Marshall reflected that as participants shared their lives and the central roles of their respective faiths, they recognized their common humanity, and said, "Over and over participants voiced growing respect for the serious faith of the 'other.'"

The event at Central was planned by a committee of local Muslim leaders and representatives from American, Cooperative, and National Baptist congregations, as well as seminary representatives.

About Central Baptist Theological Seminary

Founded in 1901, Central Baptist Theological Seminary prepares women and men to transform churches and communities by educating and forming them as Christian leaders who are biblically knowledgeable, theologically articulate, spiritually healthy, humanly sensitive, and professionally competent. The only seminary in Kansas, Central is proud to have the first woman president of a Baptist seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Serving more than 30 Christian denominations, the Seminary is ecumenical and evangelical. For more information, visit www.cbts.edu.

American Baptist Churches is one of the most diverse Christian denominations today, with over 5,200 local congregations comprised of 1.3 million members, across the United States and Puerto Rico, all engaged in God's mission around the world.