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## Araim Discusses Islam in America with Lafayette Rotary

By Sophie Braccini



Dr. Amer Araim Photo Andy Scheck

to the community since wealth is considered a gift of God. His most important message, on Thursday, was that Muslims living in this country pledge to abide by American law. He tried to dispel misunderstandings. "In this country the word 'Jihad' evokes someone with a sword," he said, "Jihad means the struggle to control, especially the evil within the self, or self-defense. In America, this is done through the law; violence is not an option.

For him, the violence that has erupted in some Muslim countries and led misguided youth to acts of violence is the result of socio-economic or politic problems. "How do you interpret what is happening right now in the Middle East, this quest for democracy that is breaking out?" asked Rotarian Dick Holt.

"All these countries could be in favor of democracy," answered Araim, "but because of tribalism they have suffered dictatorships. But now people can communicate with others through the internet and circumvent government's control. They know what is happening in other parts of the world, they see that their rulers are corrupt, and out of desperation they face the oppression of their regimes." He added that he thinks that the Muslims in Egypt would welcome a secular state.

Dan Baker asked how Araim's wife would like to live in some parts of the Muslim world where women are oppressed. "Islam should not oppress women," he answered, "it is important to distinguish between tribalism and religion. Qu'ran says to protect women, not oppress them."

The general theme Lafayette Rotary's speaker series is "Building Communities."

After the meeting was over, the Rotarians continued to discuss that day's topic passionately. "He (Araim) is well-integrated into America, but he didn't address what happens on the other side of the border," said Mo Levitch, while another Rotarian added that the conditions of women in Islamic countries had not been discussed sufficiently.

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Dr. Amer Araim offered interesting insights on Islam and triggered pointed questions from the audience at the Lafayette Rotary Club meeting on Thursday, March 24, in the Oakwood Athletic Club. The public meeting drew quite a crowd despite the rain. Araim is the president of Islamic Community Outreach of California and an Imam at the Dar-UI-Islam Mosque in Concord.

Since 9/11, Araim has been invited by numerous groups to come and speak about Islam. He said that over 50 churches, some hospitals and many colleges in the Bay Area have invited him. Dignified and eloquent, Araim is an adept of interfaith dialogue and his goals are to share with his audience the roots of his faith, bringing out what they have in common, leading to an audience understanding that American Muslims are no different from themselves.

"Christians, Jews and Muslims believe in the same God," he says, "the difference is the way we receive the guidance through Qur'an." He explained that to be a Muslim is to submit to the will of God expressed in the Qur'an. He told the story of how the sacred book was revealed to Muhammad verbally through the angel Gabriel over a period of approximately twenty-three years. He listed the five pillars of Islam, insisting that it is the duty of a Muslim to give back