

'Caravan of Reconciliation' ends in Frederick

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FREDERICK – A 3,000-mile trek through 18 American cities in the cause of interfaith understanding ended at St. Katharine Drexel in Frederick Sept. 25 when a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish clergy joined Gov. Martin J. O'Malley for a "homecoming celebration."

The "Caravan of Reconciliation" began Sept. 11 with a Washington sendoff by President Barack Obama, wending its way through 10 states in the East and mid-West.

Sponsored by Clergy Beyond Borders, the caravan promoted peace and reconciliation among the three major religions while trying to squelch religious intolerance 10 years after the terrorist attacks on the United States.

Imam Yahya Hendi, president of Clergy Beyond Borders, said the effort went beyond mere symbolism. In an interview with The Catholic Review, Imam Hendi said concrete steps were taken across the country to strengthen inter-religious dialogue.

In Detroit, leaders of a local mosque promised to reach out to the Christian community for the first time. Elsewhere, Jewish and Muslims asked for help in confronting misunderstandings and addressing differences over the Arab-Israeli conflict, he said.

"We are going to people telling them you need to confront your fear, you need to confront your prejudice of others, you need to confront your misunderstandings of others," Imam Hendi said.

Some feared that extending friendship to those of other faiths somehow meant they were abandoning their own faith. That's not the goal of interfaith dialogue, he said.

“We believe in the existence of borders between religions and we celebrate borders,” he said. “I want you to come to the table of dialogue as a Christian – not a Christianity watered down. I want you to come with your full Muslim identity, with your full Jewish identify.”

Promoting forgiveness is fundamental to understanding, the imam said. Clergy of all three faiths apologized for the persecution of others outside their faith traditions, he said.

“We will not allow the bitterness of yesterday to paralyze the possibilities of the future,” Imam Hendi said.

In welcoming the clergy and more than 100 guests, Father Keith Boisvert, St. Katharine’s pastor, said one of the goals of Clergy Beyond Borders and the Caravan of Reconciliation is to “help people remove hostility from their hearts and replace it with love.”

“That kind of forgiveness is more than a passive resignation,” he said. “It’s active reconciliation. By the grace of God, we can use the gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation as creative forces in our midst, bringing light into a darkened world.”

There will never be peace in the world, Father Boisvert said, while the world’s religions are not at peace.

In his keynote address, Gov. O’Malley said the Caravan of Reconciliation has “made a new road in our country.”

“All of us need to walk on that road so that it can come into existence and take us to a place where there is a deeper understanding of one another,” he said, “a deeper understanding of the dignity of every individual, a deeper understanding of the religious traditions of our neighbors which are different than ours, but also a deeper understanding of the essential unity that all of us share.”

During the prayers service, Scriptures were read from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. Participants sang “Let there be Peace on Earth” and many signed a peace banner that leaders hope to present to President Obama.

Imam Hendi hopes to conduct more caravans in the future – and take the mission to the Middle East.

“This is only the beginning of many caravans,” he said.

For a video report of the Frederick event, visit <https://tinyurl.com/cr-caravan>.