

PANEL SHARES INSIGHT ON "ISLAM FOR DUMMIES, LIKE ME"

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By Laura Rehrmann

"Whatever Rotary may mean to us, to the world it will be known by the results it achieves."

*Paul Harris
Founder of Rotary International*

President-Elect Cindy Runger opened the meeting with the theme of gratitude and service. To kick it off, we recognized nearly two dozen Paul Harris Awardees, our members donating \$1000 to The Rotary Foundation. Their gifts, and all our annual contributions support service work in our community and around the world.



For our invocation, the meeting room was filled with the sound of the muezzin calling all Muslims for prayer. As the Arabic words were sung, our member David Woodward translated from the Arabic: "God is great, I bear witness there is no god but the one God. I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Hasten to the prayer. Hasten to salvation. God is great, there is no god except the one God". This is the call that goes out several times a day to Muslims around the world.

The prayer introduced our main topic on Islam. Paul Ishii organized the program and interviewed our member Bret Anderson, who lived and taught for 40 years in Muslim countries, and Reverend Randy Martin, a Christian pastor who spent most of his life and career in the Muslim countries of Malaysia and Indonesia.

Using a question and answer format, Paul gave us a basic primer of the faith, cultures, and traditions practiced by more than 1.6 billion Muslims across the world. First a few facts: Muslims represent about 25% of the world's population and in the US, up to 30% of the African slaves brought to America were Muslim. There are two main Muslim sects: Shi'a and Sunni, however like all other religions, there are more than a dozen branches of the faith.

Worship in Islam is woven into the daily life of a Muslim and is not confined to a holy place. The fundamental aspects of worship in Islam are encompassed within five pillars, which enable Muslims to cultivate their relationship with God. The five pillars are:

1. "There is nothing worthy of worship except God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."



2. Daily prayer, depending on the sect, from three to five times a day
3. Giving of Alms of 2.5% of their wealth to help the poor, the needy and the oppressed
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan
5. Pilgrimage or Hajj to Mecca once in a lifetime

We were served a halal lunch, and Paul asked what that is and how it differs from kosher preparations. The answer is that the two are very similar with specific requirements on how to humanely kill the animal and prepare the food. Originally for health reasons because of unsanitary conditions, pork is not eaten.



What is the Quran? It is written in Arabic and Muslims believe it is the actual word of God. It is said that Muhammad could not read or write so he memorized the words as God spoke them and recited them to those who could write them down. The Quran is highly respected and prominently placed in Muslim homes.

What is a fatwa? It is an opinion by a well-respected Muslim scholar, most often an Imam, who is qualified to give an opinion on issues pertaining to Islamic law.

How can I become a Muslim (a person who follows Islam)? Just believe in one God and that Mohammed is his messenger. Many Muslims believe we are all born into Islam at birth and then change our affiliations over time.

Is it safe to proselytize in a Muslim country? Malaysia is an Islamic Republic and if you are proselytizing for Christianity you will be kicked out of the country. By contrast, Indonesia is a secular country so you can proselytize. Country laws vary and there are many cultural influences. All countries in the world that have Islam as an official religion respect people's rights to practice other religions. In fact, the Pakistani flag is mostly green, to reflect the country's belief in Islam, but it is edged with white, to represent those who practice other religions.

What is Sharia law? It is a broad term and not a legal document. It is a collection of culture, tradition, and Islamic beliefs that each culture imposes.

Both speakers emphasized the warm, hospitable nature of Muslims and the holistic world view they share, that religion, work, and family are all part of a whole and not segmented into separate areas of life.

Reverend Martin closed the program by commenting that Muslims are people just like us. Having lived in Indonesia most of his life he saw the ravages of malaria, polio, and bad water. He thanked Rotary members for their support in these areas.

Committee chairs announced many spring activities for individuals and families. Details are listed in this Totem issue. Joe Phillips introduced new member Zach Haveman, attorney with Carney Badley and Spellman. His introduction is also included in this issue.

In what has become a spring tradition, the La Conner Rotary Club arrived with armloads of flowers for sale and we gladly left with tulips in tow.

