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A cure for the disease of Islamophobia

By DAVID W. GOOD

Clearly the spiritual disease of Islamophobia is all too prevalent in our society, spread by the malicious politics of such people as Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin and such supposed pundits as Cal Thomas, whose Aug. 18 commentary in The Day, "Ground zero sum game," is but yet his most recent endeavor to spread this disease.

While I could offer counterarguments and theological statements in response, I've always been of the persuasion that "more people act their way into a new way of thinking than think their way into a new way of acting." Therefore I would offer this remedy for those who suffer from the disease of Islamophobia, and make no mistake about it, it is a disease; it is a disease that threatens to render asunder the tender fabric of our country; it is a disease that would shake the very foundations of our country's cherished tradition of liberty and justice for all, make a mockery of our Statue of Liberty and all that it represents, and undermine our country's freedom of religion. And when Islamophobia is spread by those who purport to be Christian, it brings dishonor on the name of Christianity. But, thankfully, there is a cure for this disease. Here is the remedy:

Come with me to meet my friends in the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut. Led by Dr. Reza Mansoor, a prominent cardiologist at Hartford Hospital, they organized the best presentation I have seen on the need for universal health care in our country. Our former governor and senator, Lowell P. Weicker, offered a prophetic keynote address, and Dr. Mansoor offered a highly enlightened historical perspective on Islam and its emphasis on medical science. Also, I was much impressed by the health clinics around our country that have been established through Muslim generosity and leadership.

Come with me to a meeting of We Refuse To Be Enemies, an organization of Jews, Christians and Muslims who are in community with one another as they work toward a just peace in the Middle East.

Come with me to the Negev desert in Israel and meet a Muslim Bedouin woman, Amal Abo Alkhom, who visited us in Old Lyme last November. In March of this year members and friends of our church were welcomed by Amal and the Muslim members of her community.

True to their great Bedouin tradition of hospitality, out of their scarcity they provided us with an amazing feast, and we were there for the proud opening of their new school, a school that Amal helped to start. Hospitality and education are very important values that our Muslim neighbors uphold and if one suffers from Islamophobia, there's nothing like being on the receiving end of their hospitality.

Come with me to Damascus, Syria, where last March members and friends of our church visited a synagogue, and yes, there are active synagogues and churches in predominantly Muslim countries. Surrounded by curious and friendly Muslim onlookers, I invited our group to stand on one leg and in honor of both Jesus and Rabbi Hillel, we said, "Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Come with me to see the film documentary, "The Heart of Jenin," about Ahmed Khatib, an 11-year-old boy who was shot and killed by the Israeli army when they thought that the toy gun he was holding was real. His Muslim parents donated the boy's organs, with the recipients being both Israeli and Palestinian children. These grief-stricken parents were humble and gracious, saying that they found consolation in knowing that their son's organs were keeping someone else alive, and it didn't matter to them what their race or nationality or religion might be.

If one suffers from Islamophobia, one doesn't need to travel very far from home here in southeastern Connecticut, for working side-by-side with us in our places of employment, schools and non-profit organizations are some of the most loving and generous people I have known.

Come with me to one of our local mosques where I have had the privilege of standing side-by-side with my Muslim friends to offer prayers.

In my 35 years of ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, among my many joys has been the opportunity to get to know and to learn from my Muslim brothers and sisters here in Connecticut, to break bread with them in their homes and in their mosques, to work side by side with them in building houses for the poor, to laugh with them and cry with them, to pray together and work together on issues of peace, social

justice and human rights.

What a privilege and honor this has been, and in response to all the Islamophobia I want to express my gratitude publicly for all the many ways in which my own Christian faith has been strengthened and my soul enriched by being in a community of friendship with my Muslim neighbors here in Connecticut. And, if you suffer from this disease of Islamophobia, come with me, I want to introduce you to some of my friends.

<i>The Rev. David W. Good is the senior minister of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme.</i>
