

# Muslim leaders denounce Islamic extremism

[Susan Loyer](#), @SusanLoyerMyCJ 6:03 p.m. EST December 11, 2015

*Church leaders and politicians come out in support of area Muslims*



*(Photo: Susan Loyer/Staff Photo)*

## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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- **State Sen. Bob Smith, D-17th District, told the group not to be afraid in Piscataway.**
  - **Imam Asif Hirani said the key to fight terrorism is education.**
  - **Hirani also said bigotry and prejudice is unacceptable.**
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PISCATAWAY - Members of the Woodbridge Interfaith Clergy Council and others joined members of the Muslim community Friday in a show of solidarity as Muslim leaders spoke out against all forms of violence and prejudice.

"I know what you are going through," state Sen. Bob Smith, D-17th District, told the group that gathered at the Muslim Center of Middlesex County. "There are a lot of crazy people on television spouting hate. They are spouting hate against all mosques and all practitioners of Islam and that's just wrong. Do you know that this country — the United

States of America — was founded because people were suffering from religious prosecution in Europe and they came over to be free so they could practice their religion? It's insane that we have supposed leaders speaking so bad of our community."

Smith said that on behalf of the township, the mayor of Piscataway, the Township Council and the residents of Piscataway, "we appreciate you."

"We think you are a vital and wonderful part of our community and we are in solidarity with you," Smith said. "Do not be afraid in Piscataway Township."

He told them this will pass.

"The crazy people will calm down," Smith said. "What you need to know is that the vast majority of America appreciates you, appreciates your contribution to America and wants to be involved and protective of your community."

Imam Asif Hirani, program manager at WhyIslam, who served at the Muslim Community New Jersey, based in the Fords section of Woodbridge, said Muslims reject all forms of extremism as a matter of principle.

"This includes extremism of all kinds, embraced by any individual: in ideology, in practice and in action," he said. "Manifestation of extremism, particularly violence against innocent people, is abhorred. Any individual, Muslim or non-Muslim, who chooses to engage in violence against innocent people is a criminal. God All-Mighty says in the Quran, "If you kill one human being (whether it is a Muslim or a non-Muslim) it is as though you have killed the entire humanity" (5:32). We as American Muslims condemn the extremist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda and so forth. In fact, all the major scholars from Muslim countries have also condemned these groups."

Bigotry or prejudice of any kind, by or against Muslim or non-Muslim, is "completely unacceptable," he said.

"It is in clear contradiction to the Quran and to the Prophetic tradition," the Imam said. "Islam calls for equality, social justice and respect for human life. Islamophobia and extremism are two ugly faces of the same coin. One begets the other and creates a vicious cycle that can only be broken by engaging the community and proper education. Vilifying an entire group of people breeds extremism. Though we may have differences in our faith, but we are one as a nation, and it is our responsibility to take a stand against injustice together."

Hirani also spoke out against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

"As a Muslim scholar who has condemned ISIS, I see a lot of similarity between Trump and ISIS," he said. "They both are using Islam to market themselves. They both are spreading fear. Both are misrepresenting their people. ISIS is misrepresenting Islam and Trump is misrepresenting the American values. They both are highlighted by some of the mainstream media. They are both very good at marketing, but they are lying."

Safi Faizullah, president of the center, told the group that Trump is on the wrong path.

"This is not the way to win some wars," he said. "There are more positive ways. We have to focus on common grounds we have."

Faizullah said "generalization is really bad."

Bad things have happened in all religions, he said.

"As a community, we have to look forward," he said. "We have to look to common humanity."

Imam Nizam Ahmad Raouf Zaman of the Muslim Center of Middlesex County also spoke out about violence and extremism in the communities.

"We are all suffering from Islamophobia," he said. "It is not just Muslims who are suffering from Islamophobia. It is others also in some ways or the others."

He said an article would be posted on the center's website, which "would be more geared for the Muslims who want to react when there is Islamophobia."

"They may want to react in a negative way," he said.

He said when someone says something negative, "it is time for introspection."

"I think that this is only going to help us become better individuals, and hopefully people will be able to see that," he said. "We all get to understand each other better."

Hirani said the key to ending terrorism is education.

"I personally think bombs are only going to produce more terrorists," he said. "Education will create a highly educated society."

The Rev. James F. Thomas, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Iselin, and a member of the Woodbridge Interfaith Clergy Council, said he came to the event to show solidarity.

"The more dialogue the better, especially now with all the rhetoric that's in the airwaves," he said. "I think his (Hirani's) statement is a very healing and unifying."

Also on hand was the Rev. Shelley Gardner, associate pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge.

"I see them as my brothers and sisters and part of the community," she said. "I stand with them in unity and I'm hopeful that dialogue will outweigh the rhetoric we hear on the news. They have been an important part of our Woodbridge Clergy Council."

Additional information about the Muslim Center of Middlesex County is available at [www.mcmcnj.org/](http://www.mcmcnj.org/).

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