

Church fundraiser has far-reaching benefits

By TAMARA SHEPHARD
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A modest project to rebuild a mosque in Afghanistan has grown into a \$1 million commitment by 10 multi-faith congregations and one peace agency to construct a centre offering health, educational, social and humanitarian assistance.

All Saints Kingsway Anglican Church mounts its spring concert next Tuesday (May 14) at 7:30 p.m. — a fundraiser in support of the Canadian International Peace Project.

The Queensmen of Toronto Male Chorus performance is the first project fundraiser for All Saints, one of 10 Greater Toronto Area multi-faith congregation partners in the project. The concert is the project's fourth fundraiser.

Lori Ann Comeau, All Saints' director of community outreach and vice-president of Concordis, a secular peace organization that promotes unity among warring factions globally, said board members at the church quickly endorsed the project.

"Ideally, we hope to offer some comfort and peace to the people of Afghanistan," Comeau said. "We hope it will act as a model to illustrate Canada's role as a peace broker. ... The project is an example of a group of Canadians coming together to offer Afghans a vision of what they need to do in their local communities in the next two-five-10 years.

"We're telling them, 'The world has been watching. We're here to help you now.'"

The project unites Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, United and Lutheran, as well as Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Muslim congregations, which, along with Concordis, are actively undertaking fundraising to reach a \$1 million goal by year's end.

Project Chair Mark Persaud, outreach chair of project partner, Lansing United Church in North York, conceived

the groundbreaking initiative after reading a newspaper article about the accidental bombing of an Afghani mosque, while travelling the subway to his job as a prosecutor with the Justice Department.

He intends the project as a symbol to both Afghans and Muslims globally that the war being waged is against terrorism, not Muslims.

PEACE

"The project is a reflection of our unique Canadian society, and our principles of pluralism, cultural, religious and linguistic tolerance and our ability to live together in harmony regardless of our religious or ethnic backgrounds.

"It's also a holistic approach to peace and development where the needs of the Afghan people will be supported morally, spiritually, physically, while offering educational, cultural, social and humanitarian aid."

The approach is synergistic to Concordis' mandate to unite divided peoples around the world to draw strengths from their differences, Concordis President Akaash Maharaj said.

"It (project) certainly is a rare unifying opportunity," Maharaj said. "It's a tribute to what we can achieve as Canadians. It shows people of differed backgrounds and faiths can come together for a common goal

and export it overseas."

Meanwhile, the project affords a unique educational opportunity to better understand Islam, an oft-misunderstood faith practised in 57 countries around the world by 1.3 billion Muslims, said project co-chair Mobeen Khaja, president of the Association of Progressive Muslims of Ontario, adding he feels the Sept. 11 terrorists hijacked the Muslim faith.

The Canadian International Peace Project launched last Dec. 21 at the annual Eid celebration at Queen's Park.

Tickets to All Saints' concert can be obtained by calling Comeau at 416-393-6111.

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