

Is it OK to laugh with a Muslim? (Fear Not blog)

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By Kay Campbell, The Huntsville Times



Negin Farsad is one of the Muslims who is touring with "The Muslims Are Coming!" a free comedy show that includes comedians who are Muslim, Christian and Jewish. (www.NeginFarsad.com)

HUNTSVILLE, Alabama -- A Muslim comedy tour stopping in Murfreesboro, Tenn., home of the best-organized anti-Muslim group in my home state of Tennessee?

That's funny.

"The Muslims Are Coming!" will bring a free comedy tour featuring funny people who are also Muslims to Middle Tennessee State University on Aug. 13, 6 p.m. That's nearly a two-hour drive from Huntsville, but it might be worth your time.



Murfreesboro, to the chagrin of most who live there, has in the last year received **national news coverage** because of a group using lawsuits and other legal steps to block the construction of an Islamic worship and cultural center. A shadowy force has also used the illegal tricks of graffiti, vandalism and fire.

God protect you if the Christians get mad at you!

Some in Murfreesboro have even argued that it would abrogate their own freedom of religion for Muslims to build a larger worship center than the one they have. And, unbelievably, some brought suit attempting to prove that Islam is not a religion at all, but merely a system of government.

They lost.

The only sane response to that is a chuckle.

But healthy laughter, laughter that unites strangers and recognizes but accepts differences is rare when it comes to Christian-Muslim relations these days. And that's too bad.

I'll never forget a side point I read in an essay by Milan Kundera about life in Czechoslovakia under the Soviet regime: The way, he said, you could tell a friend from a foe when you met someone new? The Soviet watchdogs, informers and party people had zero sense of humor.

I've noticed a serious humor deficiency in zealots no matter what their cause. It's become one of my tests of balance when I'm assessing someone during an interview - how much of a sense of humor does a person have? I'm more inclined to trust people who have the intelligence and grace not to take themselves too terribly seriously.

And laughing together is a sure-fire short-cut to friendship.

The comedy tour has been designed, according to the Jewish, Christian and Muslims comedians who produced it, to make an end-run around the barrage of vicious anti-Muslim propaganda being slung around over the last few years. Not every joke will deal with Christian-Muslim situations, but whatever the joke, laughing alongside others opens hearts.

"I don't think the press releases by Muslim groups are changing anyone's mind," comedian Dean Obeidallah told the Murfreesboro Daily News Journal. "I think we have to meet people -- American to American -- make them laugh, and answer the tough questions."

The 10th anniversary of the date too often observed as Trash-Islam day in the United States fast approaches. I hope every red-blooded American is as heart-broken as I am when to consider that American moms and dads who bring their children to the mosque for religious instruction on Sept. 11 will do so under the watchful eyes of the extra off-duty police officers they've hired to protect them from, well, Americans. I'm sure I'm not the only citizen who finds this incredibly embarrassing.

That Americans who want to pray together have to be protected from other Americans in a country that claims to embrace the protection of the freedom of religion for everyone would be maybe a little bit funny - if it didn't make me want to cry. I'm looking forward to this comedy show as a night when all kinds of Americans can laugh together in a healing exercise of the united pursuit of happiness.

Kay Campbell is editor of the Faith & Values section. She can be reached at Kay.Campbell@htimes.com, 256-532-4320, especially if you have a sense of humor.

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