

# Three women of diverse faiths strive to bridge the gap

**LOCAL** By Pamela Dillon - Contributing Writer

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**Women's Interfaith Discussion organizers (L to R) Sister Jeanette Buehler, Bushra Shahid, and Phyllis Pavlofsky Allen at the Dayton Fazi-I-Umar Mosque.** Marshall Weiss/*The Dayton Jewish Observer*

Bushra Shahid of Centerville grew up in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country, and had little exposure to other religions. She wanted to reach out to other women to learn about their religions, and also teach them about her Islamic faith. She prayed about this idea so that she might meet someone who shared the same vision.

Her prayers were answered in the summer of 2015, when the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was handing out free literature from a booth at a Third on Third Outdoor Marketplace. That's when she had the occasion to meet Phyllis Allen, a Dayton resident who attends services at Beth Jacob Synagogue.

"[Bushra Shahid] asked me if I might be interested in a women's interfaith group, and I gave her my email. I was happy to hear from her months later, and we hoped to each bring five friends together for discussion," said Allen. "We had 12 women at our first meeting at the mosque. Later, we met Sister Jeanette Buehler and knew she was the right person to join us as the Christian organizer of our fledgling endeavor."

Since their first meeting on Dec. 10 two years ago, the group has been planning discussions every four to six weeks from September through May. Topics have included The Messiah in Judaism, and faith as it relates to: The Role of Women, Social Justice, Music and Prayer. They meet at various houses of worship, a number that has expanded due to the women who have attended and volunteer to host. This "fledgling endeavor" has grown because the women enjoy the spirituality and learning at the meetings.

"We average about 40 to 60 attendees. Our largest gathering so far was 88; we were stunned!" said Allen. "Our flyers say 'Bring a Friend.' We're hopeful that women who have attended will spread the information. That seems to be happening."

Meetings have been held at the Fazole Umar Mosque, three synagogues, Salem Heights, several Catholic churches, along with Methodist, Presby-

terian, and other Protestant denominations. Future meetings include these locations: The Kroc Center/Salvation Army, Islamic Society of Greater Dayton, and Beth Abraham Synagogue.

Allen attends services at Beth Jacob Synagogue, and added that the most interesting thing she's learned about Christianity is the concept of grace. And understanding another religious belief works both ways.

"So many times we Christians ask why the Jewish people do not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. While we differ on a personal Messiah, hearing the presentation by Phyllis and Rabbi Chessin on the Messianic Age was enlightening," said Jeanette Buehler, who lives at the Sisters of the Precious Blood independent living community in Trotwood. "Also coming to understand Islam as a religion of peace ranks high on my list."

Endeavoring to understand other religious views has been enlightening for many women who attend these meetings.

"My overall Aha! moment has been realizing that good people are in every faith and every community. I have met wonderful Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Bahai, Sikh, etc. people. I have met people with tender hearts for the downtrodden in the community, who regardless of what faith they follow, are just good people," said Shahid. "I think that is the common thread in what religion ultimately brings in our life, if followed correctly, compassion for humanity. And realizing this through practical experience of meeting other ladies of faith has been eye opening for me."

What: Women's Interfaith Discussion Group meeting

When: Jan. 18, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Where: Kroc Center/Salvation Army

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