Muslim community shares beliefs with Morton Grove residents at forum

By Nick Katz
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MORTON GROVE — The prophets Abraham and Isaac are probably familiar to those who practice a Judeo-Christian religion.

But they also are part of Islam, as about 80 people gathered at the Morton Grove Public Library learned or were reminded on Nov. 14.

The Muslim Q&A event, sponsored by the Morton Grove Community Relations Commission and Muslim Community Center, offered those in attendance a chance to learn more about Islam and to ask questions – both religious and political.

The event was prompted, in part, by the Aug. 13 incident in which 51-year old David Conrad, a neighbor of the Muslim Community Center Full Time School, was charged with firing an air rifle at the mosque while it was occupied for a Ramadan service.

Bob Burkhart, a member of the commission and a retired United Methodist pastor, said the event was designed “to clear up where there has been misinformation” about Islam.

To that end Habeeb Quadri, principal of the school, Abeer Saleh, a department head and science teacher at the school, and Omer Mozaffer, adjunct professor of theology at Loyola University, answered questions, which were submitted on cards by the audience and prepared in advance by commission members.

The three talked about many aspects of the religion, including clothing, dietary restrictions, prayer and other basic beliefs.

Quadri noted that it is a myth that most Muslims live in Arab countries. Only about 18 percent are Arabs while most Muslims are in India, Pakistan and Indonesia, he said.

“Even China has 10 million Muslims,” he added.

Quadri explained that, to Muslims, Jesus was viewed as a prophet, not the Son of God, although the faith shares many prophets with Christianity and Judaism.

Allah, he said, is the Muslim name for the same God worshipped by Christians and Jews.

“Allah is the God of the whole creation,” he said.

“We worship Allah or God,” Mozaffer said. “I use the word interchangeably.”
A written question posed at the forum asked why there are “no cries of outrage” by Muslims after terrorist attacks. Mozaffer said Muslims do condemn terrorists, but that it is not often reported in the media.

“There’s quite a bit of outrage, but it’s not newsworthy,” he said. “What would make the news is if someone stood up and said, ‘Death to America.’ ”

Mozaffer also said that Islamic terrorists are a “fringe group,” which he said is smaller than the Ku Klux Klan.

In response to another question, Saleh said that Muslim women are not forced by their faith into arranged marriages, though families may encourage a couple to meet and spend time together with a third person present.

But the woman, she said, can refuse to marry the man and, in fact, is asked three times before marriage if she agrees to it.

“A woman can say I don’t want that,” she said.

Quadri said some cultures might have their own rules about marriage, but “try to separate that from faith.”

Saleh was asked whether evolution is taught in the Muslim school, which provides religious training as part of its education of elementary-level students.

Saleh said that although Muslims do not believe in evolution, she teaches it in science class.

“It is definitely in our curriculum,” she said. “Do we believe in evolution that we came from apes? No.”

Quadri noted that the Muslim Community Center Full Time School has tried to become an active part of the Morton Grove community.

The school takes part in the farmers’ market and recently adopted two forest preserves “and just had our first cleaning,” he said.

“Kids have to do 10 hours of community service,” Quadri added. “Every month, we want to make sure our kids get involved in the community.”