

when there was a similar issue with the Temple Beth Israel, there was also a vigil there,” Toké says.

Although the group is firm about its nonpolitical principles, the board members do not believe that the attempted Muslim ban is a political issue.

“As far as the political aspect, suggesting or saying that we are not for the ban, I don’t think it’s political because it’s more [of a] human issue, it’s more about unity. But of course if we say don’t elect or elect Trump — that is political,” Toké says.

Tenaj says the Muslim ban is “very sad. I mean I know that several of us have gone to the mosque ... to make deeper connections and really letting them know that we are very supportive of them as a community.”

Toké recalls a time when he was discriminated against in Eugene. “Once right on Park Blocks and once on 17th and Willamette,” he says, people yelled at him to “Go back to Iraq” in the early ‘90s and the early 2000s.

“The way I feel about it is, for one, it’s ignorance,” he says. “They don’t even know that I’m not Muslim or I’m not from the Middle East just because I look dark.”

Toké says that the few incidents are “minuscule compared to the overwhelming support that I get here of people smiling and saying good morning or good evening, and the way they say it is almost like you’re their long lost friend or something.”

One of IPSI’s goals is to “pray for peace,” a vision that varies among board members.

For Frisinger, a member of First Christian Church, peace is a global vision. “We need to love and accept each other as children of God, of one human race,” she says. “We’re all alike no matter what our religion or ethnicity.”

And although social justice beliefs and political views are absent from the services, some board members are active in important social justice movements.

“I do bring in social-justice peace issues and things of that nature in the magazine even as a nonprofit because I feel like if we cannot educate, if we cannot discuss these important issues, then nothing can change,” Toké says. “So yeah, you will see me in both camps.”

Frisinger is a member of Women Actions for New Direction. She says that group works to encourage women to be more involved in the political scene and to redirect military spending on human services and to educate people and elected officials on disarmament and peace.

The Interfaith Prayer Service

Every month, about a dozen speakers and musicians gather to present a one-hour themed service at the First Christian Church.

Toké says IPSI’s structure was modeled after the Parliament of World Religions, a global interfaith movement that first gathered in 1893. More than 5,000 delegates met in Chicago to discuss unity and a concept of global peace.

On April 11, Frisinger walks around the sanctuary — she coordinates the set up for every service. The church slowly fills up with close to 100 people and Tenaj opens the service themed “Prayers of Gratitude.”

“Because you love us, because our life is a beautiful gift of love from you, you’ve given us the opportunity to experience so many things,” she says.

Pani Soltani, a woman of the Baha’i faith, takes the stage; her voice fills the sanctuary chanting a prayer in Farsi.

Presenter Rob Tobias, representing Judaism at the service, takes a seat behind a piano and talks about celebrating Passover. He says the event marks “moving from slavery to freedom.” He adds that it’s important to acknowledge “that we are not free until every one is free.” He teaches the audience a few lines from a traditional Passover song “Dayenu,” which dates back more than a thousand years.

Siri Kirpal Kaur Khalsa, a member of the Sikh community, tells the audience that everything is God’s blessing, including pain and distress. She recalls being grateful after her recently ill husband’s fever broke. She chants an original prayer called “Singing the Praises” in Gurumukhi, a Sikh language.

Jon West of Unity of the Valley church in Eugene speaks another praise of gratitude. “I’m honored to be part of this service,” he says. Children, their parents and the congregation at large join him in singing an a cappella prayer by repeating “Ohm, Amen and Shalom.”

The hour-long service comes to a close with a couple representing the Hindu faith, Hanuman and Dhenuka Hoffman, who sit on the sanctuary floor singing “Nadalola Hrdaya,” in Telugu.

Ed Conrad, a presenter, offered a final speech of gratitude focusing on heart wisdom. “Heart wisdom distills cosmic energy and love into form. It can heal conflict and ills,” he says.

After the service, the congregation mingles, and some stay for tea and reflect on the service with the presenters.

Alex Reasoner came to see what the service was about. He’s a member of the University of Oregon’s Muslim Student Association. A practicing Sunni Muslim from Corvallis, he says that it was interesting seeing all of the faith groups represented.

“I feel welcome here,” he says. Recently, his mosque

invited a group visiting from Temple Beth Israel. “We met on a weekday and had a chance to talk and make connections,” he says.

Former Interfaith Prayer Service International President Emily Farthing says coming to the service is like coming home. “I just got back from South America and what I love is everyone is different,” she says. “Presenters have different paths and it touches this deep inner core that we share.”

Farthing attended the North American Interfaith Network annual conference and says she learned that IPSI is the longest-running interfaith service in North America.

Current president Lealand says the group’s presence is far reaching. He recently spoke with a symphony conductor in Stuttgart, Germany, who wants to start an interfaith prayer service.

“As far as we know there’s no one in the world that’s been doing this every month,” Lealand says.

Embracing All Religions

Lealand says Sufism is not considered a religion but rather a spiritual path. He has been on the Sufi path for 30 years.

“Sufism has some similarities in that we try our best to embrace all religions and all paths as one,” he says. “We don’t consider ourselves the only way to god or to the one.”

As part of his practice, Lealand offers prayers in Arabic, Aramaic, Hindi and Hebrew.

Meanwhile, board member Kit Frisinger grew up with a Presbyterian minister for a father and explored many different faiths. She says it’s important for religions to come together.

“I think in knowing each other it takes away the mystery, and I would have never known the people that I know on the board now of other faiths because we are in separate groups,” she says. “This has brought us together, it’s just been probably a very spiritual high for me to be involved with these wonderful people from different faiths.”

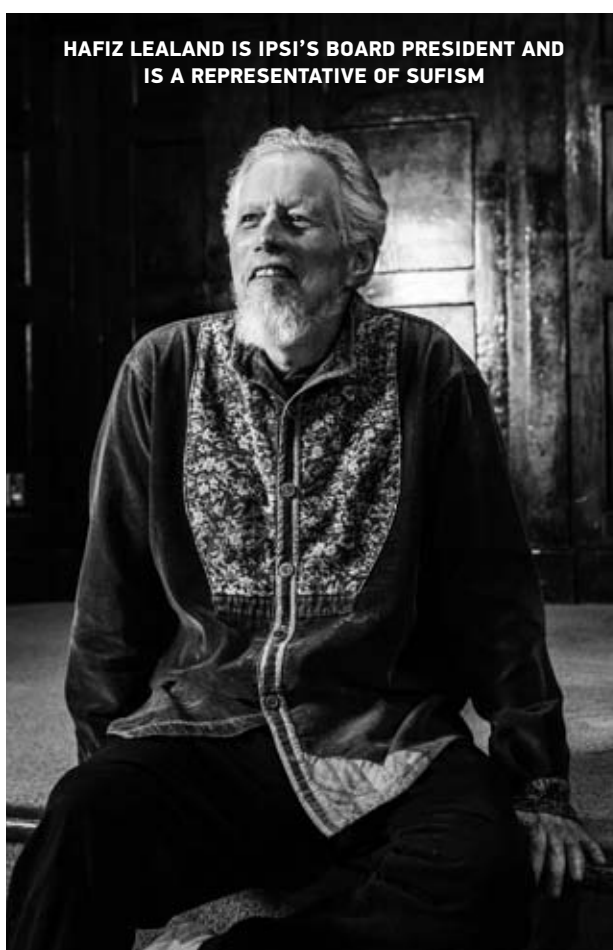
Many people who attend services are not religious, but anyone is welcome in the sanctuary. “Our vision is to have a diversity of opinions of prayer [and] faith traditions,” Toké says.

“I think the bottom line is we just want people to feel comfortable with having people in their community who believe in different ways, who pray in different ways and not be afraid of them or to discriminate against them because they have different ways,” he says.

On May 11, IPSI will host its annual Mother’s Day service at First Christian Church at 6:45 pm. All the presenters are 5 to 19 years old and the theme is “Voices of Peace.”



**KIT FRISINGER IS A CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATIVE
IPSI BOARD MEMBER AND MEMBER OF FIRST
CHRISTIAN CHURCH**



**HAFIZ LEALAND IS IPSI’S BOARD PRESIDENT AND
IS A REPRESENTATIVE OF SUFISM**



**IPSI BOARD MEMBER SHERAB TENAJ IS A
BUDDHIST REPRESENTATIVE**