

Muslim scholars use Ramadan to push for Islamic reform

Associated Press

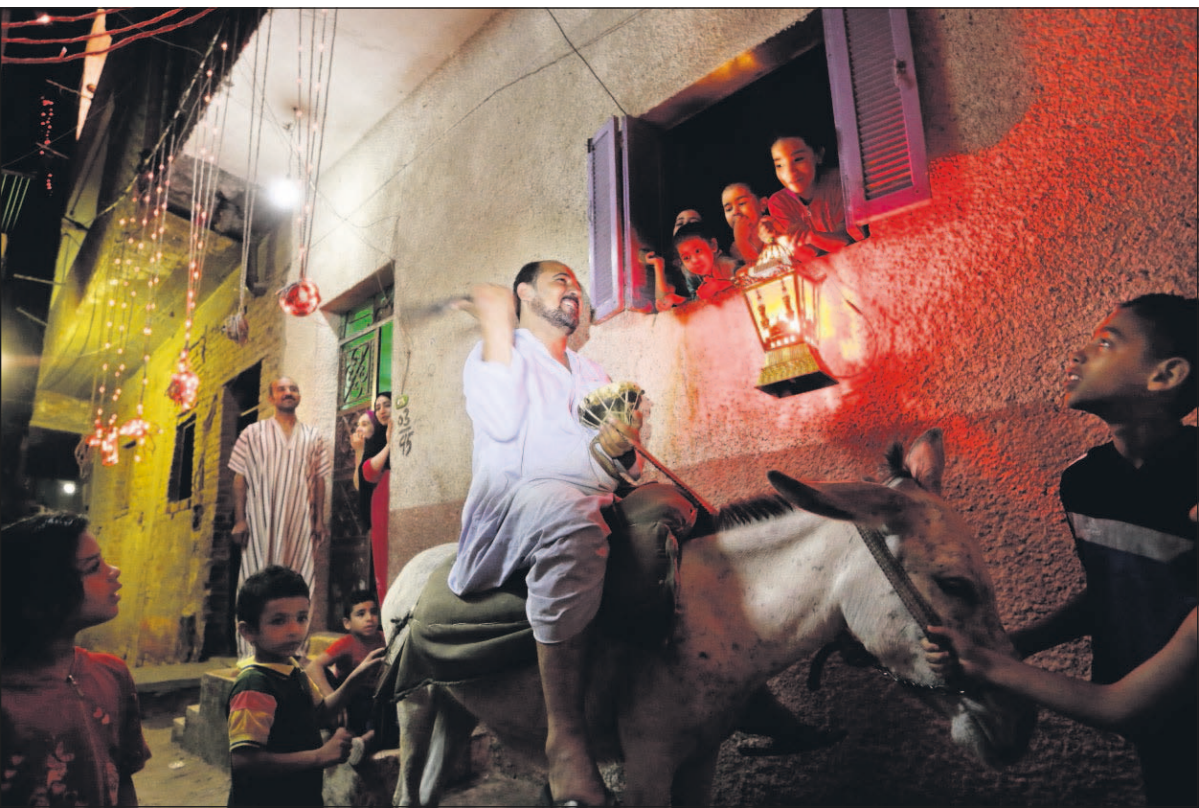
ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, Muslims are called on to reflect on their faith as they conduct their daily fast. This past month, some clerics and scholars reflected on ways to reform the religious discourse in Islam to keep up with modern-day challenges and oppose extremism.

A popular Egyptian religious figure used his daily TV show to talk about ways to renew interpretation of Islam’s holy book, the Quran. The United Arab Emirates hosted a series of Ramadan mosque lectures by dozens of clerics, including many from al-Azhar, Egypt’s premier Sunni Muslim center of thought and learning, and a popular American sheikh, who warned that renovation is needed in Islam after centuries of neglect in thought left the Muslim world in disrepair.

On one level, the religious reform effort — known in Arabic as “tajdeed,” or “renewal” — is aimed at drawing the faithful away from extremism at a time when militant violence has escalated in the region with the spread of the Islamic State group. A common theme among renewal-minded clerics is a call for greater emphasis on tolerance of others. On another level, the movement faces a struggle in revamping how the faith is practiced without altering its foundations.

Talk of change rose to the fore in January, when Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi called for a revolution in Islam, saying outdated interpretations made the Muslim world a source of destruction. He urged government clerics and the 1,000-year-old al-Azhar to carry out this change. On Tuesday, he broached the subject again, saying “tolerance is disregarded by extremist interpretations” of Islamic texts.

Critics of el-Sissi have accused him of using this effort to purge religious institutions of his Muslim Brotherhood opponents and control



AP Photo/Amr Nabil

In this July 10 photo, a girl holds a traditional lantern as Essam Sayed, the “mesaharati,” or dawn caller, bangs his drum and chants to wake people up for a meal before sunrise, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, in the Arab Ghoneim district of Helwan on the southern outskirts of Cairo, Egypt.

another arm of the state’s levers, in this instance an institution that is already weighed down by bureaucracy and government meddling.

But he also has strong regional support from the oil-rich emirate of Abu Dhabi, the UAE’s seat of government. The UAE’s counterterrorism lectures, organized by Abu Dhabi’s Islamic Affairs authority during the month of Ramadan, which ends Friday, drew more than 300 speakers, many of them from Cairo’s al-Azhar.

Among the best known speakers in the lectures was an American from California, Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, who converted to Islam almost 40 years ago. He is a founder of Zaytuna College in Berkeley in 2008, the first accredited Muslim college in the United States.

Speaking to a crowd of mostly young professionals of various

ethnic backgrounds in the UAE, he acknowledged that “our scholars have not responded properly” to current challenges quickly enough. He urged a return to the core tenet of mercy in Islam. People in the audience asked him questions ranging from how Muslims should react to the U.S. Supreme Court’s gay marriage decision to whether “Catcher in the Rye” was appropriate summer reading material for a ninth grader.

Speaking to The Associated Press later, the 58-year-old Yusuf described Islam as a house that is in need of renovation.

“The water taps aren’t working, the plumbing’s not working. The house is in disarray. It’s derelict,” he said. “The house is dilapidated. You don’t destroy it, you don’t set it aside. You renovate it.” He said Muslims should not oppose even

strong reforms, nor feel that everything needs to be changed.

“Because of the urgency of the situation, some people are waking up ... and thinking we better do something,” he said.

In his sermon at an Abu Dhabi mosque, Sheikh Maher Amer, a scholar of Shariah at al-Azhar, underlined traditions of tolerance between Muslims and Christians.

Al-Azhar has come under criticism, even from some supporters of the Egyptian president who call its teaching methods outdated and its efforts at change slow. Amer defended the institution, saying “all the sons and daughters of Islam, Arabs and Westerners, come to learn at al-Azhar, to learn its moderate and peaceful doctrine.”

Efforts to reform Islam are nothing new. For centuries, Muslim theologians, jurists, poets

“Because of the urgency of the situation, some people are waking up and thinking we better do something.”

— Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, American Islamic teacher

and scientists advanced not only their understanding of how Islam applied to the times, but also advanced philosophical debates and the sciences like medicine and math.

But one of the Arab world’s most famous Muslim televangelists, Amr Khaled, who dedicated his TV show through Ramadan to discussing ways of reform, pointed out that it has been at least 70 years since the last great work on Islamic jurisprudence was written. Some of the most widely sold books of Quranic interpretation today are 1,000 years old, he said.

“Life is running forward, but our understanding of religion is stagnant,” Khaled told viewers.

That first episode garnered more than 240,000 views on YouTube and potentially millions more on TV. He then called on young people across the Arab world to join him in online discussions. He sought to apply Quranic teachings to life situation. For example, he dedicated three episodes to discussing how Muslims are called on by their faith to be dedicated to their work, but noted, “We are a society that does not produce or work.”

“The whole idea of the show is that we can’t know how to reform unless we see where life stands,” he said. “How can you ask ‘What can religion offer life?’ when you don’t know where life stands?”

Vatican keeps up eco-pressure, invites mayors to see Pope

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican is keeping up the pressure on world leaders to listen to Pope Francis’ dual mantras of fighting climate change and human trafficking by inviting mayors to a Vatican meeting next week devoted to battling the exploitation of the Earth and its poorest people.

For the mayors, it’s a photo op of a lifetime: Francis is on vacation but he’s expected to address the July 21 conference, which has attracted 60 or so mayors from Accra (Ghana) to Zagreb (Croatia).

For the Vatican, it’s another move in its unprecedented campaign to keep the momentum alive from Francis’ environment encyclical ahead of U.N. climate change conference at the end of the year.

Francis released his encyclical to great fanfare

last month, denouncing the “structurally perverse” global economic system in which the wealthy exploit the poor and destroy the Earth in the process. He sees environmental degradation and human trafficking as related exploitations that affect the poor.

Francis has tasked his fellow Argentine, Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, to use his Pontifical Academy of the Sciences to engage a broad cross-section of society — Nobel laureates, faith leaders, the United Nations and law enforcement — to rally a global movement in support of his dual campaign.

He will be joined, among others, by the mayor of the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa, which has been periodically overwhelmed by waves of migrants fleeing Africa and the Mideast.

BRIEFLY

Bible school shares possibilities

HERMISTON — Team P.O.S.S.I.B.L.E is the theme of the Hermiston First Christian Church’s Vacation Bible School.

With a focus on “With God all things are possible,” children from kindergarten through sixth grade are invited Monday through Thursday from 5-8 p.m. at 775 W. Highland Ave., Hermiston. A light meal will be provided.

For more information, call 541-567-3013.

United Methodist officials to visit Hermiston

HERMISTON — A a Mexican-style potluck is planned to welcome the new district superintendent of the United Methodist Church.

The event is Sunday, July 26 from 4-5:30 p.m. at the Hermiston First United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave. People are asked to bring a dish to share.

Erin Martin, district superintendent, and Stephan Ross, assistant to the Gorge and Basin Churches, will be at the gathering. This is reportedly the only reception planned outside

the Portland area for the two representatives.

For more information, contact preachervet@gmail.com or 541-567-3002.

Buddhists to create sand mandala

BAKER CITY — During a visit by Venerable Karma Namgyel Rinpoche, Buddhist lamas will construct a sand mandala in the Bhutanese tradition at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center in Baker City.

Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning “World in Harmony” and the sand mandala is one of the oldest sacred art traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Created by hand over one week, the public is invited to check the progression and participate in other events.

The visit began Friday and runs through Sunday, July 26 at 2020 Auburn St., Baker City. Admission is free, with a suggested donations for activities.

Regular hours are Monday through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. During the special visit, the center also will be open Sunday, July 26 and some evening hours. For more information, including a schedule of events, visit www.crossroads-arts.org or contact 541-523-5369 or derek@crossroads-arts.org.



Adams Community Church Duane Geyer, Pastor 140 N. Main, Adams, OR 566-9457 Worship 9 am	GRACE AND MERCY LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA OPEN HEARTS – OPEN DOOR www.graceandmercy Lutheran.org Sunday Worship 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:00 a.m. (Nursery Provided) Fellowship, Refreshments & Sunday School Check Out our Facebook Page or Website for More Information 541-289-4535 Tom Inch, Pastor Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church, ELCA 164 E. Main St. / P.O. Box 1108 Hermiston, Oregon 97838	St. Johns Episcopal Church All People Are Welcome Scripture, Tradition and Reason Family service 9am Sunday Gladys Ave & 7th Hermiston Fr. Dan Lediard, Priest. PH: 567-6672	Redeemer Episcopal Church 241 SE Second St. Pendleton (541)276-3809 www.pendletonepiscopal.org Sunday Morning Worship 9:00 a.m. Wednesday Worship Noon Wednesday Evening Prayer and Pot Luck 6:00 p.m. All Are Welcome
Grace Baptist Church 555 SW 11th, Hermiston 567-9497 Nursery provided for all services Sunday School - 9:30 AM Worship - 10:45 AM 6:00 pm Wed Prayer & Worship - 7:00 PM “Proclaiming God’s word, growing in God’s grace”	PENDLETON FIRST CHURCH OF GOD FIRST SERVICE 8:30 AM SECOND SERVICE 10:30 AM 712 SW 27th ST. 541-276-1894 www.fcogpendleton.com	FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH -Presbyterian Church (USA)- 201 SW Dorion Ave. Pendleton Service of Worship - 10:00 am Children’s Sunday School - 10:20 am Fellowship - 11:00 am www.pendletonpresbyterian.com Open Hearted...Open Minded	Come meet Jesus at PENDLETON BAPTIST CHURCH 3202 S.W. Nye Avenue, Pendleton, OR 541-276-7590 Sunday Morning Worship 8:30 & 11:00 AM Sunday Bible Classes 9:45 AM Sunday Youth Group 6:00 PM Awana Kids Club Tuesdays 6:30 - 8:00 PM K - 6th Grade (Sept-May)
FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH in Mission for Christ LCMC Bible Study.....9:00 AM Sunday Worship.....10:30 AM Red Lion Hotel (Oregon Trail Room) www.faithpendleton.org	Living Word Christian Center Sunday Worship Service 10:00 AM Wednesday Bible Study 7:00 PM Sharon Miller, Pastor 401 Northgate • Pendleton 278-8082 www.livingwordcc.com	The Salvation Army Center for Worship & Service Sunday Worship Service 9:30 - Sunday School 10:30 - Worship Service Wednesday Bible Study 5:30 Family Fellowship Meal 6:00 Bible Study COME AS YOU ARE 150 SE EMIGRANT (541)276-3369	Peace Lutheran Church ELCA 210 NW 9th, Pendleton Join us Sundays 9:30 am Sunday Worship 10:30 am Fellowship 11:00 am Sunday School & Adult Class ~Come and be at Peace~ on 1290 KUMA noon each Sunday
Community Presbyterian Church 14 Martin Drive, Umatilla, OR 922-3250 Worship: 10 AM Sunday School at 11:30	Faith Center Church Worshipping God • Loving People 108 S. Main • 276-9569 Summer Sunday Worship 10:00 am Wed. 7:00 pm Praise, Prophecy & Prayer Sr. Pastor, Ray O’Grady pendletonfaithcenter.org	FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) 215 N Main • Pendleton Summer Worship begins at 9:40am Office 276-5358 M-F 8:30-12:30 WWW.FCCPENDLETON.ORG	New Hope Community Church <i>Ministries for the entire family</i> 1350 S Hwy 395, Hermiston Sunday Worship Services: 9 a.m. & 10:45 a.m. Classes for kids during both! <i>Call 567-8441</i> Servicios en Español
a place to belong Pendleton First INVITING ENRICHING INVOLVING EMPOWERING SUNDAY SERVICES AM Celebration-10:00am AM Kids Place -10:00am The Connection--6:00pm Groups for all ages: Adults, Children, Youth, & College Thursdays Celebrate Recovery-6:00pm Celebration Place-6:00pm Other Groups Available Weekly For more info visit WWW.PENDLETONFIRST.COM 1911 SE Court Ave 541-276-6417 Assembly of God Church	Seventh-Day Adventist Church Saturday Services Pendleton 1401 SW Goodwin Place 276-0882 Sabbath School 9:20 am Worship Service 10:45 am	PILOT ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH 585 SW Birch, Pilot Rock, OR 97868 (541) 443-2500 prbconline.blogspot.com Sunday School: 9:30 am Worship Service: 10:45 am Wednesday Services: Kids’ Club: 6:00 pm Youth Group: 7:00 pm	
To share your worship times call Amanda Jacobs 541-278-2683			