

AMSS 37th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

Hosted By:
The Harvard Divinity School
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
October 24 – 25. 2008

ABSTRACT

“Successful Inter- and Intra-faith Dialogue in California”

By: Vincent F. Biondo III, Ph.D
(California State University, Fresno, CA)

Following the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, outreach to non-Muslims became the defining strategy of the American-Muslim identity movement. Not only were important mosques, schools, and political organizations built, but interfaith efforts, mosque open houses, and social services for non-Muslims (such as the UMMA Community Clinic) confirmed a successful entrance into mainstream public life. As a result, local retaliatory violence in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001 was minimized. Then the USA Patriot Act produced a renewed enthusiasm for increased intra-faith cooperation among Sunni, Shi'a, and African-American Muslims in Los Angeles and New York. Seven years after being rebuked by President Bush for offering their support, American Muslim leaders today possess an even greater potential to mobilize a diverse faith for dialogue and peace-building. This study analyzes the successes of interfaith efforts on the ground in California and New York. Has the ability to reach out more effectively to Jews, Christians, and the worldwide *umma* actually increased, and if so, which tactics specifically hold the greatest promise? Can this model be replicated internationally, as in the European Union where a colonial history and issues of class and race provide additional obstacles to social cohesion? What are the best shared inter- and intra-faith *practices* used in Israel, England, and the United States? The relative successes of inter- and intra-faith dialogue efforts in Los Angeles and New York are visible through increased mutual respect of religious holidays, Friday prayer, and such special events as a spouse-abuse seminar, soup kitchen, and an Earth-Day neighborhood beautification project.