

Report 2:

The Lecture Evening: Faith Encounters Faith – Between a Priest and an Imam Hospitality and Mystery in Cross-Cultural and Cross-religious Encounters

In the spirit of the WIFHW, we invited people to a “Lecture Evening about Faith Encounter Faith”. We invited the immigrant priest, Niels Nymann Eriksen and the Muslim Imam, Ahmet Polat to our church. Their lecture revolved around the question, “What does an Imam and a Priest have to say to each other?” They believe that the conversations between a Christian and Muslim can break down prejudices in society and help create understanding on our differences and what we have in common.

The evening was open to organizations, workers and volunteers who are engaged with the work for foreigners, immigrants and refugees in Denmark. The evening started with a Danish song, “*Når du sætter din fod*”. The song refers to the way one sets one’s foot on a new ground, leaving traces of joy or sorrow in relation to other human beings, in relation to nature, and with the call to do one’s best and live out a life of hope and love to fellow human beings.

The lecture highlights:

Being different: Imam Ahmet Polat tells his story and how his *being different* from the majority has influenced his life and his encounters with others in Denmark. While he was growing up, he experienced skepticism, misunderstandings and lack of knowledge from his surroundings because of his religious and cultural background. As an Imam today, he wants to help create understanding across cultures and religions.

Hospitality: Immigrant Priest Niels Nymann Eriksen has written a book on hospitality. He explores the ways how we approach or meet strangers. He is a priest in a multicultural parish, and he wants his parish to be a place for everyone despite differences in religions and cultures: It is by opening up, taking initiative to talk with strangers and knock at their doors. It is by initiating meetings and activities that allow people to know each other and talk and plan together.

Unity: Both speakers shared the necessity for cooperation, their attempt to gather Muslim imams and Christian priests together in Copenhagen to talk about certain issues and problems in the community, especially on the young people who are radicalized towards a violent way of behaving.

Scriptural Reasoning: At the end of the evening, Eriksen and Polat introduced the audience an exercise called *Scriptural Reasoning*. This is when texts from Scriptures are read and sought to be interpreted and understood in accordance to the religious background of the one who reads with the eyes of faith and reason. The exercise helps create understanding and knowledge across different scriptural texts. For example, how does a Muslim read and understand a text on creation that is found in the Bible of the Christians. Or vice versa, how does a Christian read and understand a text from Koran with his eyes of faith as a Christian.

The evening ended with community singing. There was time for coffee and tea, where people could continue to talk with each other or engage with dialogues. To many of the participants, it was the first time to witness a Christian priest and a Muslim Imam together in taking up a common subject and showing what they do together for their people to build bridges of friendship and understanding.

Some ethnic groups represented in the audience were from Syria, Afghanistan and Iran. There were also some Asian students from the school campus.

Supplementary notes: “*Gæstfrihed*” is the title of the book which Pastor Niels Nymann Eriksen published by *Academic Publisher in Denmark*. The book affirms that it is in our encounter with the others, that we meet ourselves; that in this kind of encounter with strangers, we are led to discover a part of our own alienation to our own being; that our joy or success in life is not only in our own hands but also in joy or success of “the other” we encounter. How do we meet strangers.? Do we meet them with suspicion, or fear or do we meet them with interest, with confidence knowing that mutual encounters also bring something good for ourselves?

Reflection:

To be a human being is to be related to other human beings. No man is an island. When we meet and get time to talk, we reach a level of understanding. To know the others or the strangers gives us the possibility to know ourselves too. The lecture is a good affirmation and encouragement to what we have been doing in the Kolding Deanery and Haderslev Stift, that is, creating events, which invite and enable people to meet around tables of trust.

The purpose of this event was to help create understanding across differences; inspire people to think about how we approach new people, and what kind of impacts we have on each other as people.