

A different witness

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 19, 2010](#) issue

There was more than enough media attention paid to the leader of a tiny church in Florida who threatened to observe the ninth anniversary of 9/11 by burning copies of the Qur'an. I found myself wondering why Terry Jones's bizarre plan warranted around-the-clock coverage. Where, I wondered, were the media chiefs able and willing to say, "This is not news. This is crazy and we are not going to air it."

General David Petraeus said that Jones's planned action, once caught on video, would forever be a source of outrage to many Muslims and a threat to American soldiers around the world. Long after Jones would be forgotten, Petraeus pointed out, angry crowds would be burning American flags in parts of the Muslim world.

Following the attacks of 9/11, the congregation I serve became aware that though it has a longstanding relationship with a nearby synagogue, it has had no ongoing connection with Muslims. So we reached out to the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago and the Downtown Islamic Center. Through those contacts, the church has invited Muslim scholars to teach in our adult education programs, Muslim and Christian families have enjoyed picnics together, and Muslim and Christian women have held an interfaith prayer service.

During the week of the threatened Qur'an burning, we called our Muslim friends and asked if we could be helpful. They said yes. The director of the Islamic council explained that Eid, the last day of Ramadan, when Muslims gather to celebrate, would fall on September 10. Muslims were afraid that media portrayals of Eid festivities would be misinterpreted as celebrations of what happened on 9/11. He said it would be helpful if some people from our congregation attended the Eid observance held in the large stadium where the Chicago Fire soccer team plays.

So that is what we did. Three Presbyterians attended and read a statement expressing the congregation's support for our Muslim brothers and sisters and our respect for Islam. We affirmed the constitutional right of all Americans to practice their religion freely.

We also decided that we wanted the whole church to have an opportunity to make a witness of respect—a contrast to the threatened gesture of disrespect. So at worship on Sunday morning we read several passages from the Qur'an. The texts included these words, which sounded familiar to us:

God, there is no god but He,
Living and Everlasting
Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep.
To Him belongs what is in the heavens
and what is on earth . . .
God is All-Pardoning, All-Forgiving . . .
For God is the Truth.