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**Muslim Leader Forges Interfaith Accord**

'You Must Resist Evil With Good'

On a recent day, after removing their shoes and placing them in shelves marked for men and women, a growing crowd of people entered the Frederick County mosque, arranging themselves into three groups for Friday prayers.

At the front were men only, some immigrants from Egypt, Pakistan and the Israeli-occupied territories. Attired in business clothes or casual dress, they knelt and pressed their foreheads to the floor in silent prayer.

In the rear were their wives and daughters. All but one was wearing a headscarf known as a *hijab*, and the other wore a black veil that admitted only fleeting glimpses of her eyes.

And in the middle, incongruously, sat about twice as many men and women in three rows of folding chairs. An air of anticipation settled over the guests, all of whom-- except an atheist or two -- were Jews or Christians.

Some, even those who had visited mosques in Europe or the Middle East, had never attended an Islamic service in the United States.

At 1:30 p.m. on the dot, as a man intoned the Islamic call to prayer, into the mosque strode Hendi.

"*Salaam aleikum*," Hendi said, his black robes fluttering. That morning, suicide bombers had struck two Shiite mosques in Iraq, killing nearly 100 people. Make no mistake, he told the congregation: Killing is counter to any Islamic teaching. He reminded the group that the three great Western religions share more similarities than differences. Above all, he said, Judaism, Islam and Christianity demand that their followers honor the lives of others.

"The Koran goes so far as to look after the dignity of a tree," Hendi said. "In other words, you must resist evil with good."

At the conclusion, he asked his congregation to mingle with his guests, urging Muslims to use the Hebrew greeting "shalom."

But it was too late. His elderly students were already flocking around him as if he were a celebrity. They clapped him on the back and praised his message of unity.

"He is a fantastic teacher!" gushed Irene Schulkin, 77, a real estate

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broker from Bethesda. "He travels with Karen Hughes! He says there should be peace between the Jews and the Muslims. We all thought it was the most interesting course Evergreen ever offered."

Actually, Hendi has not traveled with Hughes, the undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs who serves as President Bush's emissary to the Muslim world and beyond. But he has met with Hughes, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Bush and other government officials to discuss creating interfaith dialogues with Muslim communities here and abroad. He also met with President Bill Clinton and members of Clinton's administration.

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