PII attended the First United Methodist Church family in Westfield to deliver a speech on Islam in Brief and Major Misconceptions on Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Ferhan Tunagur, a PII Volunteer Member and Professor at Rutgers University made his presentation on "Same Message since Adam through different messengers; Peace, Salvation, Submission to God. Islam in Brief and Major Misconceptions"

In his speech, Prof. Tunagur talked about interrelationships of cultures and faith both at micro and macro levels. Although Islam's message is universal and united, he gave examples of how it defers from culture to culture; and how it becomes difficult for observers to distinguish between what is cultural and what is religious. He then proceeded to Islam's message; peace, salvation, and submission to God, which is the meaning the word "Islam." He said "the message is fundamentally the same since Adam, but formats have been different based on the intellectual and cultural conceptualizations of various eras. The names of the religions as we know of are the names given by people. Islam is the last one, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) being the last. Islam is the eternal religion; it reaffirms the truth. Fundamentally there is nothing new. It is a re-establishment and re-affirmation of the religion."

He added, "In Islam, there are two books; book of universe and the Qur'an. We have to read the first one; the universe, things and events around us, daily happenings, the physical and the spiritual world, our joys and struggles within them by using the second. The Qur'an is the all-compassing meta-guideline, teaching us about what to do, and what is going on around us. And the lives of prophets, not one prophet but prophets, are serving the same mission. So we take the life, sayings, and the actions of our prophet as religion itself. And the prophets are not founders of religions, not writers of the books they bring, but the messengers of them."

In further his speech, Tunagur mentioned the status of the people of the book (followers of Abrahamic religions, Christians and Jews) in Islam, talked about pillars of Islam, and the basics of Islamic faith.

In major misconceptions part, Prof. Tunagur mentioned that not only Islam, but almost all religions are treated as static, monolithic entities that are sexist, irrational, and violent. Further, in the case of Islam, in much contemporary public debate, frequently fueled by media distortions, these stereotypical essentializations are presented as fact. Prof. Tunagur engaged

with these stereotypes by first presenting the worldview and perspectives that offer a framework that creates them; then he moved on to provide quantitative and qualitative insight to shed light on each misconception. For each misconception, he provided evidence for the fact that small percentages of social eventhood are presented in the media as “the” one and only public discourse about Islam. He concluded his speech by saying how fundamentalists among muslims – just like in many other religions - are helping these misconceptions by taking verses from Qur’an out of their context, and hijacking the religion by using heavily religious discourse based on misinterpretations of the Qur’an.

The speech was followed by a very engaging Q&A session.

We thank to Susan Ilif and senior pastor Rev. David Mertz for organizing this beautiful speech series, and inviting us. We also thank the participants of the night for their large selection of potluck dinner.

Pictures from the event: