

IDC informs non-Muslims about Islam and Muslims about other faiths to establish mutual understanding and tolerance. To achieve this end, we invited Rev. Barbara Lucia of First Presbyterian Church, Rutherford, to deliver a speech on Christmas.

Turkish society from neighborhood was invited. More than 40 people attended the lecture. Although we have so far organized several such events, this was different in a sense that members of Turkish Society were listening to a minister as the only speaker. Both Muslim and Christian speakers addressed the audience in all previous events. They felt she addressed the subject with openness, honesty and sensitivity. They thoroughly enjoyed her presentation.

It is now clearer for Turkish Society that developing dialog with tolerance among faiths is very important in order to challenge the problems of today.

We hope that such events will continue and that we organize joint programs in the future.

Rev. Barbara explained in brief in her presentation that the word "Christmas" gives us some hints about what Christmas was originally about. The most important thing to remember when you're thinking about Christmas is that it's not just about gifts or Santa Claus or singing carols. Christmas marks a very important historic event. It started off with the birth of Jesus. Jesus' birth is very important to Christians. We celebrate Christmas like a big birthday party. That's why we give presents to each other. Families celebrate Christmas in all sorts of ways. Some families put up lots of lights all over their houses, and decorations to celebrate the holiday.

From November onwards, it is impossible to forget that Christmas is coming. Colored lights decorate many town centers and shops, along with shiny decorations, and artificial snow painted on shop windows. In streets and shops, Christmas trees are also decorated with lights and Christmas ornaments.

By mid-December, most homes are also decorated with Christmas trees, colored lights and paper or plastic decorations around the rooms. These days, many more people also decorate garden trees or house walls with colored electric lights, a habit which has long been popular in the USA.

She also mentioned about commercialization of Christmas. However, while Christmas is viewed as too commercial by sensitive Christians, those who keep their traditions alive renew the joy that is associated with the birth of Christ each year. Most things we around are parts of commercialization of Christmas. That hidden meaning is that Christmas is the festival of the human heart. It is a time of year when all the universe agrees to raise the vibratory level of consciousness on earth to peace and love toward ourselves and one another. It is a time when the heavenly forces inspire us to shift our focus away from fear and toward happiness.

After Rev. Barbara finished her presentation, question-and-answer session took place. Audiences were so eager to learn that they asked many questions. She patiently answered all

the questions.

On behalf of IDC, Dr. Fatih Oncul presented her a gift at the end of the program. It was a framed Arabic calligraphy, meaning 'In the name of God , Most Gracious, Most Merciful'. Muslims recite this sentence not only before prayers but also before doing regular things like before eating, when getting in the car, etc.

Dr. Oncul explained what it means and added, "This is a common phrase between Christians and Muslims".

Warm dialog between Rev. Barbara and audiences continued after the program. They talked about possible future events and planned a religious music program, in which both Muslims and Christians participate.