



REACHING OUT: The Rev. Paul Edwards, left, of St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Weston, shakes hands with Altaf Ali after the local Muslim leader spoke to the church's congregation about being "brothers and sisters in faith." Staff photos/Angel Valentin

Muslim leader visits church

MUSLIM

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call the pastor, which led to the visit. It was the first time Ali attended Mass. Upon arriving, he bowed politely to women who extended a hand to him and explained that his religion did not permit him to touch them.

Edwards baptized a baby girl and offered communion during the service that followed. He tailored his sermon to the cultural connections embedded in the Thanksgiving story of American Indians and Pilgrims first breaking bread together.

"We understand we have to be connected to one another. A person cannot be well alone," the pastor said, slipping in and out of Spanish for the benefit of his largely Latino parish. "We make a pledge of ourselves to enter into dialogue with the Muslim community," he added. "We begin to listen to one another carefully. We begin to look into one another's faces."

Ali sat attentively next to his



wife, who wears a traditional headscarf, near Catholic acolytes in white robes. He began his address nervously, saying he had forgotten his speech at home. "I will have to speak to you from my heart and not from a piece of paper," he said. He continued, "I want to extend to you my condolences for what has happened to your churches in Muslim lands. This

is not the true tenet of Islam."

Government officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney, have encouraged Muslim leaders to speak more forcefully against atrocities by Islamic fundamentalists. American-Muslim civic leaders say the community has been intimidated and humiliated by lengthy interrogations at U.S. airports, racial profiling and

BUILDING BRIDGES:

Jameelah Ali, right, talks to parishioners from St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church after attending Mass with her husband, Altaf Ali, following an invitation from the Rev. Paul Edwards.

slurs since the 9-11 attacks.

Ali himself faulted the Muslim community for not reaching out to non-Muslims in a more consistent way.

The tension that followed the deadly attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center "has made us wonder what we did wrong," he said.

Ali received a standing ovation after speaking; offerings were designated to help rebuild the Iraqi churches.

"I'm a cradle Catholic. I'm at four masses a weekend. But this was extra special," said Misty Bermudez, the church's music director. "We come here very freely, but there are places where people risk their lives to go to church."

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