



Moms work to bridge cultural differences

Posted by **Beth Loechler** | **The Grand Rapids Press** February 27, 2009 22:46PM

WYOMING -- Soraya Deen removed the wide green scarf from around her shoulders and wrapped it around her head and neck.

"How do I look to you now?" she asked the dozen moms gathered at Vanguard Charter Academy.

Immediately, she *looks* like a Muslim woman, one mom pointed out.

Yes, she *is* a Muslim, with or without the head scarf, Deen acknowledged.

The scarf did not change Deen, a native of Sri Lanka, but may have changed the way her mostly Christian and Caucasian audience perceived her, she pointed out.

Resist the urge to leap to conclusions, she told the group.

"Focus on similarities. Teach your children to appreciate people, all people," Nadyne Parr added.

PEACE MATTERS LECTURE

Who: Nadyne Parr, a Christian, and Soraya Deen, a Muslim

When: 7 p.m. March 11

Where: Grand Valley State University's Kirkhof Center as part of GVSU's Peace Week

Web: Peacemoms.com

Parr and Deen are "Peace Moms." Using their friendship as an example, they have set out to show others that differences can not only be bridged, but embraced.

"We're just trying to generate dialogue, and our friendship is a visual aid," said Parr, who is blonde and Christian.

Parr, 45, has a 5-year-old daughter who attends Vanguard. Deen, 46, is a mom who lives in Los Angeles. The women met in graduate school at Saginaw Valley State University a dozen years ago.

In 2007, Parr joined Deen in California during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of prayer and fasting, eating only after the sun went down. She was regarded curiously but respectfully, she said. Her

honorable treatment of their traditions went a long way toward bridging differences.

"The chasm you think would exist wasn't there," she said. "All of my opinions were blown apart."

The women encouraged parents to practice forgiveness and to show their children they can make observations without being judgmental.

"What matters is not what we profess but what we practice," Deen said.

"To observe without judgment is the highest form of intelligence," she said, quoting philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti.

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