



# Interfaith service helps bridge religious gaps

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By [Craig Schneider](#)  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Jews conversed with Muslims. Hindus laughed with Sikhs. They did this in the spirit of creating something positive from the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001.

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Curtis Compton, ccompton@ajc.com

Kathryn Buckley, left, of Christian faith from Atlanta, and Jana Rahim, of Muslim faith from Decatur, light candles and sing together at the conclusion of a interfaith service at the Decatur Hotel & Conference Center on Sunday, Sept. 11, 2011.

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On Sunday, before an interfaith ceremony at the Decatur Hotel and Conference Center, hundreds of people stood in clusters of conversation in the lobby, bridging differences.

"There are so many things in common -- the food, the culture," Ebrahim Esmail, a Muslim living in Snellville, told Dr. Bhagirath Majmudar, a Hindu living in Chamblee.

The interfaith service drew 500 people to the conference center ballroom, making it one of the largest of the metro Atlanta events marking the 10th anniversary of the terror bombings.

Looking out at the people of different faiths, many dressed in religious clothing, Shelley Rose of the Southeast chapter of the Anti-Defamation League, told the group: "I wish you all could stand up and see what you look like. This is an

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Participants of a interfaith service remembering those who died on Sept. 11, 2001, included Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims. The event was in the Decatur Hotel & Conference Center on Sunday, Sept. 11, 2011.

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could stand up and see what you look like. This is an amazing group of people."

Event organizers said the events of 9/11 ignited a profound change among metro Atlanta's community of faith, spurring more efforts to reach across religious boundaries.

"We realized we were part of the problem," said Jan Swanson, 69, a founding member of the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta who wore a peace sign necklace. "We changed."

People said they hoped events like this would close the divisions that opened after the attacks.

Rev. Tessie Mandeville of Decatur said she carried a deep sadness for those who perished on 9/11 and their loved ones. She also felt sorrow over the prejudice that grew from those events.

"No act of love is ever wasted," said Mandeville, attired in her white clerical collar. "That's why I'm here today."

Beyond honoring the deceased, people said they wanted to unify the different faiths. They felt events like this could help educate people about their common hopes.

"Learning about your neighbors is right," said Gulbarg Singh Basi, 69, who wore a turban. "We are all creatures of the same creator. The boundaries are man-made."

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