The old patriarch Abraham would have had reason to rejoice, had he seen several of his children peacefully united at First Reformed Church during a special coffee hour and luncheon on Sunday, December 19. Musicians from the Turkish Interfaith Dialog Center and the Adult Choir of First Reformed Church had invited a good following from both faith traditions for an afternoon of singing and listening to readings. Traditional Turkish instruments and the church's own harpsichord added to the great atmosphere. And afterwards, sharing food from both traditions, we concluded the event with endless table talks. It is hard to leave when you are with friends!

There is, of course, a counter-cultural dimension to all of this. Listening to the daily news, one can sometimes gain the impression as if the world was engaged in a cultural conflict between Christianity and Islam. As a European, I am in particular concerned about measures by individual European countries – no minarets here, nor head scarf there.

We are fortunate for living in a nation that does not make homogeneity a political goal. However, even here amidst the freedom of our cultural diversity, we need events that bring us closer. True understanding can only come in part from books and lectures. One also needs friends in another culture before one can truly appreciate its otherness and not be scared by it.

And so we sang and ate and laughed together here at First Reformed Church, Muslims and Christians of great traditions bringing joy to our common ancestor Abraham.

Written by Rev. Dr. Hartmut Kramer-Mills
First Reformed Church, New Brunswick

Pictures from event: