

Philadelphia Inquirer

To the Editor:

In the recent OpEd, Professors Ellis and Fine remind us of the sad history of religious prejudice and persecution that has disgraced even the shores of our country, victimizing Catholics, Protestants, Jews and others (Islam just the latest loathed faith in U.S., August 31). Are we destined to continue on this trajectory? Clearly the sacred principle of religious freedom alone is not enough. We can do better.

After 9/11, a diverse group of Philadelphians woke up to the reality that things would not change without a dedicated effort to do so. With Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bahai's and others at the table, we founded an organization with a bold vision to move beyond religious tolerance to religious cooperation. We envisioned ways to use our freedom to stand together and bring the best of our faiths to serve our community. This has resulted in initiatives that create trusting relationships -- over time -- in neighborhoods and workplaces, among youth and adults, from grassroots to religious leaders.

A January 2010 Gallup poll revealed that a startling 63% of U.S. respondents "knew little or nothing about Islam." If you are fearful, confused, curious, or just want to ask questions that you have never had the opportunity to pose -- about any faith -- now is the right time to take the first bold step toward understanding. Join us in a DARE TO UNDERSTAND campaign!

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