

# Intersection of Faith and Food

Religious leaders headline sustainability discussion

BY LAYLA GARMIS  
THE CHRONICLE

Faith leaders and stakeholders in the food sustainability movement addressed a crowd of 100 attendees at The Enterprise Conference and Banquet Center on Thursday, Nov. 7 during "Prayin' Truckin' Servin'," a half-day gathering to probe the role faith communities can play in helping to create redemptive food systems in the local community and alleviate hunger as a result.

"What we're thinking about here is not just hand-outs - it's not just filling bellies," said Fred Bahnson, director of the Wake Forest School of Divinity's Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative, which convened the conference along with the NC Council of Churches' Partners in Health and Wholeness. "We're looking at ways that faith communities can empower people in their neighborhoods to provide, not only fill bellies but to produce food that nourishes, fresh fruit and vegetables, and making those available to everyone."

Imam Khalid Griggs of Community Mosque of Winston-Salem, Bishop Todd Fulton, pastor of Mt. Moriah Outreach Center in Kernersville and Rabbi Mark Strauss-Cohn of Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem explained the traditions their faiths adhere to with respect to food, and speculated on how their respective beliefs tie into the food sustainability movement during the first component of the daylong conference.

Griggs, who has led the mosque for nearly three decades, said eating is a sacred act in the Muslim tradition.

"Everything that we eat



Tamica Patterson (left) with her pastor, Apostle Brenda McCloud of Greater Tabernacle.

Imam Khalid Griggs, Rabbi Mark Strauss-Cohn and Bishop Todd Fulton speak.

should be an act of worship, as provision from God," he stated. "Even the farmers have to recognize that this all comes from God."

A proper Muslim meal should be one-third food and one-third fluid, Griggs said. One-third of the meal should go "unstuffed," as an act of discipline and solidarity with those who are forced to go without, because Muslims have a "divine responsibility" to provide for others, he explained.

"The person who goes to sleep with a full belly, knowing that your neighbor has not had enough to eat, knowing that your neighbor is hungry, is not worthy of calling themselves a believer - the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, made that very clear," declared Griggs, whose mosque combats food insecurity by regularly serving hot, healthy meals to those in the surrounding community. "...There's the self preservation that we all have to have, but there's

also this higher calling that we must adhere to. That's what we believe."

Fulton said the world needs to "go back to Eden," embracing the abundant natural provisions that have sustained the world's population since the beginning of time.

"The first job ever to be created was farming, but somehow we've gotten away from farming - we've become so disconnected from the soil, from the earth," noted Fulton, whose congregation operates a community garden and is working with N C Cooperative Extension



Bahnson

Services to teach members how to can, dry and preserve fresh produce. "... We've got to get back to Eden. Eden is the beginning. Once we learn to go back to where we came from, we can begin to grow our own food."

Strauss-Cohn said the Jewish faith also commands its believers to care

for their fellow man. Like Islam, the Jewish tradition has many rules about what and how to eat, many of which help to protect consumers, he said. In the Torah, farmers are instructed to leave the corners of their field unharvested, so that gleaners, widows and the poor can find provision without having to ask for help.

"That's what we have to do: we have to open our hand and work with one another," he declared. "It's about equity and fairness."

Tamica Patterson, manager and co-owner of Rebecca's Store on Attucks Street, participated in the "Truckin'" portion of the program, which focused on increasing access to healthy food in food deserts. As a participant in the NC Division of Public Health's Healthy Corner Store Initiative, Patterson works with local community gardens and other farmers to stock fresh produce in her store.

"My slogan is 'Being a part of the solution,'" said Patterson, who shares ownership of the two year-old store with her husband Wayne. "It's a problem, we

know it's an issue and by everybody collaborating, we can really begin to pull that area up and offer (improved food) access."

Patterson, who is a nurse by trade, said she attended the Food, Faith and Justice conference in February and was so inspired that she enrolled in the WFU School of Divinity, where she is pursuing a master's degree with a concentration in Food and Faith.

"It's a great feeling," Patterson said of having a role in building a redemptive local food system. "I've been a nurse for 20 years, so I guess it's a call to educate and see people healthy - shalom - have peace, and happiness and health. That's a part of what you do, as a minister and as a nurse."

The last session, "Servin'," focused on how participants could put what they'd learned into action, by increasing healthy food options in their respective

places of worship. Bahnson said he was hopeful that "Prayin' Truckin' Servin'" would spark a movement that could truly bring redemptive food systems to the forefront in the local sector and foster relationships that could promote healing and harmony across the board.

"It's one thing to acknowledge the problem, but what we're doing here today is coming together across racial lines, across religious lines, to say, 'How can people of faith work together to do something about this?'" Bahnson said. "I think the key is building relationships, and that's what we're doing here today. We have all these 'gardens' - faith communities doing these different food projects - this conference is a way of building one big garden."

For more information about the WFU Food and Faith Initiative, visit [divinity.wfu.edu/food-and-faith/](http://divinity.wfu.edu/food-and-faith/).

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