

## **FAITHS UNITE FOR EVENING OF PRAYER, REFLECTION**

*Publication: THE CHARLESTON GAZETTE*

*Published: 04/10/2002*

*Byline: Charles Shumaker, Staff Writer*

Members of a Charleston group promoting peace in Israel and Palestine believe trust in each other will help members of both the Muslim and Jewish faiths survive the latest episode of violence in their holy lands.

About 50 people came to the state Capitol steps Tuesday evening for a candlelight vigil and a time to pray for peace in the Middle East.

"It's very important at the local level to give support to the people there," said Dirar Ahmad, an Islamic leader who helped begin the Muslim and Jewish Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel. "I wouldn't think that it's too much to say we could be players or instruments for those people."

The group began after Sept. 11 and has met since October to develop ways for local Muslims and Jews to deal with the crisis in the Middle East.

Anne Fishkin, a retired Marshall University Graduate College professor and a member of Temple Israel's social action committee, said members of both religions believe that trust will be part of the solution.

"We have gotten to a position of trust with each other and have been able to have very heart-to-heart discussions," Fishkin said.

Fishkin was one of the Jews who first approached members of the local mosque.

The vigil began with readings from both the Quran and the Torah as members of both faiths stood holding small candles. Fishkin said fewer people from the Jewish faith attended because of a conflicting Holocaust memorial downtown.

Ahmad shared his personal story with the crowd. At 19, he left Palestine to come to the U.S. Most of his family remains in the war-torn country. He spoke of his mother, who also remains in Palestine.

"The tears of my mother and the tears of Israeli mothers have no color," Ahmad said. "Enough killing is enough."

Rachel Dash, who read Jewish scripture to the crowd, said a solution should come at individual levels.

"I believe that true change and peace not only happens on a large scale, but also one relationship at a time," Dash said. "We need to stop being labels to one another and be human beings."

Raheel Khan, a local pediatrician and a member of the Muslim community, pleaded with the crowd help one another through the conflict overseas. "It's about coming together during this time of dehumanization," Khan said.

Children and adults huddled in a semicircle to listen to scripture and then stood silent for 15 minutes in prayer.