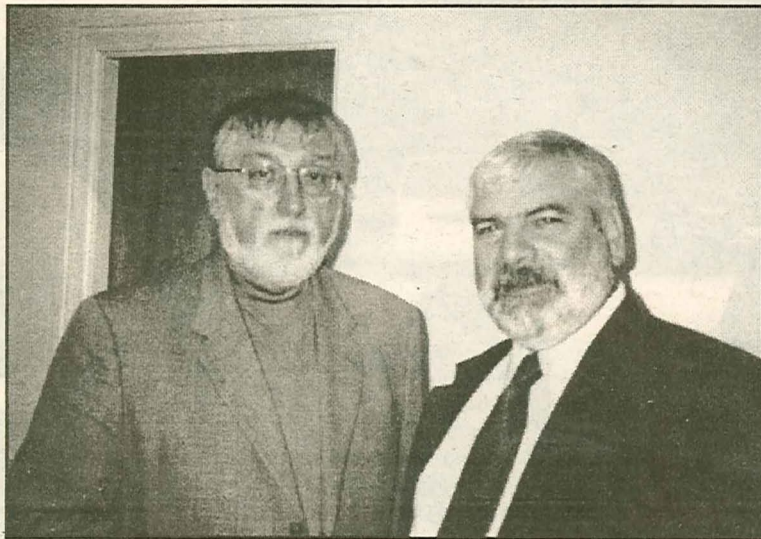


# Unity In The Community

On Thursday, July 8, thanks to the initiative of Polish-American and Muslim leaders, an unusual meeting took place in Al-Islah Jame Masjid Mosque on Caniff St. in Hamtramck.

The meeting was the result of work of Fr. Bogdan Miłosz from Our Lady Queen of Apostles, Michael Szymański, editor of the "Polish Weekly," Abdul Matlib of the Al-Islah mosque and Thaddeus Radzilowski from the "PIAST" Institute in Hamtramck. It was attended by some 70 or more people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

And this was exactly the purpose of the meeting: because of the recent controversy over the Adon (Call To Prayer) being broadcast over loud speakers, to improve the relations between two communities of Hamtramck: Polish-Catholic and Muslim, an opportunity was provided to meet on an individual basis and share some of the mutual experiences of immigration, traditions and cultural values that everyone has brought with them to this country. The gathering, in spite of insufficient publicity prior to it, achieved great interest. A TV FOX 2 Channel was present in



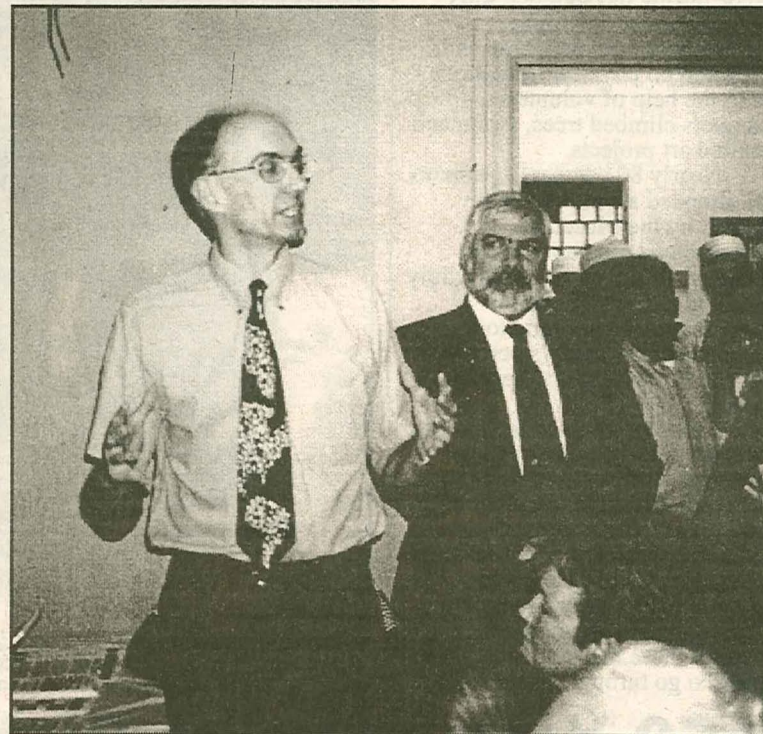
Thaddeus Radzilowski (left) of the "PIAST" Institute and Michael Szymański, editor of "The Polish Weekly."

the United States and that country. The more acceptance we have in our communities here in America, the more chance we have for a peaceful world outside of America. We may disagree on various things, but even if we do, we are doing it in a respectful manner and this is the way to do it. There does not need to be acrimony or hatred attached to whatever disagreements we have. We all

languages, Bengali, Polish, English, means the center, the center of the universe. When you leave home you break up the center, no matter how good it was or how much you wanted to leave it. When you left - you had to recreate that and all of us have that experience as immigrants, as migrants, whether you just came from Ohio, China or Poland, you have to recreate home. Home is that place where all voyages and journeys start and end, where all roads begin and end. This is the place which you recreate, you recreate your family, you are with your people and you honor God. When you move to a new place, you have to recreate that again, and this is what we have done at St. Ladislaus, at this Mosque, at First Corinthan Baptist Church. So when we talk about our stories this is one of the most important things, to tell people how it is that you recreated home." (Thaddeus Radzilowski)

Participants of the meeting were then asked to share their personal stories of how they immigrated to this country and how they adapted to it. One of the speakers was Councilmember Shahab Ahmed, who said: "I am Bangladeshi-American, practicing Islam. This country made me a better person. There were many things that I did not know about my country or my people until I came here. Being around people of different religions, ethnicities, countries and cultures broadened my mind, made me aware of the many things I did not think about before. I got myself involved in various issues, and this community helped me - I would never be able to get on the City Council without the Hamtramck community's help. We are here; we can get to know each other's community, other people, their religion - this can only make you a better person without going about all the negativities. Negative attitude brings upon us negative events."

Fr. Bogdan Miłosz, of Our Lady Queen of Apostles, added the valuable reflection of a member of the Catholic clergy; "Thanks to so many



Dan Buttry (speaking), on his right is Michael Szymański.

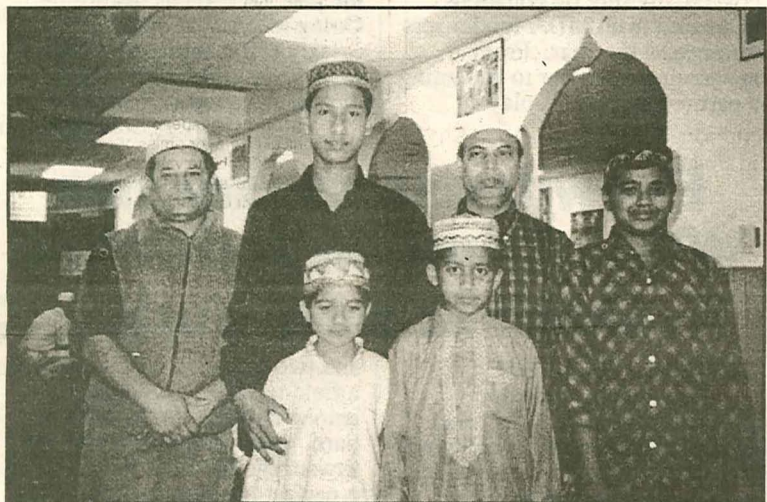
communication inventions we can communicate further and further. We can talk to our relatives in Poland, Iran, Iraq, Jordania, etc. But we are now living here. What we have to do now is learn how to communicate personally, face to face. Meetings such as this give us the great opportunity to enrich ourselves by another person, by their traditions, by their culture, their experience and education. We can change the image of our city that sometimes the people outside of it have. So many of them look at our city with stereotypical convictions that is bad, or that it has bad education, etc. By coming together to this meeting we can start changing that. It will not be easy, as achieving mutual communication and understanding does not always come easily. It depends on how willing we are to open ourselves to listen and learn about the values of others. I

together, the city would be a great one because of this very diversity. I am glad to be here and thank you."

After the public presentations everyone was invited to turn to each other, introduce themselves and listen to each other's reflections on living in Hamtramck, be it as its native residents or immigrants. "The Polish Weekly" had an opportunity to get individual perspectives on the meeting from some of its participants and facilitators.

**Ksawery Świącki:** Please tell us some of your reflectins regarding the today's gathering.

**Shahab Ahmed:** I came here because I think it is a positive thing for the city for all of us to mingle together. This is all about Hamtramck; the multinational, multicultural, multireligion. Everybody who is here came here to live together.



Some of the Muslim participants of the Thursday "Unity in The Community" meeting.

addition to reports from print media.

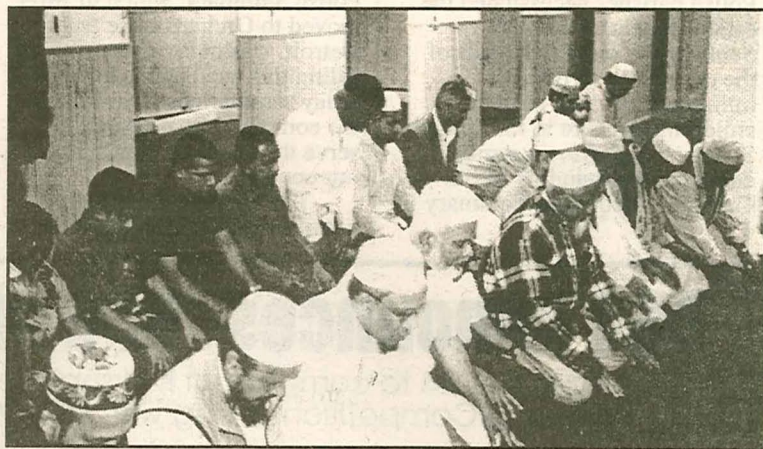
The meeting "Unity in The Community" was opened by Michael Szymański, who, among other things said;

"One of the things that I grew up with in my Catholic education is the message 'Love thy neighbour as thyself, and love God above all things.' I think that is something that the faiths have in common. The starting focus here is the Polish-Catholic and Muslim community in Hamtramck but all are welcome. We want to expand this and at some point, eventually - it is my understanding that there are no synagogues in Hamtramck itself, but we are going to go beyond the borders and create a unified community, go far beyond what we are doing here as a start. One of the effects of having immigrant population from another country is to automatically provide a bond and improve relationships between

have so much in common, even though on the surface we assume that we are all so different."

Thaddeus Radzilowski, President of the "PIAST" Institute, which facilitated the meeting, pointed out the common experience for the many residents of Hamtramck, regardless of their beliefs.

"There are people here who probably do not remember when their ancestors came, or whose ancestors came as slaves, but there are migration stories. All migrants, whether they cross borders or not, have a common experience. Many Polish people living in this area do not remember where they came from in Poland but they did migrate, for example, from Pennsylvania, like my father. So all of us have a migration story to tell, and I think one of the things that is common to our migration story is that when you migrate you break up a home. The word *home* is an old word that in all our



After the meeting a regular prayer service took place at the mosque.

think today is a good beginning."

Individual Hamtramck residents also had an opportunity to speak as they wished. One voice particularly grabbed the attention of the listeners (the person did not identify himself) "I am a native Hamtramck resident. One thing I notice on my block is the kids from all of the ethnic groups playing together. If they played together in their home countries they probably would be shot. But it is so happy to see the happiness of this noisy block."

Hamtramck resident Belinda James pointed out that the diversity of the city can actually be turned into one of its greatest assets;

"We live in a city which is a diverse city. Sometimes people feel as if they were not wanted in this city, but it is diverse and all of us should unite as one. I know we are going to have our differences but if we could put our differences aside and come

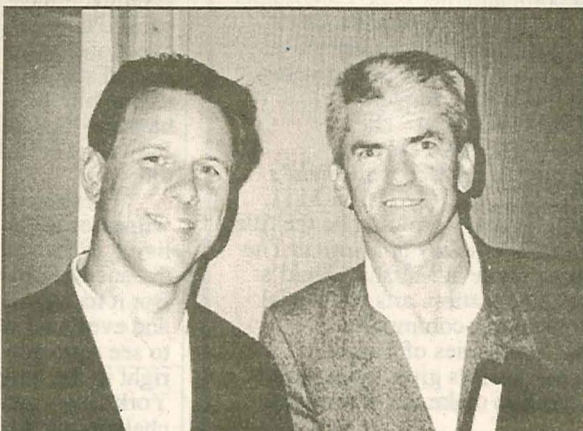
People come to the United States for different reasons. Many of them can not practice their religion in their own countries. This is why we are in the United States - to respect other cultures, respect other religions, respect other people in the way we expect them to respect our own. This is what makes America the place to be for all of us.

**Karen Majewski:** Today people from any background had a chance to come together, talk, meet, have something to eat together and just get to know each other. This is something that can significantly improve relations in the city, when you get to know somebody as an individual, as a human being, it will be harder to be critical. I came here because I think it is a good thing. I did not want to be singled out as a city official but I wanted to be here simply as another individual, another member of the community.

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Frank Szymański and Karen Majewski.



Chuck Cergieski (left) and Arif Huskic.

