

CHRISTIAN MOSQUE BUILDING AIDS UNITY WITH NIGERIAN MUSLIMS

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Christians and Muslims in Nigeria seem to be increasingly reaching out to each others' communities striving for greater harmony in the volatile West African country where religious conflict between the two major faiths in recent years has claimed more than one million lives according to some.

Recent moves for reconciliation include the building of a mosque for Muslims by a Christian political leader, the establishment of places of worship that accommodate both Christians and Muslims, and more dialogue aimed at better relations.

Governor Orji Uzor Kalu, a Christian and governor of the state of Abia in southeastern Nigeria, recently extended a hand of friendship to Muslims by building a mosque in the city of Umuahia, at an estimated cost of about US\$5 million.

“It has to do with humanity and my conscience and my consideration for other religions,” said governor Kalu explaining why he built the mosque with a seating capacity for 2000 worshipers, an Islamic school, a conference hall and other facilities.

The building was declared open by Governor Ibrahim Shekarau, a Muslim and the governor of the northern state of Kano, January 30. Shekarau, speaking at the commissioning of the mosque, described Kalu as a “true and excellent Christian who appreciates the beliefs of other religions.”

Governor Shekarau called on all Muslims in Nigeria to respect the religion of other people with whom they live. If this was done, he said, it would mark the beginning of a new era for the 134 million people in the country, of whom about 50 per cent are Muslims and 40 per cent Christians. “If we respect the religion and culture of one another, we shall live as brothers and sisters for ever,” he said.

Other political leaders at the occasion were Alhaji Ahmed Sani of Zamfara State, the Muslim governor who first introduced in Nigeria the Islamic legal code, known as Sharia, and his counterparts from the states of Yobe and Kebbi. Also in attendance was the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero, a prominent Muslim leader from northern Nigeria.

Reconciliation moves have also been made by individual Christians and churches. Professor Moses Adeniji, a university professor at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria's southwest, built a mosque.

When asked by ENI why he did this, despite the fact that he is a Christian, Adeniji said he was directed by God to build a place of worship for Muslims.

"I am a Christian, but more than 90 per cent of my brothers and sisters [in this area] are Muslims," said Adeniji. "My people do not have a place of worship. So I prayed and God showed me that I should provide them with a place of worship."

Adeniji does not believe it is a contradiction for Christians to help Muslims. "In Islam, Muslims call Jesus the servant of God, while we, Christians call him the Son of God," he said. "In my view, whether Jesus is the Son of God or the servant of God, it means the same."

Anglican and Lutheran churches in Nigeria have taken a key role in reconciliation moves. The Anglican Church has established an institution that provides an environment for both Christians and Muslims to study each other's beliefs, while Lutherans hold each year a Christian-Muslim dialogue.

There exist too, places of worship for both Muslims and Christians in some Nigerian cities, built by a religious group known as CHRISLAM, which uses both the Bible and the Quran in its worship.