

# Polish Christian and Islamic groups try to unite

■ Leaders hope event was a stepping stone to lasting relationship.

By Amanda Lee

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Local and national Polish Christian and Islamic leaders joined together in Hamtramck on Wednesday to discuss ways of unifying the two groups.

Thaddeus C. Radzilowski, president of the Piast Institute, said the meeting was an important step in forging a lasting relationship between the two religions and their followers.

"This is a great day for us," he said. "We're very proud of the turnout we got here today."

Special guests for the event included Kareem M. Irfan, chairman of the Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago and Franciszek Adamczyk, consul general of the Republic of Poland.

"We are possibly laying the seeds (for the) rest of the nation," Irfan said. "We cannot respect unless we understand."

The event was held at the Piast Institute, located on Casmere in downtown Hamtramck. Like Macomb County, Hamtramck has a high Polish population and organizers said they felt it was important to be a stepping stone on such an important day.

"It's really not about Polish and (Islamic individuals)," Adamczyk said. "It's just about people in general."

The timing of the event couldn't have been better, as residents in the city have been battling for several weeks since the City Council voted to allow Muslim calls to prayer several times a day.

"This comes at a very tumultuous time for us as a city," said Hamtramck Mayor Tom Jankowski. "Now, hopefully, Hamtramck will be able to rise up and get worldwide attention. We remain a strong community."

After a press conference on the steps of the Piast Institute, onlookers and organizers traveled to a small park located in the center of the city to plant flowers around a statue of Pope John Paul II. Organizers said the statue is one of

only two full sized models in the world.

Virginia Skrzyniarz, executive director of the Piast Institute, said her group is working to raise \$500,000 to renovate the 20-year-old statue which is showing signs of age in the form of cracks and chips.

"We want it to be an endowment so we'll always be able to take care of the statue," she said. "We tied it in to this event because it's the pope's birthday next month and we thought it would be a good time to do something like this."

As onlookers began to work their way to the park, neighbors in the area expressed satisfaction with what had transpired.

"I think they do a lot of good work," said Denny Tipton as he walked away from the press conference. "In these times right now, I think the most important thing we can have is good communication."

Anyone interested in donating to the statue renovation project or getting more information at the Piast Institute can call (313) 891-8157 or visit [www.piastinstitute.org](http://www.piastinstitute.org).