

# FAITH DIGEST: Disputed dinner fails to deliver dialogue

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dined with 300 religious and political leaders in New York, but the controversial event offered far less dialogue than advertised. Ahmadinejad delivered a 45-minute address that cut short any possibility of question-and-answer. The dinner met heavy criticism from the Anti-Defamation League and conservative Christian groups such as the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, who said the Iranian leader was not an honest broker for peace. Leaders of the historic peace churches that helped organize the dinner—including Quakers and Mennonites—rebuffed the criticism, saying Jesus was condemned for dining with sinners in his day.

**Muslims allow guide dogs in British mosques.** British Muslim authorities have issued a fatwa—a religious edict—that allows guide dogs to enter mosques, even though Islam traditionally teaches that dogs are unclean animals. The ruling by the Islamic Sharia Council stipulates, however, that dogs are not allowed into the prayer room and should be left in a foyer or anteroom. The ruling arose from a request by Mohammed Abraar Khatri, an 18-year-old blind student from Leicester. At the Bilal Jamia mosque where Khatri worships, a special rest area has been set up in the entrance to accommodate his guide dog, Vargo, while he is praying.

**Muslim files complaint over handling alcohol.** A Muslim worker has launched legal action against Britain's largest supermarket chain because his warehouse job required him to lift cartons of alcoholic drinks, which he said violates his religious beliefs. Muhammed Ahmed told an employment tribunal in Birmingham, England, he was treated unfairly when his employers at Tesco put him to work loading alcoholic beverages on fork-lift

trucks. The dispute mirrors similar fights in the United States, where Muslim cashiers at Target objected to handling pork products—which Islam deems unclean—and taxi drivers at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport refused to accept passengers returning from trips with alcohol.

**Students suspended for hanging Obama effigy.** Four students were suspended from George Fox University after they confessed to hanging a life-size cardboard cutout of Sen. Barack Obama on the Newberg, Ore., campus. A custodial crew at the school, founded by Quaker pioneers in 1891, discovered the Obama likeness hanging by fishing wire from a tree early one morning and tore it down before students arrived for classes. A sign taped to the cutout said, “Act Six reject,” referring to a scholarship program that has brought minority and low-income students from Portland to the school. The four students who confessed to the offense were suspended up to one year, school officials announced. Other sanctions include community service and multicultural education, which must be completed before the students can return to campus, said Brad Lau, vice president of student life. The FBI is investigating possible civil rights violations.