

Muslims, Christians call for religious unity in N.J.

H A S B R O U C K HEIGHTS, N.J. (AP) — Appealing for calm and understanding after the murder of an Egyptian Christian family last month, Muslim and Christian leaders rejected religious hatred and called for unity.

Although the gathering Sunday had been planned months in advance, the murders of Hossam Armanious, his wife and two young children became the focus of many participants at the American Muslim Union's

annual community brunch. Prosecutors are investigating whether Armanious, a Coptic Christian, might have angered Muslims with his postings under the name "I Love Jesus" in an Internet chat room, leading to the killings.

But they also caution that robbery was a possible motive because the home was ransacked and money was taken from the victims, and no solid evidence tying the crimes to religious hatred has been established.

"Whoever is putting the idea out that it was a Muslim who did this has [his or her] own agenda," said Fuad Issa, of Piscataway. "I don't believe it for a second. There's nothing right about creating dissension; I don't understand those motives."

Likewise, the Rev. Randall Day, pastor of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Teaneck and vice president of the Teaneck Clergy Council, said the killings have damaged goodwill that took generations to build up between

Muslims and Christians. "Not only did these murders end those four lives, but they threaten a vision and a dream of a possibility of living together peacefully, which is the strong desire of many people in the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities," he said.

The bodies of Armanious, 47, his 37-year-old wife, Amal Garas, and their daughters, Sylvia, 15, and Monica, 8, were discovered Jan. 14 in the family's home. They had been bound and gagged, and

each was stabbed repeatedly in the neck and head. The murders spread fear throughout the region's Coptic Christian community and spurred tensions that erupted in scuffles and anti-Islam slogans being shouted during the family's funeral.

"It reminded me of a mini-9/11," said Aref Assaf, president of the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee. "It shows how quick people are to jump to conclusions and categorize entire communities based on faulty

assumptions." Organizers of Sunday's event said it is more important than ever to look for things that unite people instead of divide them.

"America stands for freedom of faith and worship," said Mohammed Younes, president of the American Muslim Union and an elder in Paterson's Muslim community. "It is time for all of us — Jewish, Christian or Muslim — to stand up against anyone that tries to separate us by our beliefs."

Black Men

(Continued from Page 5)
(22 percent).

Kunjufu believes that early intervention is key. "I still believe that it's best to correct the problem K-12. How are you going to feed the college community if you don't develop students before they get to college?" he asks. "Older students could mentor younger students and plant seeds. Most brothas don't have mentors, even on college campuses. A progressive president of a university would make sure seniors mentor younger classmen."

Lemons agrees and said, "Education is friendlier to females than males. Those students that do better in school are students that can pay attention. Females are more acclimated or predisposed to do that better. I'm afraid that the other things outside of school have a much stronger pull on men," he said.

Kunjufu says there is no time to focus on what we can't change. "We need to point out that there are 1 million brothas competing for seven full-time jobs in the NBA, only 22 rappers are really getting paid, and drug dealers don't have a

retirement plan," he said. Although there are currently 200,000 more women in college than men, at one time men outnumbered women on university campuses. The census reports that in 1950 there were almost 226,000 more men in college than women. Ten years later, that number decreased but men still outnumbered women by nearly 116,000.

In 1989 things changed. During this school year, the number of female students jumped, surpassing men by six percent. In 1989 there were 1,051,344 students in college — 559,648 (53 percent) were women and 491,696 (47 percent) were men. Since then, the gap between male and female enrollment has continued to increase, especially at HBCUs.

According to Kunjufu, unless the African-American community embraces Black men, their future is dismal.

"In 1980, there were 100,000 brothas incarcerated. In 2005 [it is] 1.5 million. The million dollar question becomes: can the Black community survive if one of three of our men is involved somehow in the penal institution? The answer is no. So we need to start protecting these brothers."

AIDS

(Continued from Page 4)

my existence, nor must I hold culpable any man for the determination of the nature of my destiny — my life, ergo, my responsibility. We need to get that, and L.I.F.E. AIDS is here to communicate that!"

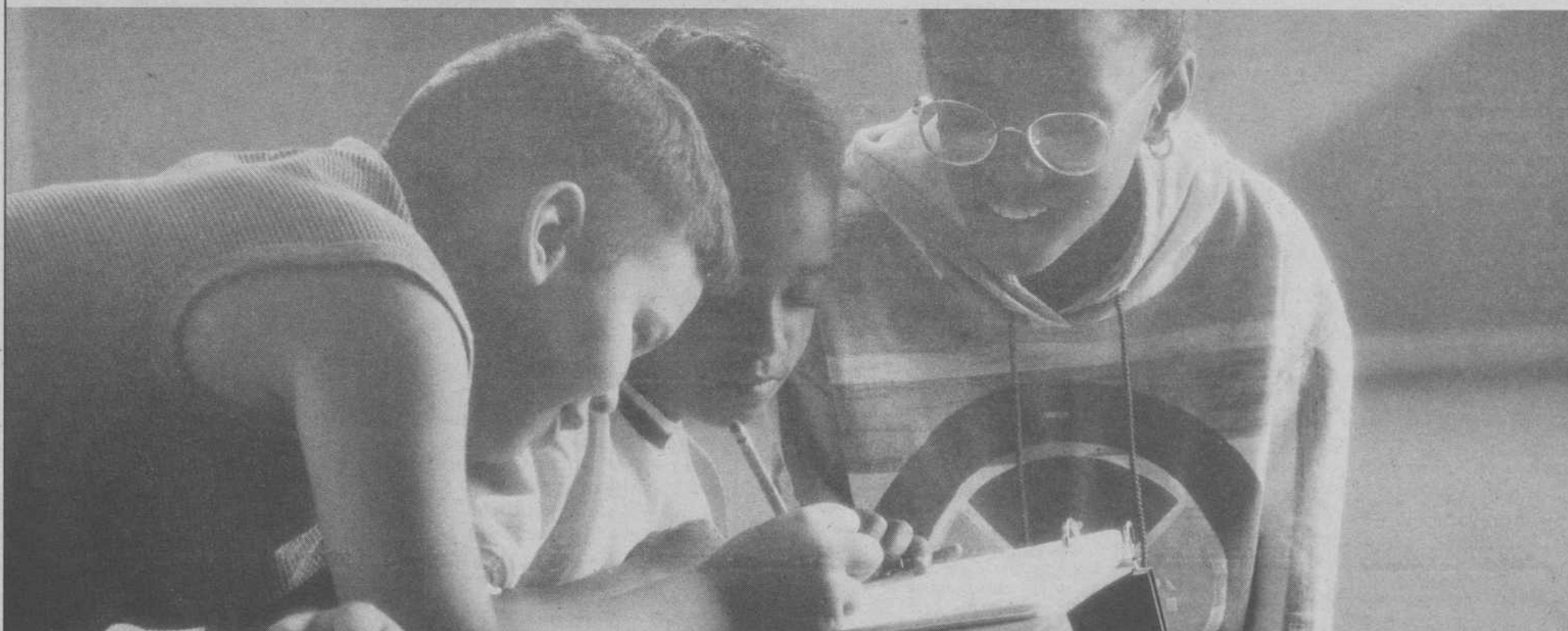
He added that when young people make careless decisions like having unprotected sex, they are simply not thinking about their health. Perry is ready to change that.

"I am getting an amazing number of requests for the T-shirts from faculty, staff, and students at different schools. I would like to see Nelly, P-Diddy, Will Smith, Janet Jackson, Jamie Foxx, Kanye West, Jay-Z, Beyonce, Lil' Flip, Lil' Kim, Alicia Keys, Snoop, Pharell, and other hip-hop and R&B celebrities don a T-shirt," he says. "This is a way for us to convey the message that 'them coloreds' actually do care what happens to them. The world must stand up and pay attention to what we are doing."

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