

# INTERFAITH GROUP WORKS TOGETHER

By Woodrow Wilcox

A group of Christian, Jewish, and Moslem volunteers in northwest Indiana are working together to send medical supplies to hospitals in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

“It is totally a volunteer effort,” explained Champ Merrick, the chief organizer of the volunteer group and a member of the First United Methodist Church at 6635 Hohman Avenue in Hammond.

The group gets medical supplies donated from various hospitals in the area, raises money for transportation, and then ships forty foot intermodal containers to hospitals in parts of the world where the medical supplies are needed.

Retired physician Dr. David Harvey contacts hospitals to get them to donate the equipment which is still good, but either used or past the legal usage date in the United States. Other volunteers contact local doctors, local business leaders, and others to ask them for donations to pay for shipping the supplies.

“This shipment to hospitals in Afghanistan will cost almost \$8,000,” Merrick stated. “We don’t use any money for storing the equipment because some business leaders in Munster let us use some storage space at no charge.”

In November 2003, the group organized a shipment of medical supplies to hospitals in Iraq. Dr. Wahbi Adad, a retired physician from Highland, Indiana, oversaw the shipment to Iraq. Dr. Adad is originally from Baghdad, Iraq.

Life Relief of Southfield, Michigan, an Islamic relief organization, helped the group to make contacts and learn what medical supplies were needed at the recipient hospitals in Iraq.

Dr. Sami Ahmadzai oversaw the shipment to hospitals in Afghanistan. Dr. Ahmadzai is from Afghanistan and was a dean of the medical school in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. The medical supplies going to Afghanistan will be divided between hospitals in the nation's capital of Kabul and the hospital at the medical school in Nangarhar.

Champ Merrick explained that the volunteer organization always tries to find a medical person from the area where supplies are destined so that what is sent is really needed and very appreciated.

"I'm really glad to be part of this effort to send medical supplies to my native Afghanistan," said Jamal Tarakey. Tarakey is a member of the Northwest Indiana Islamic Center and a volunteer videographer who is producing a public access television program about the group.

Members of the Northwest Indiana Islamic Center, Temple Beth El, the First United Methodist Church of Hammond, and other Christian denominations

worked together to load the latest shipment which was sent to Afghanistan.

“Our organization is so loose, we don’t even have a name for it,” Merrick chuckled. “We have been considering the name ‘Children of Abraham’ in order to honor everyone – the Christians, the Jews, and the Moslems – who work together to help people who need help.”

To volunteer help or other support for the organization, contact Champ Merrick at the First United Methodist Church of Hammond at 219-932-5915.