

# Saints and sinners: Making church a hospitable place

John Charles Thomas Jr., son of the famous Metropolitan Opera baritone, once delivered a terrible indictment of church hospitality in a letter to Dear Abby.

Incredible as it sounds, Thomas said he had visited 195 different churches in the previous three years and had been spoken to only once by someone other than an official greeter — "and that was to ask me to move my feet!"

What those churches need is a dog for a well-comer. Dogs and other animals are often more gregarious and companionable than their two-footed counterparts.

In his book on evangelism, Walt Kallestad, pastor of the Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Ariz., recounts what happened one time when he walked into a Roman Catholic Church. "To my surprise, just inside the front door," he writes, "a large Irish setter belonging to the

parish priest was vigorously wagging his tail, inviting me to stop and pet him. I could not get over how calming and comfortable this welcoming was."

I recall attending a church conference a few years ago at Kenyon College in Ohio. During one of the daily worship services at the Church of the Holy Spirit on the campus, a white cat wandered up and down the aisles. One man chased the cat around the church and put it out — only to have it come back in through a side door and lie down on the chancel steps.

Finally the minister got up and mildly censured the nervous ones in the congregation.

"It is a tradition in this church to let the animals in," he said. He told of the time when three visiting bishops were seated in the chancel behind him. Three dogs from the neighborhood walked in and went directly to the bishops and



## george plagenz

• saints & sinners

sniffed at their feet. Being satisfied that the strangers posed no danger, they walked out.

Another dog in the chancel can be seen at St. Rocco's Church in Cleveland — this one in a painting. It caught my attention as soon as I walked into the church.

The painting, which is just above the altar, depicts a man and a dog. The man must be St. Rocco, I said to myself. But why the dog?

When I got back to the office I looked up St. Rocco in the encyclopedia. He was a 13th-cen-

tury French saint who tended the sick during a plague in Italy and effected miraculous cures. Then he himself fell ill of the plague and withdrew into the forest, where he would have perished had not a dog supplied him with bread.

This next story is not about a dog, but about the importance of showing hospitality to people who come to church and about the consequences that can result if we forget to extend the warm gesture of fellowship that comes naturally to dogs.

The woman who told the story was relating something that happened in the 1930s to her brother John.

He had been to reform school (as they called it in those days.) When he was released, he made an effort to straighten out his life. He went to church one Sunday, and when the minister announced the "altar call" at the end of the service,

John went forward and knelt at the altar, along with several others.

It is the practice in evangelical churches at such times in the service for a member of the church to go up and pray with the kneeling penitent.

But nobody went and prayed with John. The people knew who he was. He was a bad actor. He had been to reform school. He was no good.

When John left the church that Sunday, he told his sister, "I will never go to church again as long as I live."

He never did.

The "road not taken" by John Dillinger that day was the road that could have redeemed the man who became the most notorious Public Enemy No. 1 in the annals of the FBI. But the church had missed its chance with John Dillinger as it had with John Charles Thomas Jr.

# Stay tuned — Islamic station brings religion to Malaysian radio

By Sean Yoong

Associated Press Writer

KUALALUMPUR, Malaysia—As the final chords of a Malay-language ballad fade away, Ahmad Adwani Amir Hamzah slides closer to the microphone and lets his creamy, baritone voice saturate the studio.

"Good morning to you, wherever you are," says the disc jockey. "If you're heading to work, drive carefully and stay tuned to IKIM FM."

The chatter might be familiar, but the network is new. Across this Southeast Asian country, the majority Muslim population is tuning in to Malaysia's first Islamic radio station, which the government hopes will combat what it claims is a raging trend of distorted religious teachings.

The Malay-language station is a \$3.4

million, state-funded project of the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding, a think tank launched by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in 1992 to promote better understanding of Muslim principles.

After years of holding seminars and publishing spiritual books, the institute began radio transmissions on July 6 to reach more people across Malaysia, where a study shows that radio enjoys a significantly larger audience than television or newspapers.

Mahathir says the Islamic station can help correct misconceptions about the faith, including those he claims are spread by Malaysia's biggest opposition group, the fundamentalist Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.

"There is evidence that they purposely misinterpret Islam," Mahathir,

himself a Muslim, said at the launch of IKIM FM. "For example, it is wrong that they label other Muslims as being un-Islamic out of their political interests."

But there hasn't been much preaching, or much politics, over national airwaves so far. Listeners are mostly grooving to Islamic pop songs playing alongside secular, easy-listening Malay-language tunes, with brief readings from the Quran, the Muslim holy book, four times an hour.

The religious music is mostly mid-tempo, folk-inflected ballads with lush choruses extolling the magnificence of God's creations. Typical are the songs "Thank You, Allah" and "The Highest Praise" by Raihan, Malaysia's popular Islamic traditional band.

Most secular songs played also have

reverent lyrics, with artists beseeching God to bless their romances or — in heartbreak melodies — consoling themselves that their love was simply not ordained to be.

On weekends, the station airs re-enactments of hearings from the local Islamic court, anecdotes from the Prophet Muhammad's life and chat shows on issues involving the international Islamic community.

"We don't encourage rock music, and there's no rap," said station director Johanni Salleh.

The playlist is vetted by a committee including Muslim clerics. Banned are artists whose religious values are suspect — like local R&B diva Ning Baizura, who sparked outrage last year when she spoke in a magazine interview about her sexual preferences and

taste in undergarments.

Islam forms the backdrop to everyday life in Malaysia, where than 60 percent of the 23 million people are ethnic Malay Muslims. Buddhists, Christians and Hindus make up the largest religious minorities.

Although IKIM officials insist the station will not be used for government propaganda, the Islamic party is cautious.

"We expect to be criticized," said Zulkifli Sulong, editor of the fundamentalist party's newspaper. "It's just a battle to prove who is more Islamic and who deserves the support of Muslims in this country."

Zulkifli criticized the station for playing romantic songs and recruiting hip hosts like Ahmad Adwani, an ex-karaoke club deejay who says his idol

is Rick Dees, the voice of a U.S. Top 40 radio show.

The Islamic institute, however, says these moves will draw youngsters who will benefit from the station's spiritual insights. Ahmad Adwani and the other deejays have so far been well-behaved anyway, chatting casually about everyday news headlines and shunning hyperactiveness.

Officials refuse to say what they hope their share of nearly 10 million radio listeners will be, but they welcome Islamic firms advertising everything from food and health products to children's books.

"Most of the other 38 radio stations in Malaysia have music as their selling point, but we are more well-balanced with knowledge, moral values and information," Salleh said.



## Calvary Gospel Church

**Bible Baptist Church**  
**Pastor:** Don Crutcher  
Fifth & Broadway  
899-7368  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9 am  
Worship Service: 10 am  
Evening Service: 6:30 pm  
**Wednesday:** Evening Bible Study: 7 pm

**Calvary Gospel Church**  
**Pastor:** Rev. Steve Rains  
Fourth & College • 899-3605  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
Morning Worship: 10:30 am  
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm  
**Wednesday:** Family Night: 7 pm  
Adult Bible Study and Youth Group  
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**Church of Christ**  
401 Caldwell  
899-6185  
**Sunday:** Bible Study: 9:45 am  
Worship Service: 10:45 am  
Evening Service: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Bible Study: 7 pm

**Church of the Nazarene**  
**Pastor:** Matthew Delp  
Third & Caldwell  
899-2080 or 899-3797  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Worship Service: 10:50 am  
Evening Service: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Evening Service: 7 pm

**First Baptist Church**  
**Pastor:** Bud Chester  
Fifth & Center • 899-3450  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
Morning Worship: 10:30 am  
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm  
**Tuesday:** Mens' Prayer Group: 6:00 am  
**Thursday:** Night Bible Study: 7:00 pm

**Seventh Day Adventist Church**  
**Pastor:** Bobby Potter • 332-3956  
**Saturday:** Sabbath School: 9:30 am  
Worship Service: 11 am

**First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**  
**Pastor:** Loren Strait  
Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 9 am  
**Activities:** Junior High & High School Youth Groups, Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups, Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship  
**Special Notice:** Handicap Accessible, Hearing Assistance Equipment and Infant and Toddler Nurseries Available

**First United Methodist Church**  
1116 Sherman  
899-3631  
**Pastor:** Rev. Carol Moore-Ramey  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
Worship Service: 10:30 am

**Sonrise Christian Church**  
Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398  
**Minister:** Tony Kalka  
**Youth Minister:** Doug Bean  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 9:30 am  
Sunday School: 10:45 am  
**Wednesday:**  
Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm  
Adult & Children's Classes: 7 pm

**Emmanuel Lutheran Church**  
13th & Sherman • 899-6161  
**Pastor:** Scott Grimshaw  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 8:45 am  
Worship Service: 10 am  
**Wednesday:** Confirmation: 6 pm

**Kanorado United Methodist Church**  
**Pastor:** Leonard Cox  
399-2468  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9 am  
Worship Service: 10:15 am

**Goodland Bible Church**  
109 Willow Road • 899-6400  
**Pastor:**  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Morning Worship: 11 am  
Evening Worship: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Call for location

**Grace Fellowship Church**  
104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423  
**Pastor:** Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10 am  
Worship Service: 11 am

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church**  
13th & Center  
899-2115 or Rectory 899-2114  
**Priest:** Father Charles Schneider  
**Deacon:** Gretchen Talitha  
**Adult Forum:** Sunday : 8:30 am  
Morning Prayer: 9:30 am 1st & 5th Sundays  
**Holy Eucharist:** 2nd, 3rd, & 4th Sundays: 9:30  
Sr. Warden for emergencies during the week 899-2067

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints**  
1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (970) 664-2470  
**Sacrament Meeting:** 9:30 am  
**Sunday School:** 10:45 am  
**Priesthood/Relief Society:** 11:30 am

**Word of Life Foursquare Church**  
223 E. 10th  
899-5250  
**Pastor:** John Coumerilh  
**Sunday:** Worship Celebration & Kids' Church: 10:30 am

**United Methodist Church Brewster:**  
**Pastor:**  
Worship Service: 10:45 am CST  
Sunday School: 9:45 am CST  
**Winona:**  
**Minister:** Rev. Bob Winters  
Worship Service: 9 am CST  
Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

**Iglesia Del Dios Vivo**  
La Luz Del Mundo  
Spanish Speaking Church  
**Minister:** Esteban Ortiz B.  
1601 Texas • 899-5275  
**Daily Prayer:** Sunday thru Saturday: 5 am & 6 pm  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10 am

**Our Lady of Perpetual Help**  
**Pastor:** Father Daryl Olmstead  
307 W. 13th • 899-7205  
**Sacrament of Reconciliation:**  
4:30-5 pm Saturday or by appointment  
**Mass Schedule:**  
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Sunday: 8 am and 9:30 am  
**Spanish Mass:**  
1st & 3rd Sunday: 2 pm

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*Serving the rural community for over 100 years*  
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Sunday School: 10 am  
Evening Service: 6 pm

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