

Raise your hand if you've ever been invited to speak at a mosque.

I have.

This story began three Sundays ago, when a representative of the local [Ahmadiyya Muslim Community](#) walked into the bishop's office during my 7:30 A.M. Priesthood Executive Committee meeting and asked if I'd be willing to speak the following Sunday at an interfaith symposium his mosque was hosting on the subject of how different religious traditions worship God.

To be honest, had he issued the invitation privately, I might have been tempted to make up some kind of excuse to get out of it. But I didn't want to wuss out in front of the fellas, who all thought it sounded cool and immediately started egging me on to do it. So I said yes, even though, at that point, I was nervous because I had no idea what I was going to say (or where I was going to find three spare hours to attend a symposium on a Sunday; a day on which I'm often booked solid from dawn to dusk, and sometimes beyond).

But I'm glad I said yes. It was a fascinating experience, and I don't know if I've met a more warm and gracious group of folks. The men of the mosque sat on the floor in the main sanctuary under the dome, while the women watched via closed-circuit TV from a different room. Visiting women, including my mother and my Relief Society president were invited into the sanctuary, where they joined the visiting men in an area off to the side where some chairs had been set up.

The panel, consisting of the leader of a local Buddhist temple, a Baptist pastor, a Reform Jewish rabbi, a representative of the mosque, a Sikh, a Hindu and me, sat at a table situated next to the podium at the front of the sanctuary. We were each asked to give some brief remarks—mine are posted [here](#)—following which there was some time designated for a Q&A session. I was most nervous about what might come up during the Q&A. The potential question, "Isn't it true that Mormons eat babies?" only worried me because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to resist saying something smart-alecky, like "Well, you have to understand that practice in its proper context..." Fortunately, virtually the entire Q&A period was consumed by a Sikh in the audience who stood up to take issue with an assertion made by the Hindu on the panel that Sikhism is an offshoot of Hinduism. I don't recall how all that got resolved; I was just happy it took a lot of time and didn't involve me. The closest we got to an intra-panel conflict was when the rabbi, who, as far as I could tell, didn't really believe in anything, including Judaism, described the unyielding Christian view that people can only be saved through Jesus as inherently "dangerous." I had no interest in picking a fight, so I bit my tongue, though part of me was quietly hoping that the Baptist would jump all

over him. But he didn't and nothing came of it. It was meant to be a Kumbaya event, and that's what it turned out to be. And that's not a bad thing.

Crystal and the girls didn't come, which is probably just as well given Hannah's greeting when I returned home afterward: "Why did they ask you to talk? Why didn't they get somebody important?" This, of course, is the same beloved daughter who reacted to my calling as bishop by lovingly observing, "But there are so many other men in the ward who are better than you..."

But Crystal, Hannah, and Lucy did join me a week earlier, along with all of the girls' local aunts, uncles and grandparents, at [Strathmore](#), where we took in a mesmerizing performance by [The 5 Browns](#). The group consists of five piano virtuoso siblings from Utah whose trademark act features the five of them pounding on five Steinways at the same time. Even from our not-so-great seats near the back of the hall, the richness of the sound and overall coolness of the performance was simply electric. The three girls and two boys, all in their 20s, were also charming in the way they addressed the audience. Not overly articulate, the way many classical musicians are, just very pleasant. Though they've moved to New York (where all five attended Julliard at the same time), they haven't lost their Utah accents, which gives them an added folksy appeal. For those unfamiliar with the Utah accent, it can be alternatively subtle (e.g., The 5 Browns) and blaring (e.g., L. Tom Perry). The blaring variety features head-spinning vowel shifts, such as "measure" pronounced "MAY-zher." The subtler version favors pronouncing long e's in much the same way a lot of people pronounce short i's. So, to an untrained ear, the word "wheel" sounds a lot like the word "will." It's all very confusing, but somehow we all get along.

Whoa. Sorry about the tangent. Hannah and Lucy enjoyed most of the performance, though it tested Lucy's patience at times. Lucy was also pestered by an itchy foot for much of the performance, which the audience members in the rows around us apparently took great interest in learning about because they kept turning and staring at us.

Thanksgiving was nice; thanks for asking. It was the second Thanksgiving in Grandma and Grandpa's new house (and first since they got their big HDTV, which made football watching that much better. Too bad the games stunk.) The gathering was attended by pretty much the entire local clan, including Richard and JoAnn's six, up from Lusby, plus Matt & Andra's six, up from Raleigh. All told, I think we had 14 adults and 18 children under the age of 11. Miraculously, I don't think we lost anyone. But we're still counting. We might have lost Reed F., who blew us off to spend the holiday with his, ahem, *friend*, and her family in Denver. Naturally we're all anxious to learn how that worked out.

We hope your Thanksgiving was nice and that you enjoy the holiday season.





Happy Thanksgiving!
How about some
Halloween pictures?

Hannah, between Nicholas and Michelle
(from next door)



Sophie
(Cinderella)



Lucy
(Hermione)



Above: Grace, Hannah and Sophie



Left: Grace at the annual Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Walkathon...

...Sophie occupied both seats of the double jogging stroller while Grace covered most of the 5K on Mommy's shoulders.

(I carried the camera.)