



In Miami, a Night of Hope Brings Jewish–Muslim Dialogue Into the Open  
*Students, faculty, and neighbors model pluralism, chart next steps for research and collaboration*

Miami, Oct. 22, 2025 – In a packed interfaith forum that felt equal parts seminar and town hall, South Florida students, professors, clergy, and community leaders gathered this week to wrestle with a word that too often gets written off as naïve: hope.

Organized by partners across Florida International University (FIU), Miami Dade College, and a local interfaith coalition, the evening centered on Jewish–Muslim dialogue at a moment when global headlines often reward outrage over understanding. Participants didn’t shy from the hard edges. Instead, they modeled how a civic community can disagree, listen, and still keep the conversation—and the relationships—intact.

“We live in a time when words like *diversity* and *inclusion* feel endangered,” began Prof. Mohammad Homayunvash of Miami Dade College. “*Hope* is becoming one of those endangered words. In our tradition, despair is not only disempowering—it’s spiritually off-limits. Scripture teaches: ‘Do not despair of God’s mercy.’ So our work tonight is prayer, plan, practice.”

From the Jewish side, a longtime Miami rabbi linked hope to a forward-leaning religious rhythm: “Every year on Simchat Torah, we complete the scroll and immediately begin again. That never-ending circle of learning—continuing even when it would be easier to stop—is a practice of hope.” He traced the theme through weekly readings, from Noah’s imperfect restart to Abraham’s leap into an unknown future, and then grounded it in a contemporary ethic: “We are partners with God in perfecting the world. Hope isn’t a feeling we wait to receive; it’s a responsibility we take up.”

#### Students move the center of gravity

If the evening had a heartbeat, it was the student voices. Honors and International Relations undergraduates from FIU, Miami Dade College, and other campuses spoke candidly about algorithmic outrage, misinformation, and the fatigue of “crisis-to-crisis” adolescence. Yet their testimonies kept bending toward agency. “Hope is acting,” one student said plainly. “It’s organizing in our clubs, planning together across differences, and refusing to normalize violence.” Another reflected on the recent Jewish holiday cycle—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, then Simchat Torah—as a ritual engine that “turns the page” together every fall: repentance, reconciliation, and a recommitment to study and community.

Several students pressed the adults for specifics: What comes next? Where are the on-ramps? The room answered with invitations—dialogue cohorts already meeting at FIU, an upcoming interfaith “Breaking Bread, Breaking Bias” gathering at a local church, and new small-group salons to keep the hard conversations going in living rooms and sanctuaries, not just classrooms.

#### Knowledge that disarms: “Hope is knowing”

A visiting Palestinian-Israeli professor of education from Jerusalem, Prof. Samira Alayan of Hebrew University in Jerusalem said,—“I have two eyes; I can see two sides”—offered perhaps the night’s defining line: “Hope is knowledge.” Teaching mixed classes of Jewish and Arab students, she said, has taught her that proximity and learning are not luxuries; they are survival skills for plural societies. “When we really know the other, the human being behind the narrative, we begin to heal.”

That refrain—move closer, learn more—echoed across the evening. A community mediator reminded attendees that even entrenched conflicts can pivot when

adversaries are willing to spend real time together. “It’s much harder to hate someone up close,” she said, describing couples who arrive ready to fight and leave hugging after a day of facilitated listening. “If that can happen in families, it can happen in communities.”

#### From dialogue to doing: a civic to-do list

The gathering didn’t end with abstractions. Participants sketched a short list of actions aimed at strengthening South Florida’s civic fabric:

- Scale student-led dialogue. Support the FIU Jewish–Muslim dialogue cohort now in motion and replicate it at additional campuses. Build mixed, multigenerational teams so younger voices lead alongside clergy and faculty.
- Open homes and sanctuaries. Keep rotating dialogue into houses of worship and private homes—breaking bread across difference to “look each other in the eye” and de-other the other.
- Co-produce research. Launch joint faculty–student projects on misinformation, social media outrage, and comparative religious ethics of hope; create open data and teaching modules local schools can adopt.
- Measure what matters. Track participation, trust-building, and attitude shifts over time through low-lift surveys and reflective assignments so the work can improve—and be funded—year to year.
- Train facilitators. Offer mediation and dialogue facilitation workshops for student leaders, clergy, and neighborhood organizers to expand the bench of people who can convene difficult discussions well.

#### A laboratory for pluralism

What distinguished the evening wasn’t unanimity; it was disagreement without dehumanization. Speakers named pain and politics directly—including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—while refusing to collapse one another into caricatures. Elders spoke of learning to trust younger voices; younger participants asked for concrete steps and shared leadership. The tone was neither performative niceness nor performative rage. It was civic.

Leader of Temple Beth Am’s unbiased initiative, Dr. Joanne Koren, quoted Sen. Cory Booker—“Hope is the absolute belief that despair will not get the last word”—and then challenged the room: “Great words. Now what will we do with them?” The answer, by night’s end, felt clearer: keep meeting, keep learning, keep acting, together.

## What's next

Organizers announced continued campus dialogues, a December recognition for the FIU cohort, and open invitations to community events designed to move conversation into fellowship and service. They also laid markers for collaborative scholarship: faculty–student teams will propose studies on digital outrage and interfaith resilience; a shared repository of lesson plans and case studies will make the work portable for schools and congregations.

“Friction is real,” one professor concluded. “But friction also makes movement possible. Tonight we chose to move—toward each other, not away. That’s what hope looks like in a city like ours.”

In a polarized era, Miami offered a different headline: pluralism practiced. And if hope truly requires prayer, planning, and practice, South Florida’s students, scholars, and neighbors seem determined to keep doing all three—publicly, imperfectly, and together.