

American Muslim leader urges faithful to spread Islam's message

By Lisa Gardner
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — The chairman of a national Islamic watchdog group urged Muslims on Thursday not to separate or assimilate to American society, but instead to deliver Islam's message.

Omar M. Ahmad, chairman of the board of the Council on American-Islamic relations, spoke before a packed crowd at the Flamingo Palace banquet hall on Peralta Boulevard, urging Muslims not to shirk their duty of sharing the Islamic faith with those who are "on the wrong side."

Muslim institutions, schools and economic power should be strengthened in America, he said. Those who stay in America should be "open to society without melting (into it)," keeping mosques open so anyone can come and learn about Islam, he said.

"If you choose to live here (in America) . . . you have a responsibility to deliver the message of Islam," he said.

Islam isn't in America to be

equal to any other faith, but to become dominant, he said. The Koran, the Muslim book of scripture, should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the only accepted religion on Earth, he said.

Ahmad was one of three who spoke as part of an Islamic Study School session entitled, "How Should We As Muslims Live in America?" Also speaking were Sidi Hatem Bazian, the director of Al-Qalam, an Islamic institute affiliated with the University of California, Berkeley, and Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, director of the Zaytuna Institute, which is affiliated with the Islamic Studies School.

Ahmad spoke against people trying to impose values — such as environmentalism or vegetarianism — onto Islam, and only taking ideas from the faith that conform to personal opinions.

"One of the challenges is understanding the totality of Islam. Don't come up with an opinion and find out the things that support it in Islam," he said. "Everything we need to know is in the Koran. We don't

need to look somewhere else."

Recently, the Council on American-Islamic relations challenged running-shoe maker Nike when it printed the name of Allah in Arabic on a running shoe. Nike withdrew the shoes from stores, and agreed to build some basketball courts for the Muslim community, said Feraidoon Mojadidi, director of the Islamic Studies School.

There are about 150,000 Muslims in the Bay Area, Mojadidi said.

The Islamic Study School in Hayward is a non-profit, non-political school that has courses

on Islam.

Thursday's conference, dinner and Koran readings,

were organized by the school to help reconnect American Muslims with their heritage.