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Former Muslims Reach Out

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"First, I'm a Christian," she said. "Second, I'm a woman, and they know women don't talk like this."

Next week the service will be pushed back an hour, from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m., because Iran doesn't observe daylight saving time and church officials want to keep the broadcast there at the same time, 9 p.m.

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After the service, church pastors went into the studio for a half-hour call-in program. A woman calling from Tehran said she had just attended services at an Armenian Christian Church. She was not a believer, she said, but was edging in that direction.

"Can you pray for me?" she asked.

Kamil Navai responded: "I want you to pray with me and invite Jesus into your heart."

In April 2004, Robertson singled out the Iranian Christian Church on his "700 Club" television show as "America's Church of the Week."

"Isn't that marvelous to see what they're doing?" he asked on the show. "For taking the Gospel to Muslims around the world ... we salute you."

Some American Muslim leaders find the outreach misguided. Shakeel Syed, executive director of the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California, said, "Do they have a right to do this? Absolutely. Why would they do this? Because they haven't learned the faith of Islam in the proper context. If they had, they wouldn't have looked to another faith to find peace."

Many members of the Sunnyvale congregation are Persian Shiites who left Iran after the Islamic revolution and became alienated from Islam after the Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power.

Ora Neinavay, who came to the United States from Iran in 1977 at age 18, said her spiritual transformation began when she started questioning the role of women in Islam.

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"In the Koran, if a woman does not obey her husband, he has a right to beat her and keep her prisoner in a bedroom," she said. "So I began to hate God. I thought there must not even be a God."

Neinavay now produces and writes programming for "Mohabat TV."

"My calling is evangelizing," she said. "God wants me to do this."

Moborez said his religious conversion came after the Taliban killed his parents and brothers.

At first, he said, he went in a different direction, joining a radical Islamic group that stoned people and cut off their hands for offenses such as adultery or theft.

Then, three years ago, having moved to Greece to be near relatives in Europe, he crossed paths with Helping Hands, a Christian missionary group. They gave him a New Testament, which was the beginning of his conversion to Christianity.

He recalled how, after his conversion became known, an outraged Muslim man ambushed him in Athens, unsheathing a knife and slitting his stomach. Moborez lifted his shirt to show the large scar.

Later, "the man who stabbed me came up to me in tears kissing my hand and saying, 'Please forgive me,'" he said.

Moborez says he did forgive. Now he intends to share that tale when he appears on "Mohabat TV."

Times staff writers Sahagun and Streitfeld reported from Sunnyvale. Niknejad, a special correspondent, reported from Los Angeles.

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