

FOUNDATIONS

When US immigration laws were liberalized in 1965, Muslims from the Arab world and South Asia came to Detroit in large numbers, prompting local Muslims to reinterpret their beliefs and practices. After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, his son, Warith Deen Muhammad, brought the Nation of Islam into doctrinal alignment with the Sunni mainstream. This move allowed for closer relations among Detroit's Muslim communities, but separation along ethnic, racial, and sectarian lines is still pronounced in area mosques. Today, the largest Muslim populations in Detroit are Arab, South Asian, African American, European, and African. Although each of these groups has its own mosques and prayer spaces, ethnically "mixed" congregations are a growing trend in Detroit, pan-Muslim organizations are gaining influence, and calls for Muslim unity are made urgently and often.

Muslims in Detroit are heirs to some of the earliest, most innovative attempts to make Islam part of American society. They are keenly aware of their connections to Muslims in other American cities, in immigrant homelands, and in other parts of the world. They are also aware that, as Muslims, they share vital traditions and beliefs. The foundations of Islam in Detroit, beneath and beyond its local histories, are those revealed by the Prophet Muhammad, who said:

Islam means that you testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and you establish prayer, pay zakat (tithes), observe the fast of Ramadan, and perform the pilgrimage (to Mecca) if you are solvent enough to bear the expense of the journey.

Faith means that you affirm your belief in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and you affirm your belief in the Divine Decree about good and evil.

Sincerity means that you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don't see Him, He, verily, sees you.



Imam Mohamad Chirri (1913-1994), founder of the Islamic Center (photo by Atef Alsayed).



The Islamic Center, established in 1963, Detroit.



Founding board members of the Islamic Center.



The Islamic Center's new facility, to open in April 2005, Dearborn



The Albanian Islamic Center, established in 1963, Harper Woods



Imam Vehbi Ismail, first imam of the Albanian mosque. Now in his 80s, Imam Ismail remains active in the daily life of the mosque.

