

Conference Report: National Shura and In-service Training for Chaplains and Imams and Other Service Providers to the Muslim Community

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On March 25, 2017, the 7th Annual National Shura & In-Service Training for Chaplains, Imams & Other Service Providers to the Muslim Community was held at Yale University in New Haven, CT. Approximately seventy-five Imams, chaplains, community advocates and allies attended the conference, organized annually by the Association of Muslim Chaplains (AMC), Muslim Endorsement Council of Connecticut (MECC) and the Islamic Seminary Foundation (ISF). These organizations provide a platform for learning and dialogue to achieve the following goals: 1) to provide practical, interactive in-service training for Imams, Chaplains and other service providers to the Muslim community; 2) to get feedback from interested stakeholders regarding curriculum development for the effective education and training of Chaplains, Imams and other service providers to the Muslim community; 3) to convene the annual meeting of the AMC; 4) to convene the annual meeting and training for endorsees of the Muslim Endorsement Council of Connecticut; and 5) to provide informational updates on MECC and Muslim American Islamic seminary development.

This year's theme "Service to Humanity 2.0: Best Practices" featured a range of authors, academics, advocates, allies, chaplains and Imams, who gathered to share best practices, dialogue around current and emerging issues and trends in chaplaincy and the Muslim community, and provide feedback and shura on the continued development of the Islamic Seminary of America.

The day started with welcome remarks from representatives of the hosting organizations, President Imam Dr. Salahuddin Muhammad of AMC, board member Imam Kashif Abdul Karim of MECC, and Dr. James Jones, President of ISF, as well as remarks from Yale Divinity School Dean Nicholas Lewis, Connecticut State Senator Gary D. Winfield, Chaplain Sharon Kugler, Chief of Chaplains Heidi Kugler of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, Rev. Dr. Amy Greene of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, and Naeem Muhammad of Islamic Relief USA.

The day transitioned to parallel sessions with three tracks, each offering an author highlight, panels that explored the conference theme, and best practices in the field. The authors highlighted included Dr. Zainab Alwani and Dr. Ihsan Bagby¹. Imam Dr. Muhammad Hatim presented his paper "Caregiving to Muslims: A Guide for Chaplains, Counselors, Healthcare and Social Workers." Finally, Dr. Meraj Mohiuddin presented on his book, "Revelation: A Story of Muhammad (pbuh)."

The closing plenary session featured Dr. Rami Nashashibi of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) and Dr. James Jones as the keynote speakers. Dr. Jones's address, titled "Black Lives Matter Because All Lives Matter," touched on the legacy of racism in America and the current Black Lives Matter movement. The essential point he made is that many people who criticize the Black Lives Matter movement do not understand the history of Black Americans and that there was a time in our nation's history when Black lives really did not matter. In closing, Dr. Jones offered the proposition of a new movement: Be Like Muhammad (BLM). This would include building shurah-based multi-cultural, gender-inclusive communities and organizations; leading toward the good to

¹ Dr. Alwani's and Dr. Bagby's papers are published in this issue.

regain the moral high ground; become civically engaged, and make social justice and human services as core values of our communal practice of Islam. Dr. Nashashibi expanded on this topic, relating the history of Islam in America and ended with a call to action: Hijra to the Hood. He called upon Muslims to reprioritize our devotion, attention and investment in inner-city neighborhoods across America. This is critical not just because so much of the history of Islam in America is rooted in many of these communities but it calls to the spirit and transformative power of Islam. As Dr. Nashashibi stated, Muslim youth in particular are in desperate need of that powerful, enduring, and transformative spirit of Islam. The engagement of this spirit is best exemplified through living examples of what Islam looks like on the ground. The Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), which organizes around issues such as criminal justice, housing, immigration reform and healthy food access, is one such example of Muslims working together to manifest that transformative spirit of Islam.