

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is a non-profit, grassroots organization dedicated to presenting an Islamic perspective on issues of importance to the American public. In offering that perspective, CAIR seeks to empower the Muslim community in America through political and social activism.

CAIR's mission is carried out through:

- Media Relations
- Conferences and Seminars
- Publications
- Anti-Defamation Work
- Action Alerts
- Lobbying
- Training

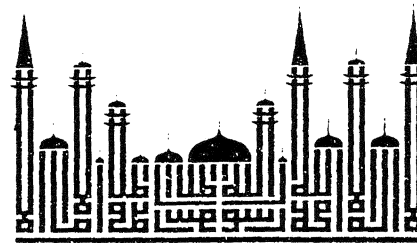
For more information, call CAIR's Washington, D.C. office at (202) 638-6340, or fax (202) 638-6412.

For more information about the Muslim community in your area, contact:

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In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Welcome to Our Mosque



published by

CAIR

Council on American-Islamic Relations
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We Appreciate Your Visit

What is a mosque?

A mosque is a place of worship used by Muslims. The English word "mosque" is derived from its Arabic equivalent, *masjid*, which means "place of prostration." It is in the mosque that Muslims perform their prayers, a part of which includes placing the forehead to the floor.

How is a mosque used?

Mosques play a vital role in the lives of Muslims in North America. The primary function of the mosque is to provide a place where Muslims may perform Islam's obligatory five daily prayer, as a congregation. A mosque also provides sufficient space in which to hold prayers on Fridays, the Muslim day of communal prayer, and on the two Muslim holidays, called *eids*, or festivals.

Is a mosque a holy place?

A mosque is a place that is specifically dedicated as a place of prayer. However, there is nothing sacred about the building or the place itself. There is no equivalent of an altar in a mosque.

A Muslim can pray on any clean surface. In the Muslim world, people often pray in public places.

How big are mosques?

In North America, mosques vary in size from tiny storefronts serving a handful of worshippers to large Islamic Centers that can accommodate thousands.

Do mosques accept visitors?

Mosques in North America welcome visitors and can arrange for tours of their facilities. It is always best to ask mosque administrators before arriving. They will want to make sure your visit is enjoyable.

What are the distinctive features of a mosque?

The *musalla*, or prayer hall, in each mosque is oriented in the direction of Mecca, toward which Muslims face during prayers. In North America, Muslim worshippers face northeast. The prayer halls are open and uncluttered to accommodate lines of worshippers who stand and bow in unison. There are no pews or chairs. Members of the congregation sit on the floor.

Because Muslim men and women form separate lines when they stand in prayer, some mosques will have a balcony reserved for the use of women. Other mosques will accommodate men and women in the same *musalla* or they may have two separate areas for men and women.

What else is in the prayer area?

All mosques have some sort of *mihrab*, or niche, that indicates which wall of the mosque faces Mecca. The *mihrab* is often decorated with Arabic calligraphy. Its curved shape helps reflect the voice of the *imam*, or prayer leader, back toward the congregation.

Many mosques also have a *minbar*, or pulpit, to the right of the *mihrab*. During the Friday prayer service, the *imam* delivers a sermon from the *minbar*.

What about the rest of the building?

Most mosques have a minaret, the large tower used to issue the call to prayer five times every day. In North America the minaret is largely decorative.

Facilities to perform *wudu*, or ablutions, can be found at all mosques. Muslims wash their hands, faces and feet before prayers as a way to purify and prepare themselves to stand in front of God. *Wudu* facilities range from wash basins to specially designed areas with built-in benches, floor drains and faucets.

Bookshelves are found in most mosques. They contain works of Islamic philosophy, theology and law, as well as collections of the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Copies of the *Qur'an* are always available to worshippers.

Calligraphy is used to decorate nearly every mosque. Arabic quotations from the *Qur'an* invite contemplation of the revealed Word of God. Other com-

mon features found in the mosque are clocks or schedules displaying the times of the five daily prayers and large rugs or carpets covering the *musalla* floor. Many American mosques also have administrative offices.

Is a mosque used exclusively for prayer?

Though its main function is as a place of prayer, the mosque plays a variety of roles, especially in North America. Many mosques are associated with Islamic schools and day care centers. Mosques also provide diverse services such as Sunday schools, Arabic classes, Qur'anic instruction, and youth groups.

Marriages and funerals, potluck dinners during the fasting month of *Ramadan*, and *eid* prayers and carnivals are all to be found in North American mosques. They are also sites for interfaith dialogues and community activism.

Many mosques serve as recreational centers for the Muslim community and may have gymnasiums, game rooms and weight equipment as well as a library and classrooms.

Do mosques have special rules?

Men and women should always dress conservatively when visiting a mosque, covering their arms and legs. Examples of inappropriate clothing would be shorts for men and short skirts for women.

Shoes are always left at the entrance to the prayer area so as not to soil the rugs or carpets. Shelves are usually provided to hold shoes. Women should cover their hair when visiting a mosque. Many mosques have scarves on hand for visitors to borrow, but it is better to bring a head covering in case none are available.

Visitors to mosques should behave as they would when visiting any religious institution, but should feel free to ask questions about the mosque, its architecture, furnishings and activities. Muslims are happy to answer questions about their religion.

Special thanks to *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* and Greg Noakes for permission to use the article, "Mosque a Vital Part of Islamic Life," in preparing this pamphlet.

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the female guests because they may not be sure where they "fit in." Have sisters assigned as hosts for the female guests. In the event of an *iftar* open house, make sure Muslims and non-Muslims are seated together for the meal.

Post helpful signs indicating the different entrances to the prayer hall clearly so as not to cause any confusion.

Most importantly, pray that the reaction of the guests will be one of understanding and that God may open their hearts through the endeavor.

Allahuma Amin!

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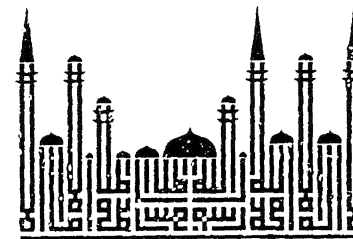
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In the Name of God, Most Gracious Most Merciful

Mosque Open House Project



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Islam in America

Muslims have much to offer America. The richness and variety of the American Muslim community have great potential to "promote what is good and forbid what is evil" in this society. To accomplish this goal, Muslims must carry out their obligation to accurately represent Islam in this country. One of the best ways to introduce Islam to local communities is by having an open house at your mosque or Islamic center.

Mosque Open House

A mosque open house is an effective way to open the channels of communication between the Muslim community and people of other faiths. The relationship that is established by the program is one of respect and understanding. This relationship will help (*inshallah*) to prevent stereotyping of Muslims and may even serve to keep hate crimes from occurring.

How to Set Up an Open House

✓ Prepare the members of the Muslim community by explaining the necessity of building a positive image of the mosque in the surrounding area. Plan an event that will present the best image of Islam and Muslims. The format of the open house is flexible. Selected community leaders can be invited or the entire community may be asked to visit. The open house might be held in the evening on a week day, on a weekend or during Ramadan. It is up to the local community to decide which approach is best.

✓ Invite community leaders to the mosque, making sure to include clergy, community activists and local government officials. Remember

to invite the chief of police, mayor and members of the city council. Send personal letters of invitation. The tone of the letter should be friendly and inviting. Follow up with phone calls. Letters are not enough.

✓ Publicize the event in the local newspapers through brief and well-written press releases and advertisements. Call CAIR if you need help with news release format. Free advertising is available through newspaper religion page calendars and radio/TV public service announcements. Also take advantage of church newsletters and bulletin boards.

✓ Inform your guests of the etiquette of the mosque before they arrive. Most people do not wish to be disrespectful so prevent potential misunderstandings by informing visitors of the rules to observe when in the mosque. This will make them feel at ease and will save them, and you, from embarrassment. Explain to them that the mode of dress for the event should be conservative and relatively austere. Make clean and neatly folded scarves available for the female guests. Explain the essentials of prayer to the guests and stress the solemnity of the occasion. Inform the guests that one must be a Muslim in order to pray like a Muslim in the mosque. Explain the separation of men and women in the mosque by stressing that the separation does not imply inequality. These simple explanations will have a great effect on the guests because they indicate that the Muslim community is well organized and wants to make them feel comfortable.

✓ Clean up the mosque. The first impres-

sion that is made is the one that will last. Walls, floors, carpets, and especially bathrooms must be spotless. Everyone can join a "mosque clean-up day" to get the building and grounds into shape. Cleanliness is an Islamic virtue.

✓ Set up a reception area where guests can be received and be served refreshments. Refreshments should not be served in the event of a Ramadan mosque open house, but should be replaced with the *iftar* meal. Have greeters at the door to receive the guests and to hand out the "Welcome" pamphlets. The reception area should be where the etiquette of the mosque is explained. There should be a place where *hijab* is not required so the female guests will have a chance to put on their scarves. Invite the guests to the prayer and encourage them to attend to help dispel any stereotypes they may have.

✓ Literature that is made available to the guests should be carefully selected to represent Islam. Avoid excessively political literature, stressing what lies at the heart of Islam: Peace and the relationship between God and man. Do not push materials on people but make sure to have a table of free literature.

✓ Assign appropriate greeters and hosts, choosing people who have an outgoing personality and know how to interact with people of other faiths. Greeters would escort guests to the hosts who will show them the mosque and stay with them to explain what they see. Do not leave guests alone to wander about the facility. Make sure all the guests are warmly received and given name tags. Special attention should be given to