

As Salaam Alaikum and peace be with you,

I hope this find all of you in the best of health and faith.

My name is Hassan Selim and I serve as the Imam to one of America oldest and most established Muslim communities, the community that built the Mother Mosque of America in 1934.

I am originally from Egypt where I was born, raised, and where I studied. I studied at Al Azhar, in fact with some of your honorable committee. Dr. Ali Gomaa, Dr. Usama Al Azhary, and had the honor of studying with Dr. Al Tayyib, the grand shaikh of Al Azhar. The story is very short. I hope you will give me a chance to tell it to you.

I grew up in Egypt in times of unrest and many changes. The attraction of a Jihadist Islam was very strong. My parents were wise, they enrolled us in Al Azhar as a protection for us against this radicalization movement that was taking place in the country late 80s and early 90s. I was lucky enough to grow up listening to Dr. Ali Gomaa Friday khutbahs in Sultan Hassan Mosque and after him Dr.Usama. Allah bestowed his favor upon me when I was also chosen with a group of the students of Al Azhar to study at AL AZHAR ENGLISH TRAINING CENTER. As a result, I was able to study English in the UK for few months where I stayed with a Jewish host family, and when I came back I met my wife, a convert Muslim from America who also studied Islam in the West.

We moved to America after the 2011 uprisings in Egypt. Since there, I have been serving as the Imam to the Islamic Center of Cedar Rapids, and ever since, I have been committed to interfaith and inter-religious dialogue. I was alhamdulillah able to arrange for many opportunities to bring the local communities of faith together. My report is about an interfaith Thanksgiving service, which may not seem as part of the interfaith harmony week, however, it was a historical event. Why? Because it was the first time this mosque hosts this event in over thirty years! Almost all churches, synonyms, temples, and places of worship in town has hosted an interfaith Thanksgiving service, but not the Islamic Center.

As a Muslim, learned at al Azhar, holding the ideas of great scholars and thinkers such as Dr. Gomaa and Dr. Al Tayyib, I was shocked. Our prophet, SWA, allowed a Christian delegation to pray in his mosque and his rawda, and yet we haven't hosted an inter-faith Thanksgiving service since the establishment of the Inter religious Council here in town! This to me was bad news. Alahmdulillah, I was able to convince the board of directors of our mosque to host the event, and as a vice-president of the Council, I was able to convince the board of directors of the council that we can host the event at the mosque.

The night of the event, people left with comments such as " This year is very special", and " the spirit of this event is different than all the previous year", and " there was a lot of good energy in the place tonight", and so on. It was not planned this way, but unfortunately the Sad Paris and Lebanon attacks happened just a week or so before the event, and this helped people heal from them fast, at least locally. Not only was this a historical event, but it was a much needed one at this time.

I hope that you will kindly consider the event for an award. If, inshallah, we do win, the money will be used to create and generate more interfaith work and events for the future. I hope that we can create

an interfaith council for the young people in town, and this money will help us kick start the project. To ensure that interfaith is something that will happen in the future too, not just now.

Thank you for your time,

Hassan Selim