

Islamic Society Of Greater Oklahoma City 10/16/20

NORMAN, OK - When I dialed the number for the Islamic Society Of Greater Oklahoma City (ISGOC), I did not expect to get an answer on the second ring. Ten seconds into the call, I realized that I hadn't talked to this nice of a receptionist in some time. I was given numerous times when I could set up a zoom call with Dr. Imam Imad Enchassi, the senior Imam, at the IGOC.

The day before I virtually attended a service at the IGOC, I jumped on a zoom call with Dr. Imam Imad Enchassi. As soon I started my interview with Imam Enchassi, I could tell he was well-prepared and excited to get started.

"My role is to lead the congregation, not only in prayers and spirituality but also to lead the community in advocating justice," Enchassi said.

Both of Enchassi's parents were Muslim, but not necessarily practicing Muslims, he told me. Emcassi went on to explain how practicing on his own as early as 14 or 15 years old.

"I started learning about the faith on my own from local preachers in Lebanon until, you know, I made a run into the borders of the United States of America," he said. "So, I've been a Muslim, basically all my life as an Imam since 2004."

I asked Enchassi what a newcomer should expect when attending a Friday prayer service.

"The first thing that will shock you is there's absolutely no pews inside of mosques, because we sit on the floor. We feel the connection to earth, and we feel it's a humbling experience." Enchassi said.

Enchassi told me that prayer would start at noon on Friday and that the sermon would be 90% English and 10% Arabic.

Enchassi used to make sure everyone was shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot, but now everyone has to stand six feet apart due to COVID-19.

"You know my building will take about 1200 people, but they are shoulder to shoulder foot to foot, and kneeling and prostrating so there's about four feet in between the rooms. And now my building would take 250 people, max." Enchassi said.

Enchassi has shifted from the usual 30 minutes service with 1000 people to 3 services that are 15 minutes each. He also allows time to sanitize between the services.

I attend Friday's Jummah Khutbah held by Enchassi the next day. I opened a video titled "Born with Heaven's Key," and watched as Enchassi sang as he mic-ed himself in front of a gold picture frame and a hanging chandelier. Due to camera placement, I could not see the rest of the congregation during the service, but regardless, I kept an open mind and observed what I could.

The services opened with Enchassi speaking a language I believed was Arabic, but after two minutes, he shifted to English and then greeted everyone in attendance.

Throughout the roughly 19-minute service, Enchassi was direct as he preached, almost as if he was intentionally directing his sermon to each of his parishioners. He went on to tell stories of regular people overcoming fear, arrogance and struggle by believing in Allah.

The rest of the service continued with Enchassi's sermon until he closed in prayer in the language it had begun.

A few days later, I realized this had been my first experience outside Christianity. I think that I hadn't learned this fact because I had drawn so many connections to my own faith and didn't experience anything that seemed out of the ordinary.

"Some of the misconception (might be that) a Muslims worships a different God, no no we don't worship God, because, you know, just because we call him Allah, doesn't mean it's a

different God. It is the same religion, with one of the Abrahamic religions,” Enchassi said when asked about the common misconceptions of his faith.

If you attend St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in the late 2000s, you would be all too familiar with the overplayed hymnal, "They will know we are Christians." Over the years, the song lyrics are still memorable and catchy.

"We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord.

And we pray that our unity will one day be restored.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.

Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love."

After reflecting on the Friday prayer service and this Catholic hymnal, I continue to think of the common ground Enchassi's faith has with my own.

"There's no Christian air or Muslim water,” Enchassi said. "We all live in Oklahoma and as a pluralistic society we look forward to building bridges with other people."