

Hammad 1 9:32

Interviewer: 0:03

And what churches or other other religious organization have you participated in?

Hammad:

So I moved here in 2000. And in South Overland Park. So... I was very close in development, in the development of Islamic Center of Johnson County down in South Overland Park. I have watched other mosques grow up themselves, throughout my life. That include the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City Missouri, and also the Islamic Center of Kansas.

Interviewer:

Can you tell us anything about the funding and early days of the organization, the founding?

Hammad:

So when I first arrived in the US, I was basically a baby. At that time, the only mosque around was the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City. So we would drive, my family would drive there about every day, to pray at least once. And it was about a 20 minute drive at the time. So we would go from South Overland Park by the spring campus. And we would go 4:30-5:00 pray until around 2002 or 2003 where the Tomahawk Community Center in Overland Park, in which we rented out a whole room.. area space, in which we made a prayer gathering happen. So there is about three rooms one for men's, another room that can have the divider open for women. And then third one for a classroom. And it would be a whole section in Tomahawk, where we would just go. You would enter through one door, which would lead to a whole, like a lobby area that connected to the three rooms. So that was the setup of the Tomahawk for a couple years until The Islamic Center of Johnson County, the was bought out.

It became an organization in March of 2000. And it wasn't officially open until 2003 or 2004, I believe, so... All these dates can be, they are not exact. So there are variants. So if you have questions about more specific dates, you can contact me. But yeah, so the Islamic Center of Johnson County was bought out around 2003, 2004. They used to be actually a house. So right off the bat, we had to make some constructional improvements to the house to accommodate worshippers. So, right off the bat, we see that the garage of the house was transformed into an ablution area where people can go and make wudu.¹ Then we can see that the front entrance would lead us to the top level, and the back entrance would be lead us to the bottom level. Then there was a side entrance that would only...was basically in the middle, but was connected to the top level. So what improvements right off the bat, the mosque were decided to make was

¹ Wudu is the [Islamic](#) procedure for wiping parts of the body, a type of [ritual purification](#), or ablution. *Wudu* involves washing the hands, mouth, nostrils, arms, head and feet with water and is an important part of [ritual purity in Islam](#).

the middle entrance, they also made a new staircase that would also lead to the bottom floor, to accommodate for the men. So the men would take up all of the bottom floor. And then the top floor, a section of it was for ladies. And there are smaller rooms like the master bedrooms, and in the personal bedroom, which were transformed into classrooms. And those would serve as your housing for Sunday school kids. And then more of your activities from day to day. And also the men's area downstairs with us for Sunday school. So and that had been the Islamic Center of Johnson County's platform for about I'd say, 10 to 13 years, until they started to look to expand.

One big principle that came out was they did not want to take out a loan. So the recruitment of money with an abstract project was probably the hardest thing they had to do. Because they... It was just an idea. And I remember people there, there are people like "hey, this might never get done." And "why should we be investing in something that's not concrete or something that you can present to us?" Again, that comes from the principle of, "Hey, we didn't want to take out a loan," which if we got a loan, there might be interest and interest is not something that Muslim should... are recommend not to engage with.

So we gradually got the funds. So they began, they began to do construction, and with it certain amount of money they already collected, hoping that they would get the rest by the end of the project. And this land was already bought by the time, like they had slowly been buying the land on the plots of land around the mosque for about 10 years. So they already had the land beforehand, before starting construction. And when construction started, you can see that there are a lot of demands "Hey, should we get a dome? Should we be working on... how do we how do people enter? How do you interact with what's going on inside the mosque? That be is there a Quran memorization program going on? Can we do weddings in the mosque." So the bottom floor was turned actually into a multipurpose hall which has been used for weddings since the new opening up in the mosque.

Interviewer:

The, which part?

Hammad:

The bottom floor. So that's the basement. So how the new mosque was set up was the basement would be served as multipurpose Hall. The second... basic... so basement was the ground, ground floor, then you have the first floor, which was all men again. And the second floor, which is considered as also a men's mezzanine because it overlooks the men's floor, with one side of the windows is for the women. So total capacity if we were all to stand side by side, and all floors are basically full, could be more than 3,000 people easily. But obviously fire marshal would not allow that. So it just depends on how much parking spots we have. And I don't know that number right now.

So it's way less, according to the fire Marshall. But yeah, this new building was a bigger development, big development for the community. But what interesting things came out of the

development of this new building was that, we were already at max capacity, with a small building. And once we got this new building and during that construct, time of construction, I would say we had an influx of people move towards the mosque. So we are still at a max capacity in, speaking in terms of brief comments that, "hey, we are this little mosque filled up." And in the morning, we would have 20 to 30 people show up for the morning prayer. We have about five prayers every day. But now in the morning prayers, we have about 100 men show up every single day.

Interviewer:
Nice

Hammad:
So it's, and this only happened because the amount of resources the mosque is providing just increased during that time of construction, there were more activities going on. And the magnet of people wanting to raise their children near a location where there's religion being practiced and or religion, like principles are being taught, was very significant. Now you can see that also in the time that Islamic Center of Johnson County expanded, Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City, Missouri was also expanding.

We can see that they, in the 15 year span this, I have... 15-20 year span I've been here, they had, there was already a grave site they own and they had been using that as the only Muslim grave site in the state of Kansas, and Missouri probably. In like a 100 mile radius I would say, very easily. So there are Muslims coming from all over to be buried here. Second thing is

Interviewer:
Is it still there?

Hammad:
Yes, so the grave site still there and it's being used actively today. Second thing the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City did was make a school school, an Islamic school. So at first one, it was only K through sixth grade. But more recently in the past decade they've opened up a high school, which includes a gym and then classrooms surrounding the gym. And the school has been very successful in the fact that the curriculum that they teach and incorporating Islam and more recently they expanded their own mosque itself.

So this is more like....

Continues in Hammad Part 2

Hammad 2 10:01

Hammad: 0:00

addition to the high school being built, and the classroom surrounding the gym gym, that again helped develop more resources for youth to be able to have a location to play in, learn in, and do activities in. And then now they have recently expanded their mosque building of their campus itself, and that has expanded, basically doubled to tripled their numbers of capacity, and also added more space, indoor space, to provide, provide funeral prayers. Because beforehand, for the past decades that they've been doing funerals, it was always outside. So if you had a rainy day, looks like it's a rainy day, and you're doing a funeral prayer outside on a rainy day. And I can say that I have been to a couple of those.

Interviewer:

A rainy day funeral?

Hammad:

Yeah. And then the prayer of the funeral was outside too. So like that's what I was saying. But yeah, so you can see the development of mosques plays a big role into where Muslims settle. And in general, usually, you see that people move for economic reasons. But this is one of those things, religion is starting to become a bigger reason for why people move to near mosques to... what's your next question?

Interviewer:

I was gonna ask you about, why were people attracted to this religious body? I know, you mentioned a little bit about like, yeah.

Hammad:

So the reason why people are attracted to a religious body is.. First, I would say the biggest reason is kids, you want to be helping cultivate a culture that provides your kids a place to learn, and learn some principles that you might not learn in school, that behavioral, and America it's a very atheistic government, and the fact that there is no religion attached to the government constitution. Well, technically there is, but it's not pretty directly quoting a religion, compared to other countries around the world, which is totally fine. It's not bad at all. But what what's happening is that more people are losing faith and hope. And what's happening, what in turn happens is people are looking for that faith, and a location where they can go to, to help their kids, their next generation, keep that culture intact. So you can see America is like a place where people of different cultures come to, but then they have to work themselves to maintain it. It's not self provided by the government compared to like a Middle Eastern country or another Muslim country or any Christian country country too. Because you can see that the government's over there are providing these resources. And when people go inside a mosque, it's... the mosque is only you go to pray for not to provide youth activities or something like that. They just go, do their prayer and leave. Compared to what's going on in the US right now, with Muslim institutions, and prayer spaces. They're not only being used as prayer spaces, they're also being used as youth event locations, funeral prayer location. You're also seeing a lot more

interactive activities happening.

Hammad 3:45

So the role of mosques in America is a lot more, I would say weight bearing. And the responsibilities of a mosque in America, has a lot more responsibilities than what you would find in other countries.

Interviewer:

How did your membership and participation affect your own private life outside the religious group?

Hammad

Umm which one was that? (Shows interview question)

Interviewer:

Like was your behavior affected by the group's ideas?

(Long Pause)

Hammad: 4:27

So to answer this question, you have to know that, I... So once the Islamic Center of Johnson County was first instituted, my house was probably one of the closest houses right off the back. It was still a little bit farmland. And since the past 20 years, I would say, there's been more development happening and more houses being built around the mosque.

Hammad: 4:55

But right off the bat, when the mosque was built my house, and my family was the closest thing to it. Meaning, we were attached to this building through another way, and then just spiritually. It was like more of a "hey, this is going to be our home too." But it ended up being our home, one and our own house being home two. So we would spend a ton of time at the mosque, and maintaining the mosque, and doing general management for the mosque. Even though I wasn't on the board. My dad was on the board at one point. But then he also left. But to, to... till today we have been basically the caretakers you can say of the mosque. And if there's any questions or any problems, any... thing that needs to be done, my family has been one of those families that have been to, like go to, like, even sometimes the board of the mosque itself has to come to us to answer, to have some questions answered. So based off of that, yes, my life has been affected by the group's ideas. And being a member, I would say has developed me. And that's how I understand the mosque to be. Like some place where I was grown, that I'm a product of the mosque. Now, I wouldn't say that I am a representative of the mosque. I'm a product of what, has the mosque been through. So as far as representing the mosque, I would say that's a lot harder to answer, considering I've never had like an official position that they can say like, if there's anything that needs to be done. I know how to do it at the mosque.

Interviewer:

Yeah. But you were never like a board member? Or...?

Hammad:

Yep, I was never a board member. I was a youth board member and president, but at the same time, I take that with a little grain of salt, because again, I was part of the mosque at some point.

Interviewer:

What kinds of kinds of practices were involved in the group? Was there like rituals and ceremonies you want to talk about?

Hammad:

So, yes, there are a lot of... so rituals, I wouldn't say rituals, we'd say prayer space, is the biggest one, because we pray five times a day. And it would happen five times a day. That being in the small mosque during the two feet of snow, my family, my dad, and I would go and pray by ourselves. Or that'd be today where we see about 100 people for every prayer. It's crazy to believe that, how much development that we've had.

Hammad: 7:59

So now ceremonies. Yes we do weddings. And we've always done like, wedding certificate signing since the beginning. But more of ceremonies, like big gatherings, like 300 people gatherings have been become a more regular thing recently, just because of the amount of space we have now. So we got weddings, we got like birth of kid, first birthdays, we got a lot going on. So like youth activities, that's more of like a weekly thing. And now more recently, in the past two years, we've been we've been doing blood drives. We've been doing interfaith events with other people of faith for the past couple of years. And non religious activities, I would say like tours of the mosque. Which is more interesting, because there's one side where people are usually emailing us, "hey, can we schedule a date to come," and we let them come anytime and have someone there to help them out. But then we also have people that just show up during Friday prayers and say, "hey, I want to watch a Friday prayer." And those are the most fun ones because in high school, I would show up to Friday prayers, and then my dad would be standing outside the mosque because he would sell... He'd be doing a bake sale. My dad would say "hey, there's a new person here. Can you sit down with them?" And it became like a thing of mine, especially after Trump got elected where we are seeing more non Muslims show up to Friday prayers unannounced. So I, it became like one of my job's, unofficially, to help sit with them. answer any questions they had after their sermon, because you can't talk during the sermon on Friday. And Friday prayers are basically your, basically Sunday church prayers. So for us there on Fridays at noonish.

Hammad 3 18:50

Hammad 0:01

Yeah. Okay, so back to, um, let's see. So we just covered rituals and ceremonies. What's your next question?

Interviewer:

How did the people relate to each other?

Hammad: 0:13

That's a good question. So since, so I'm going to talk about Islamic Center of Johnson County only right now, because depending on the mosque in America, there's actually different relationships that you can find within each mosque. So Islamic Center of Johnson County was created, I would say, by a couple people that were already settled in Kansas. So it's more of a resource for them, and to engage people that may not have a place to go to, to pray.

Hammad: 0:45

And so the mosque was built for the reason to provide resources to the people in Overland Park, Olathe and Lee Summit. So that's the short answer, where we can see more people then, using the, using the, those resources, and there's no relationship to each other. That is the big thing here. This mosque, I wouldn't say there's any relationship of these people except for the fact that there may be first, second, or third generation Muslims, because they're all new. This is a new developing area. And they're coming here for mostly economic reasons. But then when they see, hey, there's a mosque right there, they're going to move closer to it. So they're coming to Overland Park, Olathe, Lee Summit, for economic reasons, to find a new life. Because it is a developing region, and then moving closer to the mosque within that vicinity.

Hammad: 1:43

Next location I would talk about, as far as how do people relate to each other would be the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City. I would say that, well, I can't talk too, about them much. Because I'm not, I would say I don't have credentials to. But there's a lot of mosques in downtown, that people are related to each other, if you look at their ancestry, just because they might be refugees. So refugees built mosques. Then also, people that migrated here at a certain time of history where maybe persecution was a lot bigger in those countries. So you see a lot of those mosques pop up. And they're providing the same resources, that all inclusive to everybody. But you would see that there are people settled in a certain area already. And then the mosque is built around them. What's your next question?

Interviewer: 2:44

How did members of the religious group interact with other members of the general public?

Hammad: 2:53

So I would say, before the time of internet and social media, there wasn't as much interaction. But there was interaction to a certain degree, because we can see that... we had people from

our mosques, connecting with local government, participating in events, being active within the local community, because again, we're going to live here for decades from now. So we want to build roots here. And we don't want to have a problem with those around us. So I would say that early on, we can see that there is a lot of communication with local government, talking with them. And just in general, letting them know that this is a safe place. And now more recently, we can say after, I would say, Trump got elected, the outreach, and the amount of people just showing up to the mosque increased tremendously, of non Muslim groups, just to learn about Islam. we're not trying to convert them. They're just interested in hearing about what Islam is, because it's not something that you can learn in one day. And I can say for sure that I haven't learned Islam to its fullest extent, like not even a percent of it.

Hammad: 4:37

And we can see that the group members in the Muslim community are reaching out to other groups too. So it's not like it's only people coming to us, we are also going to them. And creating environments of, Hey, we are people of faith, and we should encourage faith in general. What your next question?

Interviewer: 5:02

Before we move on to the next question, I was going to ask you... there is a church next to the Johnson County mosque. Do they like interact at all?

Hammad:

So the, when the mosque was first made into a... first when the house was made into a mosque, the church was always there. And the relationship has been very interesting, because when it came to, like the boards of both the church and mosques, there, they were perfectly fluent. Everybody knew what was going on. They, they're like friends, best friends. But the interesting part came when the construction was happening at the mosque, members of the church, it was interesting, because they started to worry and stuff a little bit. At that point, church leaders invited us to come talk to them. And we had board members go over there and let them know, "Hey, this is, we're not like a threat or anything like that."

Hammad: 6:08

And it didn't hinder, like our relationship with the boards. And between the boards, it would just be like more of figuring out a middle spot of "Hey, what exactly is going on with neighbors?" So I would say that's one thing that the Islamic Center of Johnson County a little bit lacked on. But I think we're at a point where outreach in the community is very fluent. And we're very open to bringing people in from other faiths, and going out and talking about our own faith. More recently, we had the vigil for New Zealand. And it was more of like a 12 hour event preparation, because about five, seven, five-seven hours before the event was scheduled to happen, I got a message to actually advertise it. Which was interesting, because we had representative Sharif Davis showing up. We had leadership, other people, groups of faith also showing up and basically condemning the violence and condemning what had happened. And this was all happening at the mosque. And it was a very fast turning point I would say.

Interviewer: 7:29

Did food figure into your religious life?

Hammad: 7:33

I mean, food plays a big role more during the month of fasting, Ramadan. But in general, it's from day to day, food hasn't actually been a significant part of religious life. And I can say that other mosques have had potlucks, they do potlucks, about once a month and comes to them, like, members come together and have a meal, have a lecture, enjoy a time of communication. And I feel like that's becoming more of a thing now. And current day, Muslim communities where we can see that the Pakistani group of people are having a potluck, and then having their discussions. The Indian group is having their potluck and having their discussion, So like, it's more of creating that culture within the community that is very diverse. And yeah.

Interviewer 8:38

Was volunteer labor used in any part, of the life?

Hammad: 8:44

Yes, everything has been volunteer based, with the exception of hiring the Imams, also. They are, they teach students, the Quran.

Interviewer: 8:57

So that wasn't volunteer? That's a paid position

Hammad:

Yeah, that's a paid position as through donations to the mosque.

Interviewer 9:02

What about the building of the new mosque?

Hammad: 9:05

I mean, obviously, that came through donations. And maintenance of the building, of the new building is paid through a private contractor where they come in every day or so to clean the mosque up. But when it was the small building, there was no, no payment for maintenance. Unless it's like a toilet fix or something like that. Yeah.

Interviewer: 9:27

What were the economic arrangement of the group? How was money raised? Who made the spending decisions?

Hammad:

So economic arrangements. Donations. We would have our once a year, yearly donation...like fundraiser night I would say, happen during Ramadan. But yeah,

Interviewer:

How was decisions for spending made?

Hammad:

We have a treasurer. And I would say like, he probably has like, a way to make decisions. And then everything is like... You could say that, every year, there's a release of financial statements, during the year, where they have a meeting and ask the community come, and they talk about their finances. Especially since the new building has been built, we have.... But yeah

Interviewer:

who owned the group property?

Hammad:

So it's considered an LLC loan. I don't know what LLC means, but that's how it is, a loan. So it was bought out by one person and then donated as a property to make an LLC. And the board owns, basically the building as a business.

Interviewer: 10:50

What kinds of issues involving personal interactions were present?

(Long pause.)

Hammad:

I wouldn't say there was, is significant personal interactions. Considering there's not much, I would say. There's not much discussion happening, more than, it's just a religious practices happening at the mosque, and q&a.

Interviewer: 11:25

Ok. How was the group governed?

Hammad: 11:28

Through a board

Interviewer: 11:29

Ok. Described the leadership.

Hammad: 11:32

One Secretary, one treasurer, one chair. And then there's board members.

Interviewer: 11:43

Did the group own any vehicle, such as school bus or van?

Hammad: 11:51

The mosque does not actually own a school bus or van. But there are, there's other mosques that I know that own buses.

Interviewer:

Were there rules or agreements regarding dress or other matters of style? Was there like any rules for how to dress up...?

Hammad: 12:13

So regarding dress and matters of style, it is addressed in the religion, but the building, mosques, Islamic Center of Johnson County, I can say for sure, like, doesn't explicitly come out and say what those are. So the mosques just says, "Hey, we practice the principles set in the Quran, and Hadith", basic teachings of the Prophet. But there's no actual like, policing of rules. So if someone didn't want to wear a scarf, there wouldn't be a board member coming up to them, and telling them, "hey, you're not wearing a scarf." You might have someone else that's just attending the mosque, letting, come up to you and acknowledge, "hey, this is the practice of Islam. And it's recommended to do that." But there's no official person, or dress code within this business model. Because we have people show up, that are non Muslim, and we give them tours and stuff. And we always recommend people to be...be considerate of other Muslims, and it's a good time for, I guess, visitors to feel how it is to be wearing a hijab. So not required.

Interviewer: 13:46

Not required. Alright. What kinds of relationship did the group have with others? I asked you this question already. Like I asked about the church.

Hammad: 13:53

Yes.

Interviewer:

And this is different.

Hammad:

So then read the rest of the question. It also talks about zoning, traffic, parking situation?

Interviewer: 14:00

the one out...Yeah,

Hammad:

Yeah, so....

Interviewer: 14:03

What were the relationship with the surrounding culture like? Were there conflicts, over zoning,

Hammad:
Then keep reading.

Interviewer:
traffic, parking situations, or other such things?

Hammad: 14:14

Yes. So we had a ton of traffic problems. Surprisingly, before the big mosque was built, Islamic Center of Johnson County and after the Islamic Center of Johnson County's new building was built. Since we were held, holding our big prayers there now, every year, our yearly large holiday prayer called Eid... We saw influx of people attending because beforehand, we would go to like the old part of the convention center or something like that to do our prayers, but it just happens that we had space to do our own prayers, which is a lot cheaper for us to do. So we would, we have on duty and off duty officers that are paid to come help us, during this time. And it is very helpful to have them there. Because basically, we're having, in one day, about 4000, 4000 people basically going through our doors, and having two or three sets of prayers, in about a four hour time span. So we would have one group come in, which was totally fine with parking, but getting that group out fast, so the next group can come in and park. So we'd use officers then. And then finally, if we had a third prayer, which I can see us having here in the near future, to accommodate the rest of the people. And we will be using the church parking lot too actually so this is where that connection between mosque and church that it's really right next to each other comes into play. Yeah. And we have a ton of volunteers on the ground and that day too wearing vests. And they have, happiness.

Interviewer: 16:14

Okay. What were the best and worst things you remember about your experience?

Hammad: 16:21

I would say the best experiences I had were....

Interviewer:
Eid prayers? Most other people said Eid prayers were the best experience.

Hammad:

I would say organizing big events. So that would be Eid parties, like we do Eid fairs. And what that means, basically after Eid, sometime in the weeks, or weekends after, we do a like a carnival. And organizing that is one of those highlight things that I like to do. And probably the number one thing I've organized so far at that mosque, would be like, planting trees, which was a \$14,000 project that I did. And it was done in like a three week span, actually. So all the fundraising and stuff like that.

Interviewer:
Yeah I remember that.

Hammad:

And then we had like over 100 people come in two separate days to help plant these trees that were like 200 pounds each.

Interviewer: 17:19

Yeah.

Hammad: 17:21

And that was more of like, my first big project, I would say, because all the pressure was put on me to do so. So like I had to figure out where to get the funds, and all the funds came from the community. We did like a online GoFundMe type thing, but it's a little bit cheaper platform. And it was all done so fast. And I was, it was all done by me too. So like that was my first, I'd say rising of leadership in a small amount of time.

Interviewer: 17:59

Okay. Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Hammad:

Nope

Interviewer: 18:06

Do you have any documents from your experience that you would like you would like to share? Like diaries or letters or news clippings?

Hammad: 18:16

I don't have anything on me, but I mean you guys can ask. And I can see what I can find.

Interviewer: 18:23

Alright. Do you know, other people we should interview?

Hammad:

I mean they don't live in... well, I would say. Are you just talking Olsen community? Dr. Khazali might be a good person. She probably knows this instructor already.

Interviewer: 18:45

Alright. Thank you so much for your time.

Hammad:

No Problem

