

August, 2019 | Islamic Center celebrates holy day, welcomes new imam (with video)

<https://www.toledoblade.com/news/religion/2019/08/11/islamic-center-celebrates-eid-al-adha-welcomes-new-imam-muslim-toledo-community/stories/20190811133>

Men, women, and children poured into the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo on Sunday, drawn by the melodic loudspeaker call of the takbir. They filled the prayer hall, then an overflow room, plus a social hall where more would convene after prayers for brunch and conversation.

President Nadia Ashraf-Moghal estimated a turnout of 2,500 for Eid al-Adha, the second of two holy days on the Islamic calendar. The postponement until next year of a unified service downtown accounted for some of the larger-than-usual crowd, she said. Imam Ahmad Deeb helped, too.

"They wanted to meet him, because they knew he was coming," she said. "I feel like the community is very excited to see this new breath of fresh air."

Imam Deeb arrived from overseas earlier this week as the mosque's new imam and religious director. Originally from Orlando, Fla., he most recently served as director of the Islamic Society of Akron and Kent. He takes over for Imam Talal Eid, whom the community sent off on a positive note earlier this summer so he could return to his family and Boston hometown.

Imam Deeb, 26, is the youngest and first U.S.-born imam to lead the Islamic Center. Ms. Ashraf-Moghal said the board sees this as an asset as it continues to look toward the future, including the role it plays in the lives of American Muslims in northwest Ohio.

"We really wanted to get a spiritual leader who talks to them in their language," she said.

Imam Deeb delivered the Eid Khutbah on Sunday. In his first opportunity to address his new community, he reflected on themes central to his vision and related them to the mass shootings that shook the United States just last weekend.

“Smile. Meet someone you don’t know,” Imam Deeb encouraged toward the end of his remarks. “And recognize that these are the cornerstones of community, and that community is the most important thing in a time like this.”

Eid al-Adha is the second of the two most holy days on Islam’s religious calendar. It follows Eid al-Fitr, which marks the culmination of the holy month of Ramadan and which this year fell in June. Eid al-Adha specifically recalls the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice even his own son in submission to God. It’s typical to donate meat to food pantries or through international aid organizations on Eid al-Adha, reflecting the sacrifice of a ram that ultimately took the son’s place in the Qur’an.

The date of Eid al-Adha aligns with the conclusion of the hajj, the pilgrimage that millions of adherents make each year as one of the five pillars of the faith.

For worshipers at the Islamic Center on Sunday, prayers led into a community celebration that spilled onto the mosque’s lawn. Families ate brunch while children waved balloon animals, watched magic tricks, and enjoyed entertainment provided by the Toledo Zoo, Imagination Station, and the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, among others.

Haitham Saleh, 6, and his sister Yasmine, 4, were so excited for Eid al-Adha that they went to bed early Saturday and woke up early Sunday, their parents, Nagy and Mirna Saleh, said after the prayers.

Esmat Safi and Entesar Alwazaify said over brunch that their children — Rashid, 6; Saeed, 3; and Shahrazad, 1 — were excited for the holiday, too.

Their family usually celebrates at the Unified Eid at the SeaGate Convention Centre, where a service typically brings together several area mosques for Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, Mr. Safi said. Organizers cited conflicts with the venue in postponing it until next year, instead encouraging the community to celebrate at any of the several mosques and community centers that held their own services. The Islamic Center typically holds its own prayers and celebration.

Mr. Safi said they didn’t mind the change in venue this year.

“This is a good place for us to be,” he said.

He said they thought the imam made a good impression in his first sermon, too.

“We like him so far,” Mr. Safi said. “I think he will have a good impact on the youth.”