

Br. Abed Hosien, veteran Secretary of MIA

Interviewed by: Ryan Ramchandar

Q: When did you come to Winnipeg?

A: I came to Winnipeg in 1958 to attend the University of Manitoba. That first winter we had 99 consecutive days of below freezing weather. It was a challenge but most of us persevered.

Q: What position(s) did you take in the MIA?

A: For many years I served as the General Secretary of the organization. This included the publishing of the MIA newsletter. It gave me great pleasure to work in this capacity. It exposed some of the fissures that existed and continued to exist and gave the Executive an opportunity to try and bridge the gaps and cement relationships to the best of our ability.

Q: What was the shape of the community when you first arrived?

A: During these early times the Muslim community comprised mainly of students attending post-secondary educational institutions, together with those Muslims who were gainfully employed in the city. We met in the apartment homes of our brothers and sisters to offer Salaat-ul-Zuhr on Sundays. These meetings strengthened the bonds between us, for we came from far and distant lands from around the globe.

Q: How was the MIA established?

A: To organize the Islamic Community was essential to our success and our well being. Having a spokesperson, the President, to speak on behalf of the Manitoba Muslims would give legitimacy to our needs as a growing community. This led to establishment of the Manitoba Islamic Association in 1969, and its role was to act in the best interests of the Muslim community by serving the religious, educational and social aspects of our group.

Q: When was the first mosque built and by whom?

A: The needs of our jamaat grew and this led to the purchase of a parcel of land in St. Vital and plans were drawn up for a masjid to provide a permanent home for the Manitoba Muslims. The Centre was built through contributions from the local members. Some financial assistance came from outside the community.

The construction of the first masjid posed its challenges and tested the commitment of those Muslims living in Winnipeg at the time. The Jamaat, in its determination to have the building ready for the end of Ramadan, took it upon themselves to pick up from where the contractors left us dangling. Through this blessed month, the Jamaat worked tirelessly completing electrical work, insulating walls and ceiling, erecting vapour barrier and drywall and finally painting the structure in order to have it available for Eid Salaat of that year.

There was no turning back. The Trustees, the Executive and the members at large were pleased with the input of everyone, and this added to our strength as the MIA. We made no distinction between one another regarding our Islamic background. Our goal was to eliminate differences and focus as believers who declare: “La ilaha illal laahu, Muhammadur Rasoolullah”.

Q: Was there tension between Muslims from different backgrounds?

A: In the formative years we lived and prayed in peace and harmony as one ummah. But as time rolled on, groups with similar traditions began to emerge and we were faced with cultural Islamization. Our leaders in general were strong, and they continued to stress on the Islam our Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas) taught and practiced. They sought the best alternatives in trying to deal with politics, the cultures of some of us and the true Islam.

Q: What are your views on the future direction for the Muslim Community?

A: Winnipeg I think, will continue to evolve as the Muslim population expands, In the initial phases it is a struggle to finance the upkeep and maintenance of many centres as most of the brothers and sisters are struggling to house, clothe, educate and provide for their families. As a result their contributions are not large, and you have to allocate wisely in order to facilitate all aspects of the programmes you are undertaking.

Time is the best provider. The Waverley location was purchased many years ago, but an Islamic Centre rose as a structure within the last few years. Today we are all proud of this achievement and the Waverley Centre is a proud indication of the resolve of the Muslims in Manitoba. Many more of these will come into being. But careful planning and proper budgeting are necessary as well.