

# Br. Basil Hassan Elmayergi

Profiled by: Br. Abdulaziz Mian.

***Q. You played a very important role in the Manitoba Muslim Newsletter. Please tell our readers the role you played in starting the Newsletter?***

***Br. Basil:*** My first endeavor within the Muslim community in Winnipeg was with the Manitoba Muslim Newsletter. Due to my experience in publishing at the time, I was contented to take on the role of naming the newsletter, designing the logo, developing the format, content, and writing and editing the inaugural issue.

***Q. For how long were you involved with the Newsletter and why did you leave?***

***Br. Basil:*** I was involved with the Newsletter for under a year. I reluctantly resigned from the editorial board in 2000, as I had concurrently left my post with the Police magazine to direct my focus towards pursuing my Ph.D.

***Q. Since this is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Newsletter, why not start by telling our readers about the early days of the Newsletter publication.***

***Br. Basil:*** There was an inherent need for establishing a forum of communication with the Muslim community of Manitoba. This includes all those people we see every day as well as those we only see every Eid. In 1999, I was working as a senior editor for a regional Police magazine, and Br. Ismail Mukhtar approached me about starting a periodical for the Muslim community. At the time of its inception, we had a handful of brothers and sisters on the editorial board, including Br. Ismail Mukhtar and myself. There were some apprehensions during the initial stages of development of the publication, due to the fact that previous attempts at similar newsletters for the Muslim community had failed within six to twelve months.

***Q. What was the background/inspiration behind the original design and logo?***

***Br. Basil:*** The logo has changed from its original design. The original was designed to best represent the concept of the Newsletter; Islamic forum for thoughts and ideas to bring us closer as a community.

***Q. What do you think are the biggest stumbling blocks in such a publication?***

***Br. Basil:*** I think it is maintaining the consistency and fidelity of the editorial board. So, for all those who have served present and past, this milestone belongs to you.

***Q. Do you think it is good to publish controversial issues?***

***Br. Basil:*** Sure, it is good to stir the pot every so often. The content shouldn't always reflect the views and opinions of the editorial board; we have the city newspapers for that.

***Q. Now the readers know the background of Manitoba Muslim Newsletter. How about some background about yourself?***

***Br. Basil:*** My name is Basil Hassan Elmayergi. I am 39 years old. My parents immigrated to Canada in 1968 from Egypt. I was born in Ontario, and two years later our family moved to Edmonton, because my father was appointed at the U of Alberta as a professor in chemical engineering. After I finished high school, my family moved back to Egypt where I spent five years and met my virtuous wife, before returning to Canada. We have five children Adham, Tarek, Donia, Omar and Kareem. I came to Winnipeg on May 1st, 1995. I completed my Bachelors degree at the University of Winnipeg and my Ph.D at the University of British Columbia. Currently, I have a post-doc appointment at the University of Winnipeg, with the Canada Research Chair in Environmental Toxicology.

***Q. What can you say about academic life?***

***Br. Basil:*** Academic life is very liberating, both to the mind and the soul. It comes with a freedom and right to search for truth, and to then publish and teach that truth. This right also implies an obligation as commanded by Islam; to reveal and implement what one recognizes to be of certainty.

***Q. Where did you live prior to moving to Winnipeg and why did you pick Winnipeg?***

***Br. Basil:*** For a couple of years prior to arriving in Winnipeg, I lived in Quebec in order to hasten my wife's immigration process. She was still living in Egypt at the time. I chose to reside where my family felt the most comfortable, and that was Winnipeg. The powerful community spirit and the embraced diversity of this city were all contributing factors.

***Q. You grew up in Edmonton. How has staying involved with the community helped you?***

***Br. Basil:*** Growing up in Edmonton, I was part of a small youth contingency invited to Libya in 1981 for three weeks, as a supplementary part of the Libyan contribution towards the building of Al-Rashid mosque. It was a great experience which I will cherish always. Later, as a young man, I benefited greatly from the new mosque in terms of its facilities, classes, and programs.

***Q. I really like the Winnipeg community and am always interested to know how others perceived this community in their earlier days in Winnipeg.***

***Br. Basil:*** The sense of a strong brotherhood and sisterhood was immediately evident. Youth programs and community services were readily available. As well, the accessibility to and approachability of the MIA executives was surprisingly easy.

***Q. Where is your focus in community involvement after returning to Winnipeg and why does individual effort count?***

***Br. Basil:*** I have been involved with leading Friday prayers at the University of Winnipeg, and more recently, working with the converted inmates at Stony Mountain Prison as part of the Islamic community services. Individual efforts are very important because there is no substitute for an individual's initiative and aspiration.

***Q. What do you think are the key issues facing Muslims in Winnipeg? What kind of approach should we take?***

***Br. Basil:*** As Muslims in Winnipeg, and in Canada in general, we have to justify our existence and life in this land amongst non-Muslims. In order to do that we must ask ourselves a very important question; will we leave an unfillable void when we are gone?

We need to extend our boundaries as a community. It should be rudimentary upon all our able youth and adults to volunteer within different organizations, helping the less fortunate or in the betterment of the populace. Then we can have the satisfaction of individual and group identity and expose the light of Islam to those who are truly in the dark.

***Q. Is there anything you would like to say to anyone?***

***Br. Basil:*** Time goes by so very fast, and people incessantly go in and out of your life, you should never miss the opportunity to express what these people mean to you. To all who contributed to my life, from words of wisdom to a helping hand to a serendipitous smile, Jazak Allah Khair.