

Br. Mohammed Khaleel Baksh, 1st President of MIA

Profiled by: Br. Abdulaziz Mian.

(Reproduced from the archives of Manitoba Muslim Magazine)

Q. Can you tell me a bit about your background?

Br. Khaleel: I was born in SanFernando, Trinidad in 1928. I call both Trinidad and Tobago my home country. I came to Canada in 1961 and moved to Winnipeg in May, 1962. I have four children namely: Salims, Imran, Khalid and Ashan. My wife Salima is known as Auntie G in Winnipeg. I left Winnipeg in 1978 and moved to Ottawa. Currently, I am retired and living in Kingston.

Q. Why did you choose to reside in Winnipeg? Where did you live before? What was your involvement in your previous place of residence?

Br. Khaleel: I came to Winnipeg to study at the University of Manitoba. I lived in Winnipeg for 16 years. My involvement in Muslim activities began as a youth in the Masjid in SanFernando, Trinidad. I became the president of the Young Muslim Cultural League and later a member of the Central Muslim Youth Organization of Trinidad and Tobago.

Q. What was your impression of the Muslim community when you first arrived in Winnipeg?

Br. Khaleel: When I arrived in Winnipeg, the Muslim community consisted of about twelve members mostly university students.

Q. Do you feel the Muslim community has progressed since you became involved? If so, how?

Br. Khaleel: Yes, the Muslim community has progressed. I continued my participation in community activities when I moved to Winnipeg. I also served the community as a president for four terms. I was also Chairman of the Board of Trustees for one term. In addition, I was involved in the development of the first Youth Camp in Winnipeg. The community's biggest achievement was the construction of the Masjid which is still serving the community. During the construction of the Masjid, we were letdown by the contractor. Therefore, I had to assume the role of a contractor. Since resources were scarce in those days, I had the tables and chairs built at the Stony Mountain Penitentiary for the Masjid. On the national scene, I served as the secretary and as the vice president for the Council of Muslim Communities of Canada.

Q. When did you leave Winnipeg? Where did you move to? What was your involvement in the community after moving from Winnipeg?

Br. Khaleel: I moved to Ottawa in 1978. There, I served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Ottawa Muslim Association. In 1983, I moved to Kingston where I served as a member of the Masjid building committee.

Q. What are your views on the MIA, and the plans for the new centre?

Br. Khaleel: I am very delighted to know that you are planning for a new centre*. I am sure you have outgrown your existing centre. I was also happy to hear about the Islamic School in Winnipeg. I would congratulate the community for their efforts.

Q. As a community where do we need to go from here?

Br. Khaleel: I think the Muslim community in Canada has come a long way. I am proud to be a Muslim living in this great country. I am also very proud to see the developments of Mosques and Islamic schools. Islam is the fastest growing religion in Canada. Many members are doing great work to move our communities forward but lack of national cooperation among Muslims is not healthy for our community. I believe that we need a united front on a national level providing leadership and guidance.

** Note: this interview was conducted before the opening of the new center.*