



Tuesday, October 30, 2001

## OU students, staff, alumni learn about Islam

By *Jennifer Charney*, OU Staff Writer

OU students, staff, alumni and friends learned about Islam and what it shares with Christianity and Judaism during a volunteer project at a mosque on Saturday, Oct. 27.

The event was one of Oakland's monthly Spirituality in Service programs, which combine volunteerism with meeting and learning about people of different cultures and religions at various sites. The program is a collaborative effort of the **Center for Student Activities (CSA)**, the **International Students and Scholars Office**, UMHE Protestant Campus Ministry at OU and St. John Fisher University Parish.

A dozen students in instructor Charles Mabee's Introduction to Religion course helped set tables at the **Islamic Center of America** in Detroit, which was preparing for a large fund-raiser. The students joined Oakland staff, alumni and friends who wanted to learn more about Islam in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Eide Alawan, a congregation member and liaison between OU and the Islamic Center, said the object of the visit was to promote interaction between the Oakland visitors and the congregation members. Such interaction would teach the visitors about Muslims and show congregation members that the greater community has consideration for Muslim Americans.

"Out of tragedy comes some goodness — the cooperation, the willingness to learn about each other's beliefs," Alawan said.

After setting tables for at least 800 guests, the 20 OU visitors toured the mosque and learned about Islamic rituals and beliefs. Alawan distributed literature explaining the five requirements of each Muslim:

- Belief in one God and Mohammed as his messenger
- Five daily prayers
- Donating a certain percentage of one's income to the mosque
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan
- Pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Mohammed's birthplace, at least once

Alawan stressed the elements that Islam shares with Christianity and Judaism, including the Bible.

"If you don't believe in the Old Testament and the New Testament, you cannot be a Muslim," he said. "To be a Muslim, you must adhere to and respect the knowledge of those books."

Muslims believe one can achieve peace with God, with oneself and with humanity by surrendering to the will of God, which is to worship him and to do good to humanity.

Muslims respect and revere Moses and Jesus, believing that all prophets came to confirm and renew the message of the former. They also believe in the Day of Judgment; life after death; and God's complete authority over human destiny.

Alawan explained that Muslims fast from dawn to sunset during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting is a period of reflection to mark when Mohammed received the first revelation from God. This revelation, which continued for 23 years, is known as the Koran, the sacred text of Islam.

"Fasting is a way of staying away from worldly desires that might tempt you —empowering your mind over your body," said congregation member Ali Dabaja, who served as a presenter for the OU visitors.

Ali and his sister, Killoud Dabaja, both college students, led the Oakland visitors on a tour of the mosque, where they discussed rituals such as prayer positions and traditions of dressing.

After the congregation served traditional food to the OU group, the imam, or religious leader, Hassan Al-Qazwini, addressed the visitors.

"Islam is a peaceful religion. American Muslims are peaceful people. What's happening has nothing to do with Islam," Al-

Qazwini said, referring to the terrorist attacks. "As much as you are hurt and outraged by acts done by those perpetrators, the Muslims are too."

Al-Qazwini said he values opportunities that the OU Spirituality in Service program provides.

"One of the things that makes America a great country is the diversity we have," he said. "This diversity, you don't find it in any other country. I think this is a gift from God, that despite all our differences, we can communicate with each other, we can sit in a setting like this and talk. In many countries, they cannot do that because of prejudice and ignorance."

Oakland students said they appreciated the visit as a learning experience.

Matt Lemanski, a senior English major, left the visit with more insight into Islam. He said he didn't know much about the religion except for what he's learned in the Introduction to Religion class. He praised the congregation members.

"They were very kind," Lemanski said. "They were just completely inclusive. I was impressed by that."

John Beck, a freshman philosophy major, had never been in a mosque before.

"The presentation in the prayer room was my favorite," Beck said.

The program offered a good explanation of the differences between Islamic and American cultures, he said.

Amanda Montei, a sophomore in elementary education, also said she appreciated the chance to learn about Islam, which she regarded as mysterious.

For more information about the Spirituality in Service programs, contact CSA Director Jean Ann Miller at (248) 370-4332 or [jam@oakland.edu](mailto:jam@oakland.edu).

For information on OU programs and responses related to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, visit the [OU Responds](#) Web site.

#### **SUMMARY**

OU students, staff, alumni and friends learned about Islam and what it shares with Christianity and Judaism during a volunteer project at a mosque. The event was one of Oakland's monthly Spirituality in Service programs, which combine volunteerism with meeting and learning about people of different cultures and religions at various sites.

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