



FARMINGTON VALLEY AMERICAN  
MUSLIM CENTER, INC.

*Serve God. Build Community.*



*FARMINGTON VALLEY AMERICAN  
MUSLIM CENTER, INC.  
(FVAMC)*

*2013 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT*



## ***PRELUDE***

Since its inception the Farmington Valley American Muslim Center, Inc. has moved rapidly on various fronts to consolidate and develop a Muslim community organization. The most heartening and positive aspect is the enthusiasm and support with which the Muslim community in the Farmington Valley has welcomed this development. Their support has been with substantial donations, volunteer assistance, and involvement in various activities.

Given that this is our inaugural annual report, we wanted to provide details of the hard work put in by the members of the Board and the Muslim community in the Valley to making this organization what it is a year later to serve as an inspiration for future generations. This is our story and a brief look at our activities to date.



## ***BRIEF HISTORY***

The founding members established the Board of Trustees in January 2013 to serve as the organization's governing body. The Board comprised seven members at inception, but was expanded to nine members in November. The Board includes five women and a teenager who was added in December to serve as an ex-officio (non-voting) member representing and advocating for the youth.

The Board incorporated the organization with the Secretary of the State of Connecticut as the "Farmington Valley American Muslim Center, Inc. (FVAMC or "the Center") in January 2013. We also established bank accounts, rented a mailbox, and filed the lengthy application for a tax-exempt (non-profit 501(c)3) status with Internal Revenue Service in April, 2013. As of the writing of this report, the application status remains pending due to a heavy backlog.

As we were organizing in early 2013, we became aware of the recent closing of Christ Episcopal Church – Avon, which closed its doors in December 2012 after over 160 years of operation. We also heard a call by Bishop Ian Douglas of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut for a public meeting in February on the future of the church's building on 35 Harris Road, Avon. Two representatives from FVAMC who are members of the local Avon community attended the meeting and expressed our desire to lease the facility as an interfaith center and Muslim place of worship for our community, citing the dire need for such a facility in the Farmington Valley. Their appeal was received sympathetically by attendees and the Diocese, who agreed to pursue further discussions with us.



## ***THE EARLY DAYS***

In the days that followed both the Diocese and FVAMC engaged – separately and collectively – in much discussion, soul searching, and negotiations. Given the significant financial and effort commitment that would be required to acquire and manage the facility, FVAMC needed to assess the level of commitment from its members. As a result, the FVAMC Board held its first fundraising event at the church to raise funds and gauge the interest and commitment of the community to this project. The response was very positive, with over 150 people attending and \$50,000 raised in donations and pledges. As a result, FVAMC and the Diocese continued with the negotiations throughout the Spring and Summer, which culminated in an agreement reached on September 7, 2013 to lease the facility at 35 Harris Road for one year and the promise to negotiate a permanent agreement on the facility.

While negotiations with the Diocese were underway, FVAMC remained very active in its outreach to the Muslim and non-Muslim community. Iftar dinners (when the daily fast is broken) were arranged on the four Saturdays of Ramadan (July/August) with an open invitation to the public at a rented hall at Avon Congregational Church. The events were well attended with approximately 150 attendees at each event. Each dinner was followed by Taraweeh congregational prayers. To celebrate the end of Ramadan, FVAMC held prayer services and a reception at the Lions Club – Unionville, which was very successful, further assuring the Board of the viability of its endeavor to establish this community. To carry on the momentum, a cookout was organized at the Lions Club in September to celebrate our agreement to partner with the Diocese and rent the former church building on 35 Harris Road, Avon.



## ***MOVING-IN***

FVAMC moved into the facility on October 1, 2013. The facility has a total area of 13,000SF, with 4,000SF for prayers (Musalla), and the remainder split among a fellowship/dining hall, kitchen, a large basement, three offices, library/lounge, two bathrooms, and six classrooms. The parking lot has a long entrance and an exit driveway, one hundred (100) car parking stalls, and a generous playground. The facility sits on five and a half acres of land, most of which is wooded. To prepare the facility for our use, we performed some renovations and improvements that were absolutely necessary. These included: re-striping the parking lot, trimming overgrown trees and greenery around the building, painting a basketball court in the parking lot, replacing out-of-order toilets and removing a urinal, installing shoes racks, and removing the molding



wall-wall carpet in the basement. All these improvements were performed with the Diocese's permission.



## ***OUR ACTIVITIES***

Our activities and focus have been aligned with our stated vision *"to be recognized for worship of God, interfaith understanding and dialogue, service to community and country, and as a secure, nurturing venue where our community can congregate"*, mission *"to foster generations of Muslims who are proud of their American identity and Islamic heritage through service to God and community"*, and objectives *"to create a venue for Muslims in the Farmington Valley to receive Islamic education and fulfill their religious and spiritual obligations, promote understanding of Islam and other religious traditions through interfaith dialogue, and create a resource center for the community."* Here's a summary of our activities.

### **Religious Obligations and Islamic Education**

- (1) Weekly Halaqa (study circle) and social gathering held on Friday nights since October 1, 2013 and attended regularly by approximately fifty (50) people.
- (2) Congregational Eid-ul-Adha (second Muslim High Holiday to celebrate the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca) was held on October 15, 2013 with over 200 people attending.
- (3) Weekly Juma (Friday Service) was started in early November 2013 and has been regularly attended by approximately 40-70 people who either live or work in the area.
- (4) Daily Maghrib (Sunset) and Isha (Night) congregational prayers, started in January 2014.
- (5) Afterschool Quran Learning (AQL) program started in early March 2014 and is held weekly Wednesday-Friday 5:00-7:00p, with over 20 students enrolled during the first week. We anticipate this number to rise significantly as the program matures.
- (6) We've hosted notable speakers, including Dr. Mahmoud Ayoub, an internationally recognized authority on Muslim-Christian relations at the Hartford Seminary; Dr. Saud Anwar, Mayor of the Town of South Windsor, CT and first Muslim Mayor in the New England region; Ms. Mehlaqa Samdani, Director of Critical Connections; Dr. William Howe, State of Connecticut Department of Education Title IX Coordinator; Mr. Omer Bajwa, Yale Muslim chaplain and youth activist; and Mr. Wisam Sharieff, an internationally recognized scholar and motivational speaker.

## Youth

A number of events were held and measures taken to address the young and youth of the community. Some of these included:

- (1) To express the Board's deep conviction for youth involvement and representation in the Center's affairs, it has appointed a 15-year to serve as an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees. This member represents and advocates for the interests of our younger members. The term for this post is limited to one (1) year to allow as many youth as possible to take advantage of this opportunity.
- (2) Co-sponsored an event with the USPAK Foundation in October at FVAMC on "Collaborative Problem Solving Techniques," which was focused on teaching children how to deal with bullying in and outside of the classroom, developing leadership skills, and solving internal and social conflicts. Ms. Mehlaqa Samdani – Director of Critical Connections–, and Dr. William Howe – State Title IX Coordinator, CT State Department of Education – conducted the workshop.
- (3) Formed the FVAMC Youth Club for middle school through college age students. The first meeting was held in November at FVAMC and included prayers and fun activities, and a second gathering was held at Spare Time Bowling Alley. Each event attracted 30–50 youth.
- (4) Hosted an event on the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing upon him) in January to commemorate his life. Youth and children presented on topics related to his life. Prizes and awards were given at the end. Entire event was organized and conducted by our youth.
- (5) FVAMC students participated in the Future City Competition, a national, project-based learning experience where students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade imagine, design, and build cities of the future. FVAMC students worked as a team with an educator and engineer mentor to plan cities using SimCity™ software, research and write solutions to an engineering problem, built a tabletop scale model with recycled materials, and presented their ideas before judges at Regional Competitions in January. Our students won the Silver Medal in this year's theme "Tomorrow's Transit" and received two special awards for best Transportation System and best Health System.
- (6) Started weekly Movie Night on Saturdays, beginning in February. This program has been particularly popular with younger children.

## Interfaith

- (1) Provided support and educational materials to St. John's Episcopal Church, Bristol for a series of educational workshops they ran for their members on Islam. We also formed and participated in a

Book Club with them, where members of both congregations read and discussed the book “Acts of Faith” by Eboo Patel.

- (2) We participated in a joint food packing event with St. John’s, Bristol at Emanuel Lutheran Church (Hartford) to package 25,000 meals as part of the End Hunger New England program.
- (3) Held an Interfaith youth Event at FVAMC in January that was well attended by FVAMC members and local churches. Aamir Hussain – a local youth and protégé of Eboo Patel – presented about his involvement in interfaith efforts at Georgetown and talked about the Muslim Youth Core.
- (4) Participated in Thanksgiving Interfaith Services at the Beth Hillel Synagogue (Bloomfield, CT) and the Farmington Valley Jewish Congregation Emek Shalom (Simsbury).
- (5) Served on the Steering Committee for Environment Stewardship conference held in November to discuss the role of religion in protecting the environment.

## Community

- (1) Upon moving-in, members of our community made Fall Baskets with a friendly note that were hand delivered to fourteen of our immediate neighbors. This gesture of goodwill was well received as evidenced by the positive phone calls and Thank You notes we received from some of the recipients.
- (2) FVAMC was awarded a grant from the State of CT to become a certified assister to help enroll people in the Valley in the Access Health CT program – CT’s Health Insurance Exchange.
- (3) In January, FVAMC hosted the Connecticut Muslim Leaders Group – a group composed of all Muslim Centers and Mosques in Connecticut, with over 25 leaders in attendance.
- (4) Held two potluck dinners with presentations to celebrate our move-in to the facility and returning pilgrims, respectively.
- (5) Because of its unique partnership with the Diocese and its outreach activities, FVAMC attracted much positive coverage from the local media (newspaper/web), with a number of articles published in the local patches and a segment on Fox Connecticut News. These articles are available on the FVAMC website: <http://www.fvamc.org/news-events/>



## ***FINANCIAL STATEMENT***

To date, three hundred (300) members have been added to our list comprising at least eighty families (80). We expect this number to increase dramatically as we grow and Muslims in the Valley learn about our presence. We have raised a little over \$200,000, which is used for operating the facility and the remainder set aside for the eventual purchase of the facility.

## ***BOARD OF TRUSTEES***

The affairs of the organization are managed by a Board of Trustees, which consists of a president, secretary, treasurer, and six other Board members. The Board exercises all the powers of the organization and has the primary goal of taking all possible steps to implement the vision, mission, and objectives of the organization.

As the organization develops and the need arises, the Board of Trustees may establish a Board of Directors to assist it in the conduct and regulation of the affairs of the organization. At such time, the structure and functions of the Board of Directors will be defined by the Board of Trustees and documented in the organization's bylaws.



***Khamis Abu-Hasaballah, Ph.D.***

***President, Board of Trustees***

Dr. Abu-Hasaballah received formal education in Physics and Engineering and has worked in the Information Technology and Informatics for the past 20 years. He currently serves as an Assistant Vice President for Research IT & Informatics at UConn. He is an active member of the local Muslim community where he leads Friday congregational services, speaks at interfaith events, and teaches in weekend Islamic schools. He's a founding member of Madina Academy – Connecticut's only independent fulltime, daytime Islamic school. Khamis is an avid runner and soccer player. He enjoys coaching soccer, gardening, and the outdoors.



***Rubina Ali, D.M.D.***

***Member, Board of Trustees***

Dr. Rubina Ali has been an active contributor to the success of various endeavors undertaken by the FVAMC. As the founder and President of Dental Arts of Avon, P.C, in Avon, Connecticut, and iSmile Family Dentistry in East Hartford, Dr. Ali has been a well recognized member of the healthcare community and a successful entrepreneur in Connecticut. As a member of the Board, she brings her significant experience in organizational structure and management.



Dr. Rubina Ali is a graduate of the Goldman School of Dental Medicine at Boston University. She has subsequently completed several courses in cosmetic dentistry and business management. She brings with her a caring nature and sincerity towards achievement of the goals of FVAMC. She lives in Avon with her husband Dr. Ahmad Ali, and their three children Hashim, Aizah and Zayba.



*Zain Athar*

*Ex-Officio Member, Board of Trustees*

Mr. Athar a 15-year student at Avon High. He joined the Board of Trustees a representative of and advocate for the youth at the Center.



*Noora G. Brown, M.A.*

*Member, Board of Trustees*

Ms. Brown holds a Master of Arts degree in Christian-Muslim Relations (Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT). She holds a Certificate of Gerontology Studies from the Worcester Consortium Studies Program and a training certificate from St. Francis Academy for Clinical Pastoral Care. Ms. Brown accepted Islam as a way of life and has been involved in Christian-Muslim interfaith and dialogue. She is a busy stay-at-home mother of three and has recently joined the Pastoral Advisory Committee at the UConn Health Center, Farmington, CT as a representative of the Muslim Community in the Farmington Valley. She is FVAMC's Chairwoman of the Interfaith Committee.



*Nausherwan Burki, M.D., Ph.D.*

*Member, Board of Trustees*

Dr. Burki is a clinician, teacher, and research worker and is Professor of Medicine at the University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, Connecticut, USA, in the division of Pulmonary & Intensive Care. He has held this position for the

past 9 years, prior to which, he was Professor of Medicine & Chief of the Division of Pulmonary & Critical Care at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, USA for 20 years. He is the author of a book on pulmonary medicine and has a number of book chapters to his credit. In addition, he has published more than 86 peer reviewed scientific papers.

Dr. Burki serves on numerous National and international professional boards and committees. Dr. Burki serves on several nonprofit charitable organizations: he is the Trustee of a not-for-profit charitable organization – the Imran Khan Cancer Appeal, Inc., USA which gathers donations for the care of cancer patients. He is also on the Board of Founding Members of the International Network for Cancer Treatment & Research (INCTR), Brussels, Belgium, as well as a Member of the Board of Governors of the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital & Research Center, Lahore, Pakistan. Dr. Burki has an enormous amount of experience on the prevention, diagnosis and management of a very wide range of disease states in particular COPD (the number 3 killer in the USA) and Lung Cancer (the number 1 cancer in the USA).



*Wendy Burki, M.S.*

*Member, Board of Trustees*

Ms. Wendy Burki is a mother, former EEO Director for the State Department of Education, and former college instructor with a background in law and writing. She received her bachelor's degree from DePauw University, where she also studied at the American University in Athens, Greece. She has edited and published numerous publications over the years, and while living in Lexington, Kentucky, served on the Board of Directors to create, build and establish "The Lexington Universal Academy," an independent Islamic School founded in 2003. She currently lives in Farmington, and has been involved in various community organizations, including the Farmington Oral History project, the Cub Scouts, room mother, school library, Hillstader, and served as the Coordinator of Amistad Tours for the Farmington Historical Society. After completing her Master Gardener certificate at UConn in 2010, Wendy got involved in botanical work at the Channel 3 Kids' Camp and Mark Twain House, where she continues to volunteer. She enjoys photography, skiing and traveling with her husband and children to the most interesting corners of the earth.



*Chaker Dridi, M.S.*

*Secretary, Board of Trustees*

Mr. Dridi is a father and teacher, residing in the neighboring town of West Hartford, Connecticut. He studied linguistics and translation at the University of Tunis, La Univesidad Autonoma de Madrid, and La Sorbonne. He holds a Master's degree and Diploma of Advanced Studies from La Sorbonne. He worked as a translator for six years in Berlin Germany. He is a certified World Languages teacher in the state of Connecticut and has taught French, German, and Spanish at Avon High School. Chaker is an active member of the greater Hartford Muslim community; he helped manage the Weekend Islamic school at the Association of Greater Hartford in Berlin, Connecticut, and participated in many projects for the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut. Chaker is an avid runner, who ran long distance races and marathons. He also enjoys watching his children play soccer.



*Ola Ghoneim, M.S. Ph.D.*

*Member, Board of Trustees*

Dr. Ghoneim is an Assistant Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Saint Joseph School of Pharmacy in Hartford, Connecticut. She holds a Master of Science degree in Medicinal Chemistry from Mansoura University, Egypt and a PhD degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Prior to coming to CT, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California and an Assistant Professor in the College of Pharmacy, Qatar University. Dr. Ghoneim has held several administrative responsibilities; she served in the faculty senate, honor council, and was the chair of community outreach and planning of events committee. She was the host and the organizer of students exchange program between Qatar and USA. She is the faculty advisor for the inaugural class of 2014 at University of Saint Joseph.

Dr. Ghoneim is an active member of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy and the American Chemical Society. She enjoys community service and was actively involved with Autism Society of North Carolina, Sports for Special Athletes in Southern California, and Walk

now for Autism. She participated in the Health and wellness festival, Mercy shelter food serve, and Muslims Against Hunger.

Dr. Ghoneim enjoys traveling with her husband and her two teenage boys and learning about other cultures. She is FVAMC's Chairwoman of the Hospitality Committee.



*Atique Mirza, M.D.*

*Treasurer, Board of Trustees*

Dr. Atique A. Mirza is a Consultant Cardiologist at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford Connecticut and an Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine in the Department of Cardiology at the University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT, and is actively involved in the training of cardiovascular medicine fellows. He is a Diplomat of the American Board of Internal Medicine and a Fellow of the American College of Cardiology. He is the founding president of the Allama Iqbal Medical College Alumni Association of North America, the founding President of the Connecticut Chapter of the Association of Physicians of Pakistani descent of North America, Secretary of the Association of Pakistani Cardiologists of North America (APCNA), and is a Board Member of the US PAK Foundation.

Dr. Mirza is a community activist, who has been involved in increasing the recognition of health and social issues faced by Asian Americans at the local and national level. He testified in the Connecticut General Assembly before the Appropriation Committee for the Asian Pacific American Commission in 2009.



*Faryal Mirza, M.D.*

*Member, Board of Trustees*

Dr. Faryal S. Mirza is a graduate of Aga Khan Medical College in Karachi, Pakistan. She's a clinician scientist faculty in the School of Medicine and consultant endocrinologist at John Dempsey Hospital at University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, Connecticut. She is a Diplomat of the American Board of Internal Medicine, a Fellow of the American College of Endocrinology, and a certified



Specialist in Hypertension by the American Society of Hypertension. She served as a primary care physician in underserved rural Virginia for six years before moving to Massachusetts where she completed a clinical research fellowship in hypertension at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Faryal Mirza lives with her husband Dr. Atique Mirza (Board member) and three children in Avon, CT. She is FVAMC's Chairwoman of the Community Service and Outreach Committee.

## ***FUTURE FORWARD***

Our progress has been incredible, but the road ahead is long and arduous. Our main objectives for the coming year (*In Sha Allah – God Willing*) include: securing a permanent home for our community; launching a world-class weekend learning program, extending our Afterschool program, and opening the Center for activities and worship seven days a week.

## ***CONCLUSION***

We like to close this report with our "I belong to FVAMC" photo essay project that FVAMC has initiated. The project seeks to adorn the walls of the Center with the faces of happy children to help radiate their joy across the hallways, as can be seen in the photos shown throughout this report. Some of the photos have already been mounted on posters with our logo and the caption "I Belong to FVAMC" and hung on the walls of the entrance hallways. This is an ongoing and enduring project. Pictures are taken impromptu to try to project a relaxed, easy and friendly mood. Permission of the parents is obtained prior to mounting the posters. We believe this project will beautify our Center, add a welcoming and friendly touch, and make it feel like home, but more importantly, help our children feel proud to belong to our community and give the parents a sense of ownership.

We thank God Almighty for this success and seek His continued guidance and watch over us. Ameen.