# Editorial

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

I am pleased to present the sixth volume of the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*, entitled "**Advancing Islamic Chaplaincy in North America**." Muslim chaplaincy in North America is a growing, vital field, bridging faith and public service in diverse settings like the military, hospitals, prisons, and campuses. Muslim chaplains offer crucial spiritual support, yet face unique challenges such as cultural misunderstandings, lack of established training pathways, and combating stereotypes—all while forging a distinctly North American Islamic pastoral care model that embraces interfaith work and empowers diverse leadership. While the School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS) was a significant early effort for formalized Muslim chaplain training in the US, Hartford Seminary (now Hartford International University for Religion and Peace) launched the first accredited Islamic Chaplaincy program in 2001, filling a crucial need for military and broader chaplaincy requirements, and making it a key pioneer in the field.

Muslim chaplaincy faces significant statistical shortfalls in major US sectors in their efforts to meet the spiritual needs of a diverse Muslim population, though recent decades have seen growth, especially on college campuses. A Pew survey mentioned in an Oxford article (2023) noted a severe lack of Muslim chaplains in state prisons, with only 7% of chaplain respondents being Muslim in a 50-state survey, reflecting a long-standing issue (Stark 2023). Reports from late 2020 and 2021 (ISPU) on Muslim chaplaincy reveal a high demand for culturally sensitive spiritual care, especially in healthcare and corrections, but highlight significant gaps in availability, with many Muslim patients lacking access to chaplains during critical times such as end-of-life care, despite the highly perceived importance of prayer, spiritual and religious education, and emotional support. Key findings show Muslim chaplains are highly educated but often under-certified and face challenges balancing traditional Islamic care with institutional demands, while also serving diverse populations with unique needs, often alongside roles as imams (Abu-Ras 2010).

Despite the essential role which Muslim chaplains already play in many institutions, much of the American Muslim community is completely unaware of this evolving field. As Sajida Jalalzai astutely notes:

> What is a Muslim chaplain? Much of the existing scholarship on Islamic chaplaincy engages with this deceptively simple question, providing essential foundational information about the roles, responsibilities, and history of Muslim chaplains in North America. (Jalalzai 2024)

In focusing on "**Advancing Islamic Chaplaincy in North America**," this volume bridges a critical gap in existing scholarship by integrating essential scholarly information with the practical experiences and lived knowledge of practicing chaplains. The sixth volume of the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* includes four articles and nine reflections:

My article, "The Guiding Light: Qurʾānic Wisdom and Prophetic Examples in Chaplaincy," establishes wisdom (*ḥikma*) as foundational to the practice of Islamic chaplaincy and to care, mentorship, and teaching overall. It outlines a model for wisdom based on the Qurʾān and its Prophetic application, using the hermeneutical method of *al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān* (the Qurʾān's structural unity), as well as combining the "Two Readings" (the revelation and the universe) and the Qurʾān's higher objectives (*al-maqāṣid al-Qur'āniyya*) to better understand what the Qurʾān says about wisdom and how to embody it. Through this method, several terms related to *ḥikma*, such as *taqwā*, *ʿilm*, *rushd*, *qawlan sadīdan*, and *iṣlāḥ*, are explored, allowing for a fuller elucidation of the Islamic understanding of wisdom. After presenting some examples the Qurʾān gives of role models who embodied this characteristic, the article then explores its opposite: including the Qurʾānic terms associated with lacking wisdom (*jahala*, *lā yaʿqilūn*, *safaha*, and *ghafla*), as well as the characteristics and consequences of being unwise. This study concludes with how chaplains (and anyone else entrusted with the care, mentoring, or teaching of others) can develop and embody wisdom, especially within significant life decisions.

In "The Illuminating Lamp: A Four-Step Model for Islamic Chaplaincy in North America," authors Sondos Kholaki, Shapla Shaheen, and Shane Atkinson argue that while many contemporary psychosocial tools employed within chaplaincy are useful, they must be re-anchored in *tawḥīd* and a Qurʾānic anthropology. Muslim chaplains serve not as neutral spiritual caregivers, but as *khalīfa*s (trustees) whose practice is tied to revelation, divine purpose, and self-purification. To this end, they present a four-step chaplaincy model derived from Qurʾān 33:45–46: "O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of good news, a warner, and as one who invites to God, by His permission, as a beacon of light." Witnessing, bearing good news, warning or directing, and inviting to God are proposed as sequential steps for chaplaincy encounters, each building upon proper spiritual presence, trust, and wisdom.

Ingrid Mattson's "Identity, Accountability, and Power in the American Muslim Community and in Islamic Chaplaincy" argues that chaplaincy is not merely spiritual caregiving but also a formative space where Muslim identity is defined in North America. Questions of who is authorized to represent Islam and how remain central, with Muslim chaplains bringing varying theological, cultural, and juridical backgrounds. Mattson argues that chaplaincy is part of Islam's "discursive tradition," shaped by who is included in the conversation. The author stresses that effective Muslim chaplaincy must include the community as well as confront systemic injustices, especially anti-Black racism, and understand the cultural realities of diverse Muslim communities.

Through her article, Mattson demonstrates that Islamic identity in chaplaincy is diverse and contested, and that institutions must acknowledge and negotiate this diversity. Muslim endorsing bodies must wield their power ethically, avoiding reductive legalism and acknowledging the broader moral responsibilities of leadership. Power must be supervised, accountable, and oriented toward justice. Endorsers should avoid restricting "Islamic" concerns to *fiqh* alone, recognizing the moral stakes of issues like racism, misogyny, and institutional harm.

In "Change from Within: A Model for Training Imams and Muslim Chaplains about Domestic Violence," authors Salma E. Abugideiri, Fatima Y. Mirza, Tahani Chaudhry, Hasnaa Mokhtar, and Denise Ziya Berte explain that faith leaders (such as imams and chaplains) are often first responders in cases of domestic violence (DV) and that their responses can either help or harm. Unfortunately, many imams and Muslim chaplains lack training, resulting in the misuse of religious texts, minimization of abuse, and re-victimization of survivors. In this article, the authors present findings from two cohorts of the Peaceful Families Project's (PFP) domestic violence first responder training for imams and chaplains; a training which blends mental health expertise, Islamic scholarship, and cultural grounding.

Through the administration of pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys, the researchers found that training significantly increased leaders' knowledge, confidence, and preparedness to respond to domestic violence. Prior to the training, many participants reported minimal or no previous exposure to DV training or counseling skills, despite being frequently approached with complex family violence cases. Training helped correct misconceptions and barriers, and encouraged safer, survivor-centered responses. After the two-day PFP training, imams and chaplains showed large gains in understanding domestic violence dynamics, knowing how to respond safely, and feeling prepared to act, although some challenges remained.

In her reflection entitled "Does Islam Have Its Own Tradition of Spiritual Care? The Twelve Principles of Spiritual Care in the Muhammadan Model," Feryal Salem shows how Islam has a rich, Prophetic tradition of spiritual care rooted in the character, teachings, and companionship (*ṣuḥba*) of the Prophet Muhammad. She outlines twelve principles for spiritual care which can be derived from the practice of the Prophet, including "do no harm," meeting people where they are, connecting before correcting, making religion easy, flexibility and diplomacy, gradual teaching, cultural relevance, political intelligence, compassion, avoiding personal gain, humility, and confidentiality. These principles emphasize prioritizing mercy over rigidity, recognizing individual capacity, safeguarding dignity, and ensuring that guidance draws people toward God rather than alienating them. Salem demonstrates that the goal of Islamic spiritual care is stewardship, not control, and she provides a framework relevant not only to Muslim chaplains but to caregivers across traditions.

Raymond Elias reflects on how Islamic chaplaincy has changed and stayed the same over the past nine years in his "Reflections on a Master of Divinity (MDiv) Thesis: 'Professional Muslim Chaplaincy: Defining a Role for Religious Authority and Leadership in the US Context'." He explains that Muslim chaplaincy sits between traditional Islamic scholarship and professional pastoral care, where Muslim chaplains often have strong Clinical Pastoral Education training but may lack the deep classical Islamic studies of imams and *ʿulamāʾ*. This creates a gap in religious authority, raises questions about standards of preparation, and requires careful navigation by both institutions and Muslim communities. Elias illustrates how Islamic chaplaincy programs have responded to these gaps, mentioning for example the fact that Hartford Seminary and Bayan Islamic Graduate School have added Arabic requirements to their curricula; however, limitations still exist. To address these limitations, he proposes a dual-solution pathway; one in which

organizations such as the Muslim Endorsement Council, ISNA, and the Association of Muslim Chaplains provide short-term support via creating and enforcing standards and continuing education, and in which Islamic seminaries and chaplaincy programs collaborate in the long-term to provide the curricula and training needed, combining both classical seminary education and rigorous pastoral formation.

Kamal Abu-Shamsieh's "Spiritual Formation: A CPE Chaplaincy Training Model Based on an Islamic Paradigm" shows how Muslim chaplains benefit from Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) models that reflect Islamic beliefs. With traditional CPE programs being rooted primarily in Christian theology, Muslim chaplains are left to figure out on their own how to ground their own practice of chaplaincy on Qurʾānic themes, Prophetic narratives, and Islamic theological principles. Through presenting a case study of a CPE program based on an Islamic paradigm (focusing on concepts such as *tawḥīd*, *taqwā*, *iḥsān*, and *ṣuḥba*), Abu-Shamsieh shows how aligning pastoral practice with Islamic sources can strengthen students' theological competency and enable them to construct care theories consistent with Islamic beliefs, offering a holistic framework for responding to illness, suffering, death, and ethical decision-making rooted in Islamic theology, law, and pastoral tradition. Such a program demonstrated that with a tailored curriculum, Muslim chaplains were able to enhance their cultural competency and patient support, even when taught by non-Muslim educators, highlighting the need for a formal Islamically grounded CPE model globally.

In "Envisioning Survivor-Centered Anti-Violence Spiritual Care," Safia Mahjebin makes a moving and powerful case for the need for anti-violence chaplaincy, based on her own deeply personal experience as a gender-based violence (GBV) survivor-advocate and chaplaincy student. Through her story, she demonstrates the challenges which faith-oriented domestic violence and spiritual violence survivors/victims face in their families, communities, and when seeking help from religious leaders, DV services, and other individuals and systems that are theoretically supposed to support them. As a survivor, even while being empowered by her faith to escape a dangerous home, Mahjebin was made to feel isolated from her faith community. As an advocate for other survivors/victims, she faced racism, Islamophobia, and exploitation in the very movements and organizations which ostensibly were there to advocate for her. Through her reflections, Mahjebin demonstrates how Clinical Pastoral Education with the right educator can help survivors/victims process their own experiences and make space to care for others. She proposes the role which chaplaincy can play in supporting survivors/victims—stating that "if we acknowledge that there is such a thing as spiritual abuse, then we ought to acknowledge that there is such a thing as spiritual healing and wellness, and that requires faith-affirming spiritual services"—while acknowledging the shortcomings of chaplaincy as it is currently practiced. All in all, Mahjebin's argument for an Islamic chaplaincy education which prepares chaplains to be true advocates and a CPE specialization in GBV/DV that is shaped by survivors/victims themselves, is a stirring call for chaplains, educators, program designers, and community members.

"Beyond Pastoral Care: Justice-Oriented Islamic Chaplaincy" by Ibrahim J. Long highlights the need for Muslim chaplains to be trained to not only provide pastoral care, but to also be advocates in the pursuit of justice. Muslims and Muslim chaplains face

increasing hostility and systemic challenges, frequently confronted by racism, Islamophobia, institutional pressures, and even harassment—a reality that has become more starkly evident over the last two years when trying to advocate for the Palestinian cause and those supporting it. Long argues that current chaplaincy training is insufficient for today's realities; the Christian pastoral and interfaith models taught do not equip chaplains to navigate systemic discrimination, contentious political issues, or institutional power dynamics. On the other hand, Islamic chaplaincy has roots in social justice advocacy: the early Black American Muslim pioneering chaplains had their start in prisons, where their advocacy led to reforms which Muslims and non-Muslims both benefit from today. Long emphasizes the need for connecting Islamic chaplaincy education back to its longstanding tradition of legal advocacy, resistance to oppression, and pursuit of religious rights. In addition to making this history play a more prominent role, Islamic chaplaincy curricula should integrate social work and justice-oriented training, leading to programs that include anti-oppressive practice, decolonial frameworks, policy navigation, and community development to prepare chaplains for contemporary challenges.

Sondos Kholaki reflects on her experience as a Muslim hijab-wearing police chaplain in "Muslim Chaplains in Law Enforcement: Challenges and Opportunities." While hoping that her presence would build bridges and better understanding both within law enforcement and the community, the author faced challenges in a predominantly White, male, Christian law enforcement culture, including microaggressions, isolation, and cultures resistant to change. In attending a three-day police chaplaincy training, she realized that the practice of chaplaincy in law enforcement was heavily shaped by evangelical Christian norms, with chaplains openly framing their role as an opportunity to spread Christianity. Kholaki did experience meaningful encounters particularly within her ride-alongs with officers, illustrating the possibility for empathy, shared identity, and humanization. However, after standing with fearful students at a university pro-Palestine encampment while wearing her chaplain badge, Kholaki faced criticism from the police department, and this misalignment between her values and the institution's culture, combined with moral distress and advocacy fatigue, led her to resign from her position as a police chaplain. Kholaki concludes that to provide authentic chaplaincy, one must feel they can operate with integrity, in accordance with their values, and that they must feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.

In "A Muslim Chaplain's Role in Government Institutions: Navigating Around Religious Freedom," Mustafa Boz explains the responsibilities and requirements of serving as a staff chaplain within the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). Chaplains must act in accordance with the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), supporting the religious needs of all recognized faith groups and ensuring fairness, consistency, and non-preferential treatment, even if practices may conflict with their own personal beliefs. For staff chaplains who are Muslim, they also serve as cultural and religious consultants when Muslim inmates request religious accommodations, especially those which may diverge from mainstream Islamic interpretations. Through the use of case studies, Boz demonstrates that upholding "stricter" Islamic opinions, as long as they are sincerely held by the inmates and even while the chaplain personally may hold a less

stringent juristic opinion, can protect religious freedoms and actually lead to greater accommodations and offerings which benefit many more inmates.

Yusuf Hasan and Mira Abou Elezz argue for the importance of Muslim chaplains becoming board certified in "Board Certification: Its Requirements, Process, and Value - The Personal Experience of a Muslim Chaplain." Board certification ensures that chaplains meet professional standards in spiritual assessment, ethics, interfaith care, and self-awareness. The authors outline the process for obtaining this certification, which includes completing graduate education, CPE, extensive clinical hours, essays, and an interview, and they explain that this acts as a safeguard against harm and promotes high-quality, ethical care. Three case studies are presented, in which the application of competencies tested for within the board certification process directly improved patient well-being within a hospital setting. These examples show the transformative role of trained chaplains in safeguarding dignity and providing holistic care.

Mona Islam's "The Development of Islamic Chaplaincy in the United States: An Interview with Dr. Jimmy Jones" gives a brief overview of how the field of Islamic chaplaincy in the United States came to be. In it, Dr. Jones, executive vice president of The Islamic Seminary of America and one of the pioneers of Islamic chaplaincy education, explains how Islamic chaplaincy in the US emerged informally in the 1970s, with the Nation of Islam taking the lead in prison chaplaincy. He stresses that while Christian seminaries like Hartford played an early role in training Muslim chaplains, Muslims must develop and lead their own seminaries to ensure culturally and theologically grounded leadership training. It was a recognition of this need that led to the establishment of The Islamic Seminary of America, a graduate-level seminary created to train Muslim leaders using Islamic principles and culturally relevant curricula, with the aims of professionalizing chaplaincy, setting standards, and developing leadership rooted in the American Muslim experience. Islam and Jones reflect on the hesitance which the Muslim community sometimes shows in supporting such initiatives despite the need, and point out that by raising awareness on the immense positive impact which Islamic chaplaincy has had and can have on the community, we may see an increase in institutional support.

This volume also includes six book reviews: *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction* by Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo (reviewed by Ibrahim J. Long), *Islamic Spiritual and Religious Care: Theory and Practices* by Nazila Isgandarova (reviewed by Mona Islam), *With the Heart in Mind* and *When Hearing Becomes Listening* by Mikaeel Ahmed Smith (both reviewed in one piece by Raymond Elias), *An American Muslim Guide to the Art and Life of Preaching* by Sohaib Sultan and revised by Martin Nguyen (reviewed by Abdul-Muhaymin Priester, III), *Divine Pronouns: Unlocking the Definitive Quran: Part 1: Principles* by Omar Imady (reviewed by Nosheen Khan), and *Trauma-Informed Pastoral Care: How to Respond When Things Fall Apart* by Karen A. McClintock (reviewed by Saira Qureshi).

In addition to these, included are a touching tribute to Sohaib Sultan (may Allah have mercy upon him) written by Omer Bajwa, a report on the Association of Muslim Chaplain's 2025 annual conference by Jaye Starr, a research brief by MA in Public and Pastoral Leadership graduate Gulsen Cok, and two resources by the Muslim Endorsement Council.

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