

The Association of Muslim Chaplains Annual Conference 2025: *Re-Member, Reflect, and Reimagine*

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The Association of Muslim Chaplains (AMC) convened their annual virtual conference, *Re-Member, Reflect, and Reimagine*, on February 14 to 16, 2025 via Zoom. The program was split into two parts: the first was a set of parallel training sessions intended to help the different fields of chaplains reconnect with one another while exploring a specific topic of relevance, the second part was an opportunity to virtually sit at the feet of elders to learn from some of the earliest Muslim chaplains in the field and gather to hear from those who are thinking about the future of Muslims in each sub-field within Islamic chaplaincy. It was preceded by a casual in-gathering on Friday evening which attempted to recreate virtually the experience of arriving at a conference hotel lobby and reconnecting with old friends while meeting new ones. This was achieved through a collection of small group breakouts with reflective questions such as: *What was a “rose” and a “thorn” from your past year? What led you to chaplaincy and what has kept you here? What is something from the Prophetic tradition that informs your chaplaincy and what is something from contemporary culture that does the same?* Rooms mixed long serving chaplains with those new to the field and included students in their midst.

Topics for Saturday’s training included “Navigating Salafism in Prison” (Dr. Faizudeen Shuaib), “Critical Anti-Islamophobia for Muslim Campus Chaplains” (Margari Hill of MuslimARC), “Understanding and Responding to Trauma Through Islamic Psychotherapy” (Maryam Fakhruddin), and “Engaging with Narcissism: Supporting Families & Communities” (Azleena Salleh Azhar). Additionally, a four-part series was provided on *fiqh* related to medical care that included two sessions on Sunni rulings—one for general medical topics (‘Asma Binti Hasanuddin) and one around end-of-life rulings (Yunus Dadhwala)—a session looking at convergences and divergences for Shia rulings on the same topics (Narjess Kardan), and a concluding session on talking to patients and families who “want everything done” (Ayman Soliman). The longer three-hour format that was employed allowed for an important depth of learning and discussion. Feedback was positive, especially in relationship to the case studies and sharing of experiences by the participants in the various trainings. There were some concerns expressed by several healthcare chaplains who were distressed about the emphasis on *fiqh*, given its limited role in the work performed by most of the cohort members.

Dr. Ingrid Mattson’s keynote set the stage for the next day: looking at the past and envisioning the future. She began by centering the experiences of early Black Muslim chaplains doing the work primarily in corrections institutions without the benefit of training, thus reminding attendees that the need for Muslim chaplains was born out of anti-

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Black racism in America that has fueled mass incarceration. She encouraged the audience to learn from each other across sectors of chaplaincy and especially from African Americans who came first, many of whom have faced obstacles similar to what education chaplains are currently facing. Dr. Mattson concluded by sharing the ways her work with the Hurma Project has advanced her understanding of the mechanisms of spiritual abuse as well as the protective steps that can be taken to ensure that chaplaincy is not tarnished by such injustices.

On Sunday, we gathered to hear from some of the earliest chaplains in each cohort with a session series called “Remember our Roots.” These sessions ran concurrently and varied significantly between cohorts, with military chaplains (Capt. Ryan Carter, Capt. Barbara Helms, Dr. Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad, and Col. Dr. Khallid Shabazz) sharing personal stories from operations and deployment experiences, and community chaplains (Dr. Nurah Amat’ullah, Rabia Terri Harris, Dr. Muhammad Hatim) likewise sharing stories from the early days before Muslims were familiar with the title “chaplain,” as well as reflecting on the experience of being Muslim women in leadership roles. The healthcare chaplaincy session (led by Zilfa Baksh, Yusuf Hasan, and Dr. Abdus-Salaam Musa) was observed to be at times a little more akin to a *khātira* extolling the virtues of chaplaincy work while also sharing stories from the various times that individuals have stepped in to fill critical urgent needs for the Muslim community that then blossomed into more comprehensive spiritual care for all. The corrections chaplaincy session (presented by Abu Ishaq Abdul Hafiz, Jenanah Amatullah-Muqsit ESQ, Wynona Majied-Mohammad, Oliver Muhammad, and Dr. Salahuddin M. Muhammad) discussed the ways in which Black chaplains, particularly those with the WD Mohammed community, were integral to doing the early work and developing the field of Islamic chaplaincy—which they did with deep sincerity and love, often as volunteers without the benefit of formal training. Education chaplain Omer Bajwa spoke solo as the other discussants (Marwa Aly, Dr. Bilal Ansari, and Amira Quraishi) had last minute cancellations. His session examined the emergence and development of Muslim chaplaincy post-9/11 and the ways it continues to navigate contemporary campuses’ cultural, political, and religious realities.

The conference then transitioned to a session series titled “Envisioning our Future.” The two foundational questions framing this series were: Where would you like to see Muslims in this field 25 years from now; and what steps need to be taken to get there? This set was followed by a cohort working group session, with each group focused on a different need.

The corrections chaplains (Muhammad Ali, Mustafa Boz, Hajjah Sabah Muhammad-Tahir, and Zubair Yousif) discussed the critical role of having a strong foundation of Islamic sciences combined with a deep understanding of the history and lived experiences of Black people, as well as the need for love, respect, listening skills, and trauma-informed care knowledge.

The community chaplaincy cohort (facilitated by Ibrahim Long, Lauren Schreiber, and Hanaa Unus) talked about, and subsequently worked on, the development of accountability mechanisms that could be applicable across the diversity of their work (i.e., for a chaplain who may be running a private practice, to those working in the masjid or serving on a volunteer basis with a community organization). The education cohort (led by

Tahera Ahmed, Patricia Anton, Kaiser Aslan, and Dr. Joshua Salaam) explored the recent challenges that they've faced post-Oct. 7th and thought about how independently structured chaplaincies might provide benefits and challenges to chaplains. Their working groups discussed the diagnosis of Islamophobia on campuses, documentation of harms experienced by chaplains or students, and how to engage in national advocacy more broadly.

Military chaplains (Maj. Rafael Lantigua, Capt. Ryan Carter, and Col. Ibraheem Raheem) focused on deployment support needs and thinking about how to best meet the needs of a cohort that struggles to be able to gather for huddles, given time changes and security measures on bases. Healthcare chaplaincy (led by Sondos Kholaki, Ayman Soliman, and Taqwa Surapati) discussed what it looks like to continue with service rooted in our tradition, following the Qur'ān and Sunna. They expressed the hope that chaplains can grow in their skills, interventions, community impact, and engagement with evidence-based research and reflection, including the development of research specific to Islamic chaplaincy.

The conference concluded with cyber security training provided by Praveen Sinha from Equality Labs. Although an intense way to wrap up, it provided attendees with important knowledge to protect themselves from doxxing, data hackers, and surveillance by government and non-government actors.

The conference was accompanied by an artfully designed program book thanks to Seher Siddiquee and Usama Malik. In addition to advertisements from sponsors, session information, and biographical information for the speakers and hosts, it also contained an extensive collection of photos from the past fifteen years of AMC's work. In addition to making recordings available to members, AMC maintains conference program books on the website so that those researching Muslim chaplains, as well as members who missed the program, can learn more about the conversations that are being had in AMC spaces.

The conference was chaired by Jaye Starr with communications and tech support from Usama Malik and speaker coordination assistance from Rasheed Rabbi. AMC's operations manager, Karim Hakim, provided critical tech support during the conference. All in all, it was a success, with 194 attendees participating, and an average of nearly 9 hours of participation. However, many only participated in one or two sessions and the number of cameras turned off would suggest that many who were in attendance were multi-tasking. The conference committee was left feeling that to truly advance the field of Islamic chaplaincy, future conferences require an in-person focus, in no small part because the side conversations that happen are often as important as the sessions themselves, but also because speakers can't build on other sessions if they only attend their own.