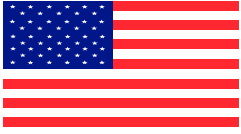


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# Conveners of Imams



*Associated with the Community of Imam W. Deen Mohammed*

## Community Leadership Summit Summary

(November 2013)

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On November 22-23 2013, the Section Conveners of Imams Associated with the Community of Imam W. Deen Mohammed convened the third Community Leadership Summit (CLS) in Houston Texas.

The purpose of the CLS is to bring together nationally influential leaders and leaders of national groups in the IWDM community to discuss issues and strategies to advance progress in the overall community. On Fridays the Sectional Imams meet to discuss matters pertaining to the Sections and on Saturday everyone meets to discuss topics affecting the entire community.

The CLS meeting began with reports from the Sectional Imams about their sections and the American Coalition for Good Government (ACGG) report. Reports were provided by the New England, Southwest, Northeast and Midwest Sections.

### SECTION REPORTS

The reports described progress in the making, including:

- A building renovation project for the creation of a woman's shelter.
- Growing attendance and participation by Imams in all sections, as well as fair and trouble-free elections and transfers of leadership.
- Multimillion dollar purchases of property, hundreds of thousands of dollars in masjid renovations, including the completion of an elevator in one masjid.
- The continued progress and growth of leadership teams and activities that involve resourceful people in all areas of community life.
- The creation of standards and criteria for new Imams and Chaplains.
- The increase in dawah programs.

### ACGG REPORT

The ACGG report included comments in three major areas:

- ACGG is planning a 2015 political convention in New Orleans, whose purpose is not to endorse candidates, but to provide an energized

working environment that unites our political people across the country.

- ACGG is working on increasing political support and work in Washington D.C. as well as a political education campaign across the country via workshops, enhanced radio and TV programs, and community organization coordination.
- ACGG is completing its analysis of its national survey and will soon be sharing more of that analysis with the community.

### **LEADERSHIP SUMMIT TOPICS**

The topics on the agenda to discuss were related to the 5 major areas of concern identified at the first CLS meeting: Business, Government, Education, Culture and Youth.

### **BUSINESS**

One of the big needs discussed was for increased financial education or literacy amongst the general community. It was agreed that each section needs to find and implement ways to educate and encourage the people to employ good financial management personally and as local communities. One excellent idea was to have successful business persons and finance educators to travel to each masjid and give workshops, the way Imams rotate to give religious teaching.

Another idea that resonated well with the group is the idea that we need to have a program that people can join. If there was something that people could be a part of, they might be more inclined to get involved and this would enable more financial education to take place.

The idea that we need better information of the business and financial activity taking place in the community. There has never been a meaningful assessment of our community to have some objective knowledge of what we are doing and not doing, what skills we have or do not have. There has always been discussion about doing something and some attempts made at creating business directories, but none have been maintained over time.

### **GOVERNMENT/POLITICS**

There was discussion around the fact that members of our community have been receiving an increasing number of invitations from political entities and that we need to find a way to organize more support and presence there. ACGG is looking to establish an office in D.C.

There was vigorous discussion about the pros and cons of revealing our population numbers to politicians. On one side, there is acknowledgment that politicians respond to large numbers. The bigger your constituency, the more the politicians listen. On the other side, these same numbers can work against you. If your numbers are not large enough in the eyes of the politicians, they may decide they can afford to ignore you.

There was also discussion about whether we need to respond to every invitation that we receive from others. We have our own agendas to work on and while

part of our political vision is strong relationships and partnerships with others, how, when, and why we join with others should be a proactive decision, not a reactive one.

Another topic that was discussed was whether it was advantageous or disadvantageous for Muslim politicians to run for office using their Islamic names. The fact that this was a topic of concern was revealing in itself, but the general agreement was that the Islamic names were usually helpful in the demographics where we run for office.

In addition to discussing issues of government outside of our community, there was a big discussion around governmental problems within the community. There was a specific case discussed around ownership of a masjid, where reportedly, a relative of a deceased Imam was trying to put the masjid in their name to claim ownership from the community. This led to analysis about how far Sectional Imams could go to intervene or help a community, if leadership is local and each masjid is autonomous.

The two primary views expressed were that 1) Imams or anyone outside of a local community could not intervene with a local community's affairs unless members of that local community invited them to come and arbitrate the situation. The Section Imams arbitration council concept even requires the disputing parties to sign an agreement that they will accept the arbitration council's evaluation and decision, before they would intervene.

The second (2) view was that we cannot allow local masjids that were built with the sweat and blood of the pioneers be stolen, given, or voted away from the community of IWDM under the guise of "leadership is local and autonomous." This principle works when things are going naturally, but if our association is in danger of losing a local community to other people or orientations, then the principle of autonomy is muted or at least mitigated until the issue is resolved. It was also stated that even the autonomy rule does not prevent Section Imams or others from visiting an area reported to have such problems out of concern, in order to investigate and ascertain what is going on and to look out for our brothers and sisters who may find themselves in a weak position.

Recommendations were made to initiate educational campaigns to educate the general public of our community about the steps they can take when faced with these kinds of situations.

### **EDUCATION**

The topic of education did not take place in its usual way. At the very beginning of the discussion, it was suggested that the community needed to be educated about Imam Mohammed's position on giving our community a name. This led to a vigorous discussion on this topic. The major discussion points were as follows.

A pamphlet and CD was offered containing excerpts of the 1985 lecture when

Imam Mohammed said put down any name that puts us all in one group or corporate structure and never pick up another name again. It was stated that Imam Mohammed's emphasis was on protecting our community from being co-opted by those who want us to establish a corporate structure which could be controlled or influenced by controlling or influencing the small top leadership group. There was a strong implied message that those who were still trying to promote discussion about a name were consciously or unconsciously being used by manipulators.

It was explained that there are different viewpoints about what Imam Mohammed said about this topic and when a topic is raised by members of the community that does seem to be prevalent in a section or nationally, the Section Imams may take up the issue, regardless of their personal opinions about the matter. So, this is why at the previous two CLS meetings it was on the agenda.

Another view expressed asked the question, "Do we still consider ourselves a national community or not? If we don't, then agreement on what we call ourselves is not needed. But, if we are a national community, should we agree on who we tell others we are? It was further stated that everyone in the room knows that we followers of Imam Mohammed, but in this room people use 4 or 5 different names when answering the question, "What Muslim group do you belong to?" This is a problem, it's embarrassing and to others it is unattractive. "Would you want to marry a person who doesn't even know their own name?," was a poignant question. So, the name discussion is not to form a legal name or entity, but to simply agree on what term we all should use when referring to our community so that others won't see us as a confused bunch.

Additional discussion took place around the idea that through Imam Mohammed's commentary, we will develop our own madh'hab. The uniqueness of his commentary is what has given us a unique identity. Hence, our community cannot escape our identity and that it is connected to his language. We have an identity, we just haven't agreed on the name that reflects it.

Another idea expressed states that we should look at all of the things across our community that we have accomplished without having a name and then ask ourselves, "Will having a name add anything?"

Responding to the first comments about Imam Mohammed's statements about putting down a name and never picking it up again, was the comment that these comments were made in 1985 when the Imam was dismantling the American Muslim Mission (AMM). However, the Imam contradicted these words by renaming the community the Muslim American Society (MAS) and then changed it to the American Society of Muslims (ASM). It was suggested that we must examine why Imam Mohammed picked the name back up after telling us never to pick it up again. Another comment was that if people are going to put out a CD and pamphlet with Imam Mohammed's comments on this topic, they need to provide all of the comments about why he put the names down and why he

picked them back up again.

The topic generated such vigorous discussion and variety of opinions that it was clear that it is a topic that should have broader discussion in the community.

**OTHER TOPICS**

There were a host of other topics that were discussed, such as the National Website, the Moonsighting process, the Sectional Imams Community Wide Annual Report and a substantive conversation about the potential ramifications around the intellectual property of Imam Mohammed.

**End of Report**