

Islamic Centers in the United States

According to The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in 2003 there were 1,254 mosques in the United States. Islamic centers (also known as mosques or masjids) are built and operated by local communities around the country to establish the second pillar of the Islamic faith which is prayer. Depending on the particular mosque, they also offer other varied activities including civic and social services.

There is no central structure that ties together all Islamic centers, but many mosques are affiliated with national and local Muslim councils. Muslims come from all ethnic backgrounds, and there are both Sunni and Shia mosques.



The oldest existing mosque community in the United States is the Islamic Cultural Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A group of Lebanese Sunni immigrants started a prayer group in 1925 and finished construction of a facility in 1934. The original mosque structure has been nicknamed Mother Mosque and is designated as a historic landmark by the State of Iowa. Most mosques in the U.S. are

relatively young: 30% of all mosques were established in the 1990's and 32% were started in the 1980's. Only 7% were founded prior to 1960.

All states within the United States have at least one mosque. 31% of all mosques in the U.S. are in just two states: California with 17% and New York with 13.56%. More than 75% of all mosques are located in only 15 states: California (214), New York (170), Texas (83), Florida (78), New Jersey (61), Illinois (56), Michigan (54), Ohio (47), Pennsylvania (47), Georgia (32), North Carolina (32), Massachusetts (29), Maryland (26), Virginia (25), and Washington (21).

Islamic centers are found in 635 cities and towns across the country. There are 39 cities with five or more mosques which alone comprise 31% of all mosques in the United States. Nearly half (610 mosques) are located in 107 cities, each of which has three or more Islamic centers. Brooklyn has the highest number of mosques – 42. It is followed by Houston with 38. The Detroit area, including Dearborn has 25 mosques. Chicago has 19; Los Angeles, 12; Bronx, 11; New York, Queens and Cleveland each have 10.

The largest mosque (in terms of physical structure) in the United States was opened in Detroit, Michigan in May of 2005. The Islamic Center of America has room for more than 1,000 people in the main prayer hall and over 2,000 in the banquet hall. Although it depends on the community, many Islamic centers are not distinguishable from their surroundings. For



instance, the Al-Farouq Masjid in Brooklyn meets in a six story building that can accommodate over 3,000 people. It is common for Muslim communities to buy houses, churches or other public buildings and convert them to Islamic centers.

According to a 2000 report from the Mosque Study Project, the number of mosques and mosque participants is experiencing tremendous growth. Half of the mosques have 500 or more Muslims associated with them. However the number of regular participants is 125. The average attendance at Friday prayer is 292 persons, and median attendance is 135. As a comparison, in 1994 the average attendance was 150. The 2000 study represents a 94% increase since a similar study was conducted in 1994. The number of participants has increased at more than 75% of mosques during the past five years. Regular participants have decreased at only 5% of mosques. Suburban mosques have experienced the greatest increases, and inner city mosques are experiencing the least growth.

Conversion rates remain steady between 1994 and 2001. Over 90% of mosques have had a least one convert to Islam during the past 12 months, and an average of 30% of mosques participants are converts. Most converts come to a mosque after they have made an initial study of Islam and decided to seriously consider accepting it. The average number of converts per mosque is 16.3 per year. A majority of mosques had ten or fewer converts, 23% had 11 to 49 converts, but only 8% of mosques had 50 or more converts. In addition, the Federal Bureau of Prisons estimates that approximately 5% of federal prison inmates are Muslim. Approximately 85% of them converted to Islam after incarceration. Many of these converts have become community activists and imams after their release.

Most mosques are involved in some outreach activities. During the previous 12 months prior to the survey, a majority of mosques have done each of the following activities: visited a school or church to present Islam, contacted the media, contacted a political leader, and participated in an interfaith dialogue. Almost 70% of mosques provide some type of assistance for the needy, and more than 20% of mosques have a full-time school.



On average, 78% of participants for Friday prayer are men, 15% are women and 7% are children. Men make up a majority of participants at Friday prayer in 91% of the mosques. 97% of mosques use English as the main language, or one of the main languages, for the message of the Jum'ah Khutbah (Friday sermon). The few mosques that do not use English most frequently use Arabic or Urdu. Of the mosques that do use English, 47% use one or more additional languages for the message. In the great majority of cases, the other language is Arabic. Albanian, Bengali, Bosnian, Turkish, Urdu and Yourba are also used in a few mosques. 90% of the world's Muslims do not speak Arabic as their native language, yet most Muslims make the attempt to speak and understand at

least some Arabic. 57% of the mosques surveyed regularly offer Arabic classes; 20% offer Arabic classes occasionally; and 23% do not offer Arabic classes at all.

According to Bridges TV, only 7% of U.S. mosques are attended by a single ethnic group. Overall 24% of Muslim Americans are African American; 26% are Arab Americans; and 26% are South Asian. Most mosques (nearly 90%) have some Asian, African-American and Arab members. The ethnic origins of regular participants in U.S. mosques are as follows:

- ❖ 33% South Asian (Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Afghani)
- ❖ 30% African American
- ❖ 25% Arab
- ❖ 3.4% Sub-Saharan African
- ❖ 2.1% European (Bosnian, Tartar, Kosovar, etc.)
- ❖ 1.6 % White American
- ❖ 1.3% Southeast Asian (Malaysian, Indonesian, Filipino)
- ❖ 1.2% Caribbean
- ❖ 1.1% Turkish
- ❖ 0.7% Iranian
- ❖ 0.6% Hispanic/Latino

All five salah (daily prayer) are held every day at 69% of mosques. Maghrib (sunset prayer) is held daily at 82% of mosques while Fajr (dawn) prayer is held daily at 77% of mosques. Of those mosques that hold any of the salah daily, average attendance is 93 people with a median of 46. In 66% of mosques, women make salah behind a curtain or partition or in another room. This practice is becoming more wide spread. In 1994, only 52% of mosques said women prayed behind a curtain.



About a third (34%) of regular participants at the typical masjid has joined within the last five years. Approximately 40% of mosque participants travel more than 15 minutes from their home to get to the mosque which indicates that Muslim residential patterns do not coincide with the location of mosques.

71% of mosques have a Weekend School that meets regularly. The average number of adult attendees is 35, and the average number of child and teen attendees is 93. 21% of mosques have a full-time Islamic school. This is an increase from 1994 when only 17% of mosques had a school. 73% of full-time Islamic schools are elementary schools. 13% include all elementary and high school grades. The median attendance at the schools is 65 students, ranging from 12 to 800 students. The average attendance is 126 students.

92% of the mosques surveyed stressed the importance of dawah to non-Muslims during the previous year. The idea of inviting others to Islam is very much a part of the message in mosques. Putting that into action, 71% of mosques visited a school or church to present Islam and 70% wrote or called the media. As further outreach, 90% of mosques provided cash assistance to families or individuals in their community; 74% provided counseling services and 60% have a prison or jail program.

Information provided by Bridges TV reports that there are currently 8 million Muslims in North America (1 million in Canada and 7 million in the United States.) Currently Muslims are the same size community as the Hispanics were in this nation 25 years ago. The annual growth rate of Muslim Americans is 6% compared to a 0.9% average growth rate in the U.S. According to an USA Today article, it is estimated that the major inner cities in the United States will be Muslim by the year 2020.