

Portland Rizwan Mosque/ Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, Inc.
Islam
9925 SW 35th Avenue
Portland, OR 97219
Phone: 503-246-0813

Introduction

The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam was founded in India in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who is known as the Promised Messiah to his followers, became a target of criticism from other Muslims who considered his claim to prophethood to be blasphemous. This criticism has led to the persecution of Ahmadis in many Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan, where the international Ahmadiyya headquarters had been located before moving to its current location in London. The Ahmadiyya Movement's emphasis on proselytization has led to the spread of the Ahmadiyya Movement throughout the world. The Ahmadiyya presence in the United States dates back to the 1920s when the first Ahmadiyya mission arrived on these shores.

History

The first member of the Portland Ahmadiyya community came to North America in search of freedom from religious oppression. In 1958, a young medical doctor left Pakistan, where Ahmadis were eventually (in 1974) declared non-Muslim in the nation's constitution. He migrated with his family to Ottawa, Canada. After six years of moving throughout North America, in 1964, he, his wife, and his brother-in-law became the first of the founders of the Rizwan Mosque to settle in Portland. Like many of the founders of the Rizwan Mosque, he chose to settle in Portland for professional reasons, in his case, residency training in neurosurgery at the Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU). When this first family settled here, no other Muslims or South Asians were known to them in the Portland area, though they soon got in touch with the Muslim student groups at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and Oregon State University in Corvallis.

These student groups became the family's companions for Islamic celebrations such as the annual Eids, and remained his family's Muslim community for years to come. In 1968 a young Ahmadi doctor from India came to OHSU as a fellow in heart surgery. Being involved with the Ahmadi movement, he got in touch with the abovementioned family. The families of these two medical doctors were two of the only five or six Muslim families known to them in Portland, all of whom regularly gathered in one another's houses to prayer despite their sectarian differences.

As their community grew, they began holding Eid prayers at the St. Pious X Church on Saltzman Road, a tradition that they continued into the early 1980s. This early community, mostly comprised of South Asian and African American families, soon grew too big for St. Pious X and began holding Eid celebrations in a larger room at the Jenkins

Estate (a historic country estate in Aloha, Oregon managed by the Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District). In the early 1980s, with the permission of the national President of the Ahmadiyya Community, the two doctors began fundraising to build a mosque in Portland. By July 1985, \$20,000 had been raised, enough to purchase a piece of tree-covered land in Southwest Portland on behalf of the Ahmadiyya Community. On this land, they planned to erect the first building in Portland to be purposefully constructed as a mosque.

The plan to build a mosque was solidified when, a month after the land had been purchased, a prestigious member and officeholder at the Ahmadiyya International Headquarters, which was at that time in Pakistan, accepted a teaching position at the University of Portland. Soon after, the US National President of the Ahmadiyya community visited Portland and instructed the three men to begin building the mosque. The three men and their families were joined by another Ahmadiyya family who moved to Portland in 1986. Together they were able to raise the necessary funds to begin constructing the building. On 10 May 1987, the community invited Muslims and non-Muslims to celebrate the placement of the first foundation stone. By the end of October of the same year, the Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya movement visited Portland to inaugurate the Portland Rizwan Mosque as an official mosque of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam.

Activities

Activities at the Rizwan Mosque are organized by different age groups, or auxiliaries, into which the Ahmadiyya Movement is divided, each with its own leadership positions. The Lajna, the women's section (ages 15 and older), is responsible for the training of children, which includes classes focused on religious training and occasional weekend camps. The Lajna at the Rizwan Mosque is quite active beyond the local community, as it contributes articles to the national Lajna magazine, *Ayesha*, which is co-edited by a member of the Portland Ahmadiyya community. In addition to co-editing the national magazine for the Lajna, she became one of the first women to hold an official position in an Ahmadiyya mosque when she was appointed, with the approval of the national headquarters, the Public Relations Secretary of Rizwan in 2001 by her father who at that time served as the president of the mosque.

Older men's auxiliary—ages 40 and older—are responsible for guiding younger community members in religious matters. The younger men's group, the Khudam (ages 15-40), is responsible for mosque upkeep, security, and propagation. Each auxiliary also holds its own classes to teach community members how to live in accordance with the beliefs and practices of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, using a syllabus passed down from the national headquarters. The syllabus includes goals and guidelines for religious training, proper conduct, and physical health.

Outreach

Since 1987 the Rizwan Mosque has established good relations with its non-Muslim neighbors. They report that non-Muslims of varying faiths have responded well to their

letter-writing campaigns and invitations to social events. The national and international structures and community-building experiences of the Ahmadiyya community, as well as the respectability and affluence of the local community members, have facilitated their relations with local non-Muslims. By way of example, they report that they received no objections from local residents to the construction of their mosque in a residential neighborhood because they tried to meet their neighbors and explain Islam and the purpose of the mosque. They invited their neighbors to social gatherings and distributed informative videos about Islam before beginning the construction process. The Rizwan Mosque has also routinely reached out to the larger non-Muslim community to explain their distinctive interpretation of Islam in the face such events as the Salman Rushdie controversy and the attacks of 11 September 2001.

The Rizwan Mosque, however, has no official relationship with other Muslim communities in Portland. Their relations with other Muslims in Portland are of a personal nature.

Administration

The Rizwan Mosque has functioned since its inception without its own specific constitution. It follows the rules and regulations set by the International Ahmadiyya Movement for its participating mosques. The president of the mosque is responsible for all affairs of the mosque, as he represents the mosque to the national and international leaders. He is accountable to those above him, since a superior leader must ratify every major decision he makes. He is also accountable to the local community, who elects a new president every three years. In addition to the president, the mosque has a financial secretary and a public relations secretary. As previously mentioned, the community is also divided into auxiliary groups based on age and sex, each of which is led by a leader who is elected bi-annually.

Demographics

The original founders of the Rizwan Mosque came to Portland from India and Pakistan to pursue professional opportunities. Consequently, the majority of families in the community are originally from India or Pakistan. The group — estimated at 40 individuals — that attends the mosque regularly includes a few Euro-American and African American converts who have embraced the Ahmadiyya movement in recent years. The mosque serves approximately 80 Ahmadis across the state — and in some cases, beyond state lines — who are required to pledge official membership to the movement, but not to the mosque. Because of the importance placed on education within the movement, most community members have attended college or received some sort of post-secondary school education, while a number of prominent members hold post-graduate degrees.

Description

The Rizwan Mosque stands on a hill in a quiet residential neighborhood in Southwest Portland. The design of the mosque is a fusion of traditional architectural elements of mosques in Muslim-majority countries and American suburban architecture by which it is surrounded. The small mosque displays a 40-foot decorative minaret that faces the street, while large glass doors placed within wall-length windows provide a beautiful entrance from the front parking lot. Inside the mosque, the front doors point toward a meeting room, equipped with a full kitchen and tables, a women's restroom with an adjacent stairwell to the women's side of the prayer room, and a functional library. This room, which has a moveable curtain for partitioning the sexes, is where classes and social events are held, as well as monthly community and auxiliary meetings. To the left of the entrance, a stairwell leads up to the men's restroom and the ablution area, and to the men's side of the prayer room. The roof of the prayer room displays a small, ornately designed dome reminiscent of the traditional architecture of mosques in Muslim-majority countries. A curtain separates the front (men's side) of the prayer room from the back (women's side).

Prepared by

Updated on September 3, 2004

Hidden Data:

Contact Name and Title

Portland Rizwan Mosque

Contact Phone/Fax Number

503-246-0813

Date Center Founded

1987

Lay Leader and Title

President Richard Rasheed Reno

Membership/Community Size

80

Affiliation with Other Communities/Organizations

Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam