



# Empowering Muslim Women in Sacred Spaces: Reviving the Prophet's Forgotten Sunnah

A Synopsis of the February 6, 2016 Event Produced by  
CAIR-Philadelphia, held at Villanova University

## Event Summary

- Panel presentation by experts on women in American mosques and on the Prophetic tradition regarding women in the mosque
- Q&A by 100 attendees representing the diversity of American Muslims, including:
  - immigrant communities
  - post-immigrant generations
  - African American communities
  - converts of European descent
  - students
- Facilitated small group discussions to develop recommendations for the empowerment of women in mosques

## Key Findings

- There is support in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (s) for the active participation and leadership of women in the mosque.
- There is clear authority which prohibits discouraging women from mosque attendance.
- Lack of women's leadership and accommodation results in the alienation of children from area mosques.
- Women are generally discouraged and sometimes prohibited from leadership roles and active participation in area mosques.
  - Notable exceptions include congregations associated with W. Deen Mohammed and a mosque in Delaware started by mothers as a stand-alone Islamic school.
- Women frequently have inadequate, inaccessible and poorly maintained entrances, restrooms, and prayer spaces in area mosques.

## Recommendations on Women's Empowerment

How do we bring more women into mosque life, including prayer space, leadership positions, and programming?

### Leadership

- Allocate board positions for women
- Elect, rather than appoint, board
- Create a women's advisory board to articulate women's interests, issues, and needs
- Provide non-profit leadership training to board and imam
- Provide training on gender equity to board and imam
- Employ best practices from model mosques (Masjidullah, Delaware Mosque run by women)
- Set guidelines for proper adab in the mosque including respect for women's contributions and voices

### Space

- Create space to pray in the main musalla without a barrier, and a separate space for those who prefer it
- Consider side-by-side prayer spaces with a short barrier or children's space in between
- Create spaces for women to organize after prayer
- Provide child care during programming and meetings
- Maintain women's spaces and entrances, provide safe, well-lit front entrances for women
- Switch men's and women's entrance and prayer space to demonstrate the problems and build understanding

- Provide appropriate women's wudhu spaces, adequate restrooms for women with children
- Provide comfortable spaces for nursing mothers and women's hygiene products in restrooms

## Programming

- Offer girls' and women's halaqas and study circles
- Women should get opportunity to study/discuss/ask questions from/with Imam
- Create committee of women to welcome female newcomers and converts
- Provide for congregants' basic human needs when necessary: clothing, food, and social services
- Provide ESL classes
- Value and make reference to Muslim women scholars and leadership in khutbahs and programming
- Create a women's mentorship program for newcomers, converts, or those who would like more connection
- Focus on intention; provide kind and appropriate opportunities to learn; avoid alienating or excluding others
- Hold service days and cultural days

## Recommendations on Youth Engagement

How can we increase the participation of families and youth in mosque life?

### Leadership

- Create a youth advisory position on the board and a youth advisory committee to the board
- Actively seek youth input on critical issues
- Create innovative youth leadership opportunities i.e. invite young professionals to share experiences, invite youth to create charitable programs (emulate Amana Foundation model)
- Create youth mentorship programs to develop community leaders
- Encourage youth to take turns shadowing the imam to learn to lead prayer, do the adhan, and lead dhikr (boys and girls)

### Space

- Make space for young people to participate in arts, sports, and cultural activities
- Keep the mosque open and clean
- Create space where children can play, interact, and be children
- Create accessible restrooms and wudhu areas for children

## Programming

- Create youth halaqas and book groups
- Have an open forum to address youth needs or interests once a month
- Have a youth khutbah suggestion box
- Employ a youth coordinator to help guide youth efforts

## Next Steps

In recognition of the central position of the mosque in meeting the spiritual and social needs of American Muslims, Coordinators, and Participants urge area Muslim Leaders to:

- discuss these recommendations to mosque boards, community leaders, and community members,
- advocate for the implementation of recommendations,
- record and share your activities to empower women in the mosque, and
- continue the discussion on how our mosques can better serve women and youth.