

Mosque hosts open house Saturday

On Saturday, Nov. 10, the Muslim community in Farmington Hills will hold its first ever mosque open house, offering people of other faiths an introduction to Islamic culture.

Called "Discover Islam," the event will feature displays of Islamic literature, handicrafts, clothing and books as well as samples of foods from around the Muslim world. The open house is designed to help people of all faiths gain a better understand-

ing of the positive role Islam can play in American society.

Demographers say Islam is the fastest-growing religion around the world. There are 7 million Muslims in the United States and 1.2 billion worldwide.

The open house is from noon to 5 p.m. The Tawheed Center is at 29707 W. 10 Mile, one block west of Middlebelt.

Answers to common questions on Islam

What is a mosque?
A place of worship used by Muslims. The English word "mosque" is derived from its Arabic equivalent, *masjid* which means place of prostration. It's in the mosques that Muslims perform their prayers, a part of which includes placing the forehead on the floor.



How is a mosque used?
Mosques play a vital role in the lives of Muslims. The primary function of the mosque is to provide a place for Muslims to perform Islam's obligatory five daily prayers as a congregation. A mosque also provides sufficient space to hold prayer on Fridays, the Muslim day of communal prayer, and on the two Muslim holidays, called Eida.

Is a mosque a holy place?
A mosque is a place that is specifically dedicated as a place of prayer. There is nothing sacred about the building or the place itself. There is no equivalent of an altar. A Muslim may pray on any clean surface. Muslims often pray in public places.

What are the distinctive features?
The *musalla*, or prayer hall, in each mosque is oriented in the direction of Mecca, toward which Muslims face during prayer. In North America, Muslim worship-

ers face northeast. Prayer halls are open and uncluttered to accommodate lines of worshippers who stand and bow in unison. There are no pews or chairs. Members of the congregation sit on the floor.

Because Muslim men and women form separate lines when they stand in prayers, some mosques will have a balcony reserved for the use of women. Other mosques will accommodate men and women in the same *musalla*, or they may have two separate areas for men and women.

What else is in the prayer area?
All mosques have some sort of mihrab, or niche, that indicates which wall of the mosque faces Mecca. The mihrab is often decorated with Arabic calligraphy. Its curved shape helps reflect the voice of the *imam*, or prayer leader, back toward the congregation. Many mosques also have a *minbar*, or pulpit, to the right of the mihrab. During the Friday prayer service, the *imam* delivers a sermon from the mihrab.

What about the rest of the building?
Many mosques have a minaret, the large tower used to issue the call to prayer five times each day. In North America, the minaret is largely decorative. Facilities to perform *wudu* can be found in all mosques. Muslims wash their hands, faces,

and feet before prayers as a way to purify and prepare themselves to stand before God. Wudu facilities range from wash basins to specially designed areas with built-in benches, floor drains and faucets.

Calligraphy is used to decorate nearly every mosque. Arabic quotations from the Koran invite contemplation of the Word of God. Other features found in the mosques are clocks or schedules displaying the times of the five daily prayers and large rugs covering the floor. Many American mosques also have administrative offices.

Do Mosques have special rules?
Men and women should always dress conservatively, covering their arms and legs. Shorts for men and short skirts for women would be inappropriate. Shoes are always left at the entrance to the prayer area so as not to soil the rugs. Shelves are usually provided to hold shoes. Women may be asked to cover their hair. Many mosques have scarves on hand for visitors to borrow, but it is better to bring a head covering in case none are available.

Information provided by Sohail Khan, a spokesman for the Tawheed Center in Farmington Hills, which is holding its first ever open house this Saturday. See the story above.

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