

# Suburban mosques grow as congregations prosper

BY WAYNE PARRY  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

SOUTH BRUNSWICK, New Jersey (AP) — Just off one of the busiest highways in this rapidly growing suburb sits the new face of Islam in America.

The Islamic Society of Central Jersey's mosque is tucked away amid the pine trees and flowering pink dogwoods along the booming high-tech corridor leading into Princeton. Next door, huge concrete water main pipes lie on the side of the road, ready to be installed as part of a new housing development.

The mosque's expansive parking lots fill up with minivans and SUVs, disgorging parents and kids hurrying inside for worship between work and classes.

Scenes like this are playing out across the United States as Muslim communities spread out from the cities to the suburbs. Definitive statistics are hard to come by, but some Muslim leaders and sociologists, backed by anecdotal evidence, say the fastest growth of mosques is occurring in the suburbs.

That was also the conclusion of a 2001 nationwide study of mosques by the Council on American Islamic Relations. "This is more and more where Muslims are living," said Ishan Bagby, a professor at the University of Kentucky who conducted the study.

As was the case with waves of European, Asian and Latino immigrants in past decades, Muslim immigrants settled in the cities. As they established businesses and prospered, they — or more commonly, their children — moved to the suburbs.

"The Muslims are following the exact same pattern," Bagby said.

Out of 800 mosques surveyed, Bagby found that 77

percent of those in suburban locations grow by 10 percent just from 1999-2000, while 53 percent of urban mosques saw similar growth over that same period. The council plans a second study in 2005.

The suburban growth is not exclusive to Islam; major Christian and Jewish organizations also are growing in suburban areas as populations expand further from the urban core. But the growth among Muslim congregations has been dramatic.

At the Islamic Society of Central Jersey, many members are engineers, researchers or medical professionals who settled in the area in the 1970s and '80s to be close to well-paying jobs.

Now the \$1.2-million mosque has about 500 families as active members, most of them recent immigrant professionals who chose the suburbs over more established Muslim communities in New Jersey, such as Paterson or Jersey City. Its school has more than 200 students and a long waiting list.

"Not everyone wished to live and educate his kids in Jersey City," said the center's imam, Hamud Ahmad Chebli. "They spread out to different areas. Suburban Muslim families knew each other and put their money together and started local mosques."

Overall, no one knows exactly how many Muslims are in the United States — estimates vary dramatically, from roughly 4 million to 6 million. CAIR's study of mosques found 63 percent were still in urban areas.

The urban-suburban contrast is beginning to draw the attention of religious scholars and academics studying the growth of Islam in America.

Professor Sulayman Nyang, chairman of African studies at

Howard University in Washington, D.C., noted several principal differences between urban and suburban mosques.

While there are exceptions, he said the inner-city mosques tend to be predominantly African-American, more inward-looking and focused more intently on addressing neighborhood concerns like poverty, drug abuse and employment.

Those in the suburbs are more likely to be populated by immigrant Muslims from the Middle East or south Asia, with a keener interest in world affairs, particularly conditions in their countries of origin, he said.

Imam Johari Abdul-Malik, of the Dar Al-Hijrah mosque outside Washington in Falls Church, Va., said the growth of the suburban Muslim population in America was greatly influenced by State Department's decisions on which immigrants to accept as U.S. residents over the last three decades.

"They identified raw talent in the information technology industry, and quotas went out the window," he said. "As the Islamic experiment became successful, they wound up moving into the suburbs."

Abdul-Malik said the next logical step for the suburban Muslim community is one that has happened with other waves of immigrants — assimilation.

"America has become the crucible for Islam," he said. "The crucible is a container where you put an element, place it in the fire and heat it so that you burn away all but the pure element."

"The Pakistani and Sudanese and Somali and Afghan parts get burned off and you're left with American Muslims all standing in the same mosque, all praying together."

## COMMUNITY MESSENGER

Community Messenger runs Thursdays and features faith-based announcements from Oakland County on a space available basis. Please submit announcements by noon on the Friday prior to publication. Write: Beliefs & Values, Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009. Or, fax: (248) 644-1314

**Holy Name Parish**  
Monsignor John Zenz of Holy Name Parish will host the June Theology on Tap series at 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays at Dick O'Dowd's Irish Pub, 160 W. Maple Road in downtown Birmingham. On June 10, the topic is What Might Change? Our Church Going Forward. All are welcome. (248) 646-2244

**Franklin Community**  
The Franklin Community Co-Op Preschool, established in 1950, has openings in the 2's, 3's and 4's programs for the 2003/4 school year. The Co-Op provides a terrific opportunity to participate in your child's first school experience.

Call Marguerite Lampertius at (248) 626-6666, Ext. 26. The TCCP is in the heart of historic Franklin and is affiliated with the Franklin Community Church.  
**St. Anastasia**  
St. Anastasia Catholic Church presents Theology on Tap with the Rev. Ken Kucich from 7-9 p.m. Wednesdays in June at Maritelli's Restaurant, 18 and Rochester roads in Troy. On June 11, the topic is Why Be Jewish? Why Be Muslim? Why Be Christian? Interact with a panel including a priest, rabbi and Muslim. Suggested reading for the series is The Book of Revelation. (248) 699-8380

**North Hills**  
North Hills Church, 3150 N. Adams Road, Troy, is accepting registration for its summer camp program for children ages 3-5 years old. The sessions run June 16 to Aug. 15, consisting of three weeks such as "Garden Patch," "Magic Kingdom," and "Rumble in the Jungle." (248) 645-1811  
**Temple Beth El**

At 1 p.m. Tuesday, June 17, the Beth Elders, the senior arm of Temple Beth El, will present Cantor David Montefiore in *From Phantom To The Opera*. Music will include *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, and *The Student Prince*. The catered luncheon program is members \$10, guests \$12. Temple Beth El is located at 7400 Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Hills. (248) 352-5882 or (248) 354-9569

**B'nai Moshe**  
At 6 p.m. Friday, June 13, a relaxed, casual dress Kabbalat Shabbat service featuring musical instruments and contemporary as well as traditional Shabbat melodies will be held at Cong. B'nai Moshe, 6800 Drake Road, West Bloomfield. Free, drop-in, all welcome, light snacks. Future dates in this Shabbat Odyssey summer series: July 11 and Aug. 22. Each will be followed by a congregational supper (prepaid reservations required). (248) 788-0600 or e-mail cbbnif@bnaimoshe.org

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