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NAAZISH YARKHAN. WRITER. EDITOR. WRITING COACH. ACTIVIST. MOM

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THE TRUE SPIRIT OF RAMADAN – CHICAGO STYLE

Chicago's Muslim community is abuzz with activity in Ramadan. My hope is that learning of these efforts will encourage a cross pollination of ideas and spur similar activities and initiatives on your side of the globe. In a world where everything seems to be going wrong and misunderstandings and accusations abound, these efforts are a glimmer of hope. A reminder that "if it is to be, it's up to me."

GOOD DEEDS – LOCAL AND GLOBAL

UMMA Center (www.ummacenters.org) a nonprofit organization based in Waukegan, IL and IRIM (www.irim.org) (Interfaith Refugee Immigrant Ministries --a nonprofit refugee and immigrant services organization) also in Chicago, are coordinating a "Ramadan Adopt a Family Initiative."

"We are asking families, businesses, Sunday schools and playgroups to assist these disadvantaged refugee families by providing them basic household items and school supplies for their children," says Amina Khan, coordinator of the project. The majority of families are Muslim and handful, though not Muslim, are still in need of assistance. "We provide the family's name, number of members, age/gender of children, their contact information and a suggested shopping list

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mr. Stuff at the Tribune

with household items and school. You can either buy all or some of the items yourself. All items should be new and unopened.”

“We recommend home deliveries because they provide opportunities for Muslims to personally reach out to the refugee families,” says Khan. Busy families, however, can opt to have the items shipped or gift cards mailed. UMMAH and IRIM can assist with coordinating the deliveries as well.

“I think the "Ramadan Adopt a Family Initiative" is a great chance for Muslim youth and their families to help out their needy Muslim brothers and sisters in Chicagoland. During Ramadan, with Allah's blessing, the goodwill and reward will grow exponentially. And most importantly, InshAllah, this effort will help increase awareness about a neglected but very needy community – Chicagoland refugee families,” says Khan.

Islamic Relief goes where few others tread. “Cargo containers carrying 85 tons of aid -- including medical supplies, hygiene kits, powdered milk, baby formula and hand soap -- arrived in the port of Beirut over the weekend in a joint relief effort of Islamic Relief USA and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” The Press-Enterprise reported on Aug. 8, 2006. The Guardian attributes the organizations success to a key factor. “..its ability to work with other faith-based groups, such as Cafod and Jewish charities, means IR can operate in places that may be too dangerous for others. It is the only international non-governmental organization in Chechnya, and is the last left in Afghanistan.”

For the third consecutive year, Islamic Relief USA has been awarded with a 4-star rating by Charity Navigator, the largest charity evaluator in the United

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States. Less than 12% of the charities rated by Charity Navigator have received at least two consecutive 4-star evaluations. "A 4-star rating from Charity Navigator means your supporters can be assured that Islamic Relief is worthy of their trust and commitment," reads a note from Trent Stamp, Executive Director, Charity Navigator.

GOING INTER-FAITH

Just as important are the inter-faith efforts by mosques. Faith Lutheran Church in nearby Glen Ellyn, had a truck load of household goods being shipped to Mississippi for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Millions are still homeless and many displaced there. Mosques and Muslim Schools are joining hands with Faith Lutheran Church to help fill that truck with everything from Vaseline to pain medication and diapers.

Cardinal George and Catholics of the Archdiocese of Chicago have also accepted an invitation extended by the Muslim community to attend an Iftaar on October 9 at a brand new mosque in Orland Park, IL. Leaders of both communities are expected at this by-invitation only event with approximately 200 people in attendance.

Chicago's Islamic Council's Inter-faith Committee Chair, Dr. Shakir Moiduddin recalled Cardinal George's kind assistance when Orland Park residents opposed the building of the mosque. "The Cardinal wrote to the Mayor of Orland Park saying that not only was permitting the building of the mosque a moral and ethical obligation but the law of the land," says Dr. Shakir Moiduddin.

Dominican University will host a series of ongoing

local parish-mosque dialogues through the month of Ramadan and into the winter. Sister Joan McGuire, Dr. Shakir Moiduddin and the members of the Catholic-Muslim Dialogue will also hold their bi-monthly dialogue at the Priory Campus so that the Dominican University community and its neighbors may both observe and participate. The Catholic-Muslim Dialogue, which has been meeting for nine years, is co-sponsored by the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. The topic of discussion will be "Encountering Each Other: An Experience of Catholic-Muslim Dialogue".

Dr. Shakir Moiduddin encourages parents to invite their children's schools, both public and private, to tours of Masjids as part of their social studies curriculum. Mosque tours are not uncommon and we look forward to opening up mosques even further, he said.

LEARNING ABOUT THE FAITH

We're going high-tech. With gas prices so high and time at an all time premium, what better way to learn up on Islam than via teleconference. Farheen Farook, a local resident, calls into a free teleconference service and types in a specific code as do others interested in her lecture. Into the phone she speaks, relaying her message, her teachings, to women calling from anywhere in the US. Alternatively, there are a multitude of online lectures to heard. Audio files are <http://www.sacredlearning.com/>. The speaker, Shaik Hussain Sattar, a 33 year old physician, father and Islamic teacher is a personal favorite of mine. His words are clear, his wisdom immense and he has the capacity to touch us at the deepest level.

DePaul University's Islamic World Studies Program, in collaboration with the EastWest Institute and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs are hosting a series of town hall meetings, one each year in September, followed by small continuing dialogues in the winter and spring, that engage critical issues in Islam. By discussing important issues regarding Islam in a town hall meeting format, the aim is to foster a continuing dialogue that extends beyond the conferences and into the homes, businesses, and schools of the American public. This format will serve as a template for expanding public discourse about Islam across the country. The overall goal is to help open a door where all of us can reduce and prevent misconceptions in our communities by providing information and new insights that emerge from conversation.

PARENTS TAKE RAMADAN TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“We put together a basket with chocolates, fruit preserves and food items mentioned in the Quran including olives, olive oil and dates and tied a related Ayat to each of the items and gifted it to our teachers and administrators. They loved it!” says Sameena Basha, a former resident of IL. They shared the idea with Hindu parents at school who emulated the idea for Diwali !

Muslim parents at my child’s school host a Ramadan lunch for staff with food catered from restaurants that teachers are familiar with or like!, adds Saera Arain, Oakbrook, IL

Asma Jarad, Glendale Heights, IL tells of Muslim parents in their school running a book collection drive. “We bought story books about Muslim Characters and some non-fiction about Islam and donated it to the school library. They appreciated the

gesture because it helped build our collection and we did a little bit to spread some information on Islam.” Donations of books about Muslims, both fiction and non-fiction, to Public Libraries are also very appreciated.

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