A MESSAGE FROM SHAYKH NOMAAN BAIG
APRIL 2018

Since announcing IOK’s Chaplaincy Initiative in January 2015, we’ve made tremendous strides by God’s grace. The hard work of our chaplains, Shaykh Jamaal Diwan and Shaykha Muslema laid the foundation for the addition of a third chaplain in Shaykh Ahmad AlKurdy, and in 2017, the addition of five more chaplains, Shaykh Suhail Mulla, Shaykh Shahid Ali, Shaykh Jameel Besada, Hafidh Asim Billoo and Ustadha Yafa Aweinat.

The effort of all our esteemed chaplains helped increase the campuses served from one at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) to three more regional campuses; the University of Southern California (USC), the University of California Irvine (UCI), and the University of California Riverside (UCR), to a total of eight in 2017, with the addition of Cal State Long Beach (CSULB), Cal Poly Pomona (CPP), University of California San Diego (UCSD) and California State University, Northridge (CSUN).

The program has grown by leaps and bounds to offer a welcoming and
spiritually-cultivating environment for students on and off campus. The team has reached hundreds of students through various modalities such as individual consultations, roundtable discussions, educational seminars, and outreach efforts. The chaplains have collaborated with other religious life departments on campus and have worked with different faith communities to raise awareness, build bridges, and forge an encouraging atmosphere for individual and collective devotional connections. This was done by appealing to each student seeking to strengthen their belief, understanding, and practice of their responsibilities toward the Divine and to each other.

For the past three years, we sustained this Chaplaincy Initiative internally with minimal community support. Moving forward in 2018, we require full community-wide support to make this Chaplaincy Initiative a permanent program. Thus we seek your generosity in meeting our 2018 Chaplaincy budget of $250,000 to serve the 8 campus communities of UCLA, USC, UCI, UCR, UCSD, CSUN, CSULB, and CPP.

We have a lot to commemorate and be thankful for; but know that this is just the beginning of many more fruitful outcomes, God willing. We’d like to thank each one of our chaplains for their dedication to their respective campus communities and their commitment to upholding the religious aspirations of those they serve. We ask the All Generous to bless them in every aspect of their lives and pray that He continues to favor us all with guidance, benevolence, and service to Him and His creation. On behalf of my co-board members, Taher Dadabhoy and Imtiaz Mohammady, I’d like to express our deepest gratitude to all the IOK Chaplains for all that they’ve done. We are excited to continue in this endeavor with them and beseech The Almighty for sincerity and success in all that we do.

Sincerely, on behalf of my co-board members Taher Dadabhoy & Imtiaz Mohammady,

Nomaan Baig
Founding Director
WHAT’S NEW IN IOK CHAPLAINCY?

This has been a year of immense growth for our program. When we started in early 2015, our vision was to eventually see chaplains serving all the major educational institutions in the region. This year we have nearly reached that goal, but there is still much growth and improvement to undertake. Throughout the summer last year, a number of opportunities presented themselves, allowing us to expand our services to include eight chaplains and eight campuses (listed below). This was a huge step, and we have spent this past year keeping track of these developments, ensuring the team is on the same page, and working together to best serve the needs of the students at the various campuses. We are also continuing our efforts in furthering our understanding of the field of chaplaincy and determining how we can uphold the best of what the field has to offer.

WHAT IS CHAPLAINCY & WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A chaplain is generally a faith-based person who provides spiritual care and support to individuals who are in secular environments such as prisons, hospitals, universities, and the armed forces. The word itself actually comes from the Latin word for a cloak, and part of the metaphor of chaplaincy is the imagery of “cloaking” someone in the care and support they need in order to work through the various challenges they may be going through.

The primary emphasis of chaplaincy is on Pastoral Care. The idea of pastoral care comes from the concept of the spiritual caregiver as “Pastor,” the one who takes the sheep out to the pasture to graze, and cares for them on that journey. Although these terms are ones that are commonly used in an American socio-cultural context, they are not always well-known in
the Muslim community. The idea of pastoral care is completely in line with our tradition because we know from our beloved Messenger that God did not send a Messenger except he worked as a shepherd, a pastor. Certainly there is divine wisdom in that decree and there are specific qualities one learns as a shepherd/pastor that are necessary for the prophetic missions, such as patience, tolerance, attention, bravery, and self-sufficiency.

We know from our tradition that our beloved Messenger served many different roles in his life. He was a teacher, an advisor, a caregiver, and a shepherd to his people. This is essentially what the role of chaplaincy is about. The Chaplain may serve as an educator, a friend, and a mentor, but throughout it all, he is a constant and regular source of spiritual upliftment and nourishment for those served.

This role is critical because the challenges faced by Muslim students on college campuses are immense. Regardless of religious or cultural background, college is a time of great upheaval, and for Muslims it can be extra challenging. For many, it is their first time away from home and their first time being introduced to a world of concepts and ideas that have not directly challenged them up to that point. In short, it’s a time when we as a community need to be there for them. The challenges are not ones that can be solved or properly faced through online videos, but rather require in-person attention over extended periods of time. That is what this program seeks to provide.
OUR DREAM FOR THE REGION

MISSION
To provide spiritual care, guidance, and education, based on traditional sources of understanding and living Islam, to Muslim students on university campuses.

VISION
To see a region where Muslim chaplains are serving all of the major educational institutions and working to develop and support generations of young Muslim professionals who are well-grounded in their faith and capable of giving back to their communities and society - intellectually, spiritually, and professionally.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES
• To provide regular opportunities for spiritual care and guidance to college students through weekly in-person office hours and consultation through phone calls and email.

• To provide regular religious education to college students based on traditional sources, while remaining relevant to their realities through on-campus classes and study circles.

• To build relationships with students that reach beyond the boundaries of their campuses and to connect them to the larger Muslim community.

• To mentor and support students in their academic, professional, ethical, and spiritual development.

• To advise student organizations in their decisions and programming, while not interfering with their autonomy and self-determination.
OUR
CHAPLAINS
AND THE
CAMPUSES
THEY SERVE

SHAYKH
JAMAAL DIWAN
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Jamaal Diwan was born and raised in Southern California. His mother is from Newfoundland, Canada and his father from Karachi, Pakistan. He grew up in a household that strongly emphasized good manners, sports, and education. Most of his childhood was filled with playing basketball, studying, and spending time with friends. He did not grow up as a Muslim and it was not until he was a sophomore at UCSD that he accepted Islam at the age of 19. His journey was a combination of multiple influences including Underground Hip-Hop, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, reading the Quran, and meeting Muslims on campus. Slightly before his last year at UCSD he married his wife, Muslema Purmul. He graduated from UCSD with a BA in Third World Studies and a minor in Psychology. After finishing, they both went to Egypt where they studied off and on for the better part of the next 7 years. At the end of that journey, he finished the equivalent of a law degree in Sharia from al-Azhar University in Cairo and nearly completed an MA in Islamic Studies from the American University in Cairo. He thereafter served as Religious Director for the Muslim American Society Greater Los Angeles.
Muslema Purmul was born in Raleigh, North Carolina and raised in San Diego, California. Her parents are originally from Afghanistan and they came to the US in the early 80s. She graduated from the University of California, San Diego, with a double major in Religious Studies and Middle Eastern Studies. During those years she served at varying capacities in MSA UCSD as well as MSA West. After graduating, she left to study in Egypt where she spent the better part of the next 7 years. She completed the bachelor’s program in Sharia from al-Azhar University in Cairo and also completed almost two years of graduate work at the American University in Cairo in Islamic Studies. She also attended the International Union of Muslim Scholars “Future Scholars Program” while she was studying in Cairo. Afterwards she transitioned into the blessed stage of motherhood. Recently she served as the Young Muslims Program Director at the Islamic Center of Irvine, where she provided support, religious education, and leadership for programming related to youth and young professionals. She has taught classes and spoken nationally and internationally about issues related to Islamic law and ethics in a variety of different settings including conferences, retreats, universities, libraries, and mosques. Currently she serves the Muslim students at UCI and USC as a chaplain with Institute of Knowledge and is the Co-Founder and Scholar-in-Residence at Safa Center for Research and Education.
Ahmad AlKurdy is an alumnus of the Islamic University of Medina with a BA from the Faculty of Law. He received his formal training in the study of Islam and the Arabic language in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Southern California. He was raised in the San Fernando Valley, and is a former student of the University of California at Riverside. While studying abroad, he regularly returned home and served the local community in LA County, Orange County and the Inland Empire. He has served the community in multiple capacities and has been a regular guest speaker and lecturer at numerous Islamic Centers, colleges and events. After spending ten years in the Prophet’s City of Medina, he returned home to Southern California and joined the Institute of Knowledge (IOK) in Diamond Bar as an Instructor in the Seminary Program, as well as a University Chaplain. He is also an Instructor and Faculty Member for the New Muslim Academy (NMA).

Shaykh Suhail Hasan Mulla is a native Angeleno, proudly born and raised. He earned his Bachelor’s Degree in African-American Studies from CSUN, his Master’s in Social Welfare from UCLA and another Bachelor’s Degree in Shari’ah (Islamic Law) from the world’s preeminent Islamic seminary – Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. He also completed a two-year Islamic Studies program at Al-Asheera Al-Muhammadiya in Cairo, Egypt, where he studied privately with numerous Azhari scholars.

Shaykh Suhail has worked as a social worker in LAUSD, served as an Imam at the Islamic Society of Orange County, and has served as Interim Executive Director and Director of Mental Health at Access California Services. He has served on various Interfaith Councils in Greater LA and believes that dialogue
is essential in fostering harmony and cooperation between different racial and religious communities. He is also an advocate of the integration of spirituality and mental health and serves as a member of the LA Department of Mental Health’s Clergy Roundtable Project. Shaykh Suhail currently serves as Resident Scholar at the Islamic Society of West Valley. He also serves as the Muslim Chaplain at both UCLA and CSUN. He resides in Los Angeles with his wife and four children. He is a student of the outdoors and enjoys hiking, camping, backpacking, woodworking, and gardening in his free time.

SHAYKH JAMEEL BESADA
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Born and raised in Southern California, Jameel Besada converted to Islam in 2003. He graduated from UCSD in 2007 with a major in Spanish Literature and minor in International Migration Studies. Thereafter he traveled to the Prophet’s city of Madinah to study at the Islamic University of Madinah where he graduated from the College of Shariah in 2017. He is currently serving as the Associate Religious Director at the Islamic Society of Corona-Norco (ISCN) and also serves with the Institute of Knowledge (IOK) as a Seminary Instructor and an Associate Chaplain serving the Muslim student community at Cal State University of Long Beach (CSULB).

SHAYKH SHAHID ALI
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Shaykh Shahid Ali was born and raised in Southern California. Currently he is the Islamic Society of Orange County’s (ISOC) Educational and Youth Director as well as an instructor at California Islamic University (CIU). He graduated from the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo with a Bachelor’s Degree from the College of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language. He also holds a Master’s degree in Electrical Engineering from California State University, Long Beach and a B.S. from California State University, Pomona, and currently is pursuing a Master’s in the
Born and raised in Arizona and Southern California, Yafa Aweinat has been teaching the recitation, memorization, and meaning of the Qur’an in many different capacities for the last decade. She completed the memorization of the Quran in 2009 and since then has continued her study of the science of tajweed and the different recitations of the Quran under various teachers. In 2011 she graduated from the Bayyinah Dream program which focused on learning Quranic Arabic. Yafa also completed her BA in Ethnic and Women’s Studies from Cal Poly Pomona in 2012.

Having grown up in a religiously and ethnically diverse family, Yafa is passionate about sharing the message of Islam and has worked in the field of dawah with organizations like WhyIslam for the past fifteen years. She is particularly passionate about connecting with young Muslims and has taught at youth groups, MSAs, and special youth-tailored events. She has also given lectures, conducted workshops, and planned specialized events for women in Southern California. Yafa currently teaches at the Islamic Institute of Orange County, the Islamic Center of Claremont, and the New Muslim Academy. She serves as an Associate Chaplain with Shaykh Ahmad Alkurdy at the University of California Riverside (UCR), and is also an Instructor with the IOK Seminary.

Asim Billoo was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Growing up, he was blessed to be in a family-oriented household with emphasis on Islamic morals, values, and education. Asim’s journey began when he moved to Sacramento to pursue an Islamic education. After graduating from
Darul Uloom al Islamiyah Sacramento, he returned to Los Angeles to pursue a double major in Psychology and Radiography. In the meantime, Asim picked up snowboarding and fitness as his go-to recreational activities. During these years, he served local Muslim communities by delivering khutbahs and working with youth groups at King Fahad Masjid in Culver City and Islamic Center Reseda.

After graduating, Asim got married and specialized in Radiation Oncology at City of Hope National Medical Center. At the same time, he was driven to further nurture his interest in the Arabic language locally with Shaykh Suhail Mulla, and he continued his study of Islamic sciences with Shaykh Ibrahim Qureshi and Shaykh Taha Khan. Asim later got a job at Northridge Hospital as a Radiation Oncology Therapist and trained in hospital chaplaincy.

Eight years later, Asim was presented with the opportunity to pursue his Master’s in Medical Dosimetry and began his career at the University of California San Diego. Here he started to volunteer his time by leading various halaqas and lectures through MSA at UCSD. While working closely with MSA, Asim decided to take on Pastoral Care Specialist training. He currently resides with his wife and three children in Carmel Valley and serves as an Associate Chaplain with the Institute of Knowledge (IOK).
In the general field of chaplaincy, service providers are expected to have completed a seminary education as well as a specialized program in chaplaincy that includes academic and field work. In the Muslim community, it is not uncommon to find chaplains having the chaplaincy training but not the seminary training. This is largely due to lack of resources and our more recent entry into the field as compared to those from Jewish or Christian backgrounds.

In the case of our chaplains, we have people who have completed some level of seminary education but lack the same professional chaplaincy training. We try to supplement this through partnerships with other organizations, seeking the consistent counsel and help of mental health professionals, and by continuing our internal trainings.

In our program, we look for two major things in our chaplains. The first is a strong seminary background, basically people who have studied Islam formally and traditionally and are qualified to pass that on to those whom they serve. The second is that they themselves have graduated from local universities and can relate directly to the experiences of the students they serve. We believe that these two qualities enable our chaplains to connect, understand, and appropriately aid in the various challenges that students deal with.
THE FOCUS OF OUR WORK

We draw the main areas of focus of our work from a set of descriptions of the Messenger, repeated in several places in the Quran. One of those places is verse 62:2:

“It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error –”

In this verse, God mentions three major tasks of the blessed Messenger: guidance, spiritual care, and education. These are the main areas we focus on in the IOK Chaplaincy Initiative.

SPIRITUAL CARE & GUIDANCE

These are very personal matters, so the bulk of what the chaplains do in this regard is through weekly office hours on each campus. Students who would like to speak to the chaplains about any issue that may be concerning them can book a time and discuss whatever they would like, in an environment of compassion and confidentiality. Conversations have ranged from family to marriage to school to advice on living by the teachings of Islam. These opportunities for dedicated support and attention are what the core of the work is about and where the best relationships with the students are built. In fact, the hours are not limited to only when people have major issues or crises,
but some students schedule on a weekly or every-other-week basis, simply to sit and talk in general and spend time together. In addition, the chaplains are available by phone and email. This allows them to be more easily reached in case of any urgent issues that come up. It also allows an added layer of privacy, which some have found useful when asking about issues where they need advice, but do not want the chaplains to know who they are.

In 2015 we had roughly 250 one-on-one student office-hour sessions. In 2016 we had roughly 675 sessions. In 2017- April 2018 we have had roughly 1,365 sessions.
The core of our educational support to Muslims on campuses is in the form of weekly study circles and general lectures. The approach in these circles is up to the individual chaplain’s discretion, based on the student needs, in consultation with the students being served. The idea is to engage this demographic by benefiting from our rich scholarly tradition in a way that is conducive to the students’ daily lives, making Islam a living experience. We have utilized our traditional academic training in selecting appropriate topics. We have relied on works of Muslim scholars, past and present, local and international. Some of the material used is produced by contemporary Western Muslim academics, while other material is more classical and considered to be part of basic Islamic Studies, such as the life of the Messenger and the collection of Nawawi on Prophetic Traditions.

These sessions are held weekly at each campus. Sometimes they are switched with other sessions if there is an urgent need to do so. One example would be when Shaykh Suhail used his weekly study circle time to address the topic of Mental Health in Islam.

Another way that education happens on campus with the students informally is in the context of office hours or just spending time around campus. Sometimes there is more educational impact in the informal conversations and gatherings than the classes.

The last major educational component to our presence on campus is guest lectures. This
happens in two different ways. The first is when students on campus host events themselves and invite us to speak. The second is when the chaplains are invited by the university to speak to their classes. An example of this would be Shaykh Suhail being invited to speak to an introductory class on Islam offered at UCLA or Shaykh Jamaal being invited to speak to a Masters level class on Social Work at Cal State Fullerton.

**CAMPUS OUTREACH**

This area of work includes both interfaith work and general campus outreach to administration, staff, and professors. The interfaith communities are natural allies for the Muslims on campus and where the opportunities arise, the chaplains work to develop relationships of mutual respect and understanding. In addition, there are many other factors that affect Muslim student life on campus, where the role of the chaplains becomes important. Students and student organizations are able to build these relationships as well, but they are always in flux. The position of the chaplain allows for some stability in relationship building, which is very important for developing influence over time. In our roles, we meet with campus administration, faculty, staff, and other groups to improve student life for Muslims on campus.
We believe the primary way Islam has been passed from generation to generation throughout the years is through personal relationships. As simple as it sounds, these relationships are not always easy to build in a time when people are more accustomed to dealing with one another from behind screens rather than in person. This is an area of the work that is hard to quantify, but it is critically important. We must spend time with one another and we must create opportunities as a community for our youth to spend time with those who have traveled the roads they are traveling and can provide insight and perspective for them. This is a role that we take seriously and we are all so grateful for the wonderful and inspiring young people we have had the opportunity to get to know through this aspect.
“In an age of heightened secularism, I truly believe the most urgent task of our times — in this particular moment in history for Western Muslims — is to build young people to carry the vision of this Deen and internalize it as Truth. These young people need support that can counter the challenges and paradoxes of the hegemonic “millennials generation.” Chaplaincy is an institutional commitment to that task of focusing on young people in their formative years, spiritually and intellectually. Chaplaincy, in its essence, is about developing an intimate trust between our scholars and our students in reengaging with the Deen in a way that is personal. Our scholars become mentors. I know of no other organization that truly understands the importance of patiently working on developing critical, practicing, and exceptional young Muslims. While most organizations are thinking in the present, IOK’s chaplaincy project is already thinking ten to fifty years down the line. That to me, is visionary. That to me, is Prophetic.”

— Yasmeen Azam | CSULB
“IOK chaplaincy has been a tremendous blessing for me and my fellow peers. I often come across college students from other cities who do not have something similar. We as a Muslim community need to combine our resources and allow for this service to thrive and benefit students all across California and for future generations to come.

Islam, at times, is taught in a manner that does not properly reflect the sunnah of our beloved Prophet.

The Chaplains, on the other hand, embody the prophetic character encouraging us to ask questions and answering those very questions with peace, love, and mercy.

This service is not merely for us, it is for the future generations of Muslim students that will come after. Investing in this program is investing in them.”

— Maaz Amla | UCI
“I am currently a senior at UC Irvine and have been involved in the MSA space for all four years of my undergraduate career. Over the years I have been able to witness a beautiful evolving young Muslim American community. But with its evolution, there are some clear and common core foundational issues I have experienced that the chaplaincy program helps to alleviate. The first, MSA spaces and spaces with young Muslims, in general, have become heavily influenced by Western paradigms. Either consciously or unconsciously, young folks are internalizing secular frameworks from which to view and understand the world. College campuses are intellectual war zones that can create inherently secular dogmatic cultures, therefore the need for Islamically grounded spiritual guidance is ever so necessary. Second, many younger folks enter college having grown up on an Islamic curriculum consisting of passed down cultural-religious practices within the home coupled with Sunday School programs at the masjid. Many college students have not had proper exposure to Islam nor been in spaces where they can access Islam in a meaningful way.

Chaplaincy changes this. For one, chaplaincy provides spaces for young Muslims to engage with their religion in a deep and thoughtful way. Whether it be through halaqas or office hours I find that I am able to access Islamic knowledge and answers to larger questions I have every week, if not every day. The beautiful thing about IOK’s chaplaincy program which enables it to be so effective is that the chaplains themselves are deeply literate and aware of a variety of social-political issues impacting society, therefore the chaplains are
able to properly respond to students needs and can provide relevant answers to their questions.

Chaplaincy also allows for young Muslims to see Islam lived. One of the things I love the most about chaplaincy is that I am able to see mercy in action through the character and behavior of our chaplains and spiritual teachers. They teach me, indirectly, how to live Islam from basic adab to how to move through the world using an Islamic framework. These key things: making Islam accessible, not just physically, but socially and intellectually; modeling what Islam looks like; and helping students create an Islamic framework to move through the world are all essential to building people. Over the course of the three years that I have been utilizing the chaplaincy program, I have seen it build me in many many ways. And that’s the hard thing about programs like chaplaincy, you can’t measure its impact, but you can slowly see people being built. And when we invest in building people we are investing in building our community.”

— Bushra Bangee | UCI
“IOK chaplaincy initiative is about the future of Islam in our community and is one of the most important initiatives in Southern California. At the end of the day, well-adjusted individuals build thriving communities and IOK’s chaplaincy program helps preserve and build individuals with sound Islamic identities. It provides support for Muslim students to navigate intellectual, spiritual, and social challenges in secular academic environments. Often times, we face questions in academic settings that make us question our Islamic identities. If these questions are not dealt with carefully, it can cause serious damage to our understanding and practice of Islam. Due to the nature of these questions, most students don’t feel comfortable seeking help in our communities from individuals they can’t relate to or don’t know. The chaplaincy program provides students access to individuals who possess sound Islamic knowledge and can connect with them to provide mentorship and spiritual guidance. Personally, as graduate students at USC, my wife and I have benefitted immensely from the mentorship and guidance of Sheikh Jamaal and Shaykha Muslema and I personally urge you to please help IOK in providing our youth with the resources to deal with the pressures of college life. I pray Allah blesses this effort and everyone who is a part of it and has supported it in any way. Ameen.”

— Ahsan Javed | USC
“We are deeply honored and profoundly grateful to welcome Shaykh Jamaal and Shaykha Muslema to the University of Southern California as our Muslim Chaplains. In this capacity, they will provide pastoral care and spiritual counseling, mentor graduate and undergraduate students, support programs and events, and cultivate and inspire a vibrant Muslim community on campus. Given their extraordinary breadth of knowledge and experience, their presence on campus will immeasurably enrich our entire university campus. Furthermore, by serving as Muslim Chaplains and by being staff members in the Office of Religious Life, they will not only be advocates and ambassadors at USC, but will also have the opportunity to help shape regional, national, and global discourses about Islam.”

— Varun Soni | Dean of Religious Life USC
“From the minute I entered Institute of Knowledge, I was welcomed wholeheartedly. Each teacher has a unique style of teaching that allows one to absorb the beauty of Islam through the Prophetic tradition and immersion of Islamic texts. The scholars at IOK work to solidify one’s foundation and understanding of Islam. I am grateful to be a seminary student and individual who is able to benefit from such esteemed scholars. It is truly a blessing.”

— Sarah Rahman
3rd year Seminary Student

Sarah is pursuing a Master’s of Science degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from CSUF. She received a Bachelor’s degree in Gender Studies from UCLA and works for ICNA Relief’s Domestic Violence Shelter as a case manager.

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“IOK is a pioneering institution in terms of bringing relevance and vitality to our great Islamic tradition. Its chaplaincy initiative is reaching our youth on a growing number of colleges campuses, helping them to cultivate a strong Islamic identity. That is why I say, “IOK is A-OK!”

— Imam Zaid Shakir
Co-Founder Zaytuna College