

Al-Ahad Madressa Annual Report

2013-14 Academic Years

We are pleased to report many accomplishments over this madressa year, *alhamdulillah*:

New Curriculum: Following on the decisions of the prior administration, we adopted the Sirat curriculum developed by the Brampton community. This is a more kid-friendly series of books that covers all the topics in deeniyat. Response overall appears positive, the series provides a solid basic syllabus at all levels, and we are likely to use it again in the coming year.

Madressa PTA: To foster better communication and sharing amongst community members, and to increase the sense of investment and involvement in the educational life of our youth, we have established a parent group. The aims of this parent group are to develop more vigorous and creative discussion about the aims and needs of madressa, to support the parents in sharing their concerns and needs, and to assist the madressa administration in obtaining help and resources as necessary.

eMaktab: We adopted the eMaktab school management system for online management of registrations, contact information, class grouping, grading, and other information housing. The intent is to streamline our preservation of records of all kinds and to foster better communication with the parents and community.

Field Trips: We have sought to extend students' learning and appreciation for their faith beyond the mere teaching of the traditional areas of Islamic learning, e.g., fiqh, Qur'an, and so forth. Our Fall field trip was a visit to the Wild lands Conservancy to foster appreciation for the creation of Almighty God, and included a nature walk and a visit with some of the live animals housed at the conservancy. In the coming months, we will also be visiting the Metropolitan Museum in New York City to give the older students a chance to explore the Islamic art section, and the younger students will visit Bethlehem's Banana Factory for a tour and a guided lesson in creating their own Islamic art.

Islamic Art Club: To develop an appreciation for and skill in Islamic art, we created an Islamic Art Club which meets every Wednesday. The club has attracted a handful of dedicated individuals, including a Christian pastor from a local church. Our objective is to develop the skill necessary to begin making artistic contributions to our mosque building.

Youth Interfaith: We invited the youth group of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church from nearby Fogelsville, PA, for an interfaith event with a number of youth from Al-Ahad. We provided the visitors with a tour of our center, a youth-directed sharing activity, a lively conversation between the parents of the two communities, and a delicious East African lunch. St. John's has offered to arrange a similar reception at their church for our youth.

Lunchtime Presentations: In response to the need to get our young people involved, to develop a greater sense of pride and accomplishment, and to provide practice in public speaking, we have instituted lunchtime presentations. Students, groups, or classes volunteer to deliver a short talk on a project they have completed or a topic of interest.

Mash'Allah Tickets: We have established a means of supporting positive student behavior. When a student is noticed performing a good deed, a teacher can give them one "Mash'Allah ticket", which is then put into a box. Once a month we draw from the tickets during lunchtime presentations and students can win fun educational prizes.

Computer Technology: With funds from a generous grant by the Africa Federation, we have upgraded our learning technology with the purchase of eight laptop computers and three desktop computers, in addition to two tablets we purchased last year. We hope to deliver teacher trainings in the coming months to provide students with more dynamic and student-driven learning opportunities and projects.

Eid Celebration: The Eid celebrations were managed differently this year; we set aside a day of instruction in which the teachers created various stations to learn about the three Eids of Adha, Ghadeer, and Mubahila. The event was highly interactive and educational, and most importantly generated a great deal of enthusiasm.

Islamic Knowledge Fair: Students were given the opportunity along with their families to develop their own individual project based on an Islamic topic of interest. The day was a celebration of Islamic learning, and community members generously donated prizes which rewarded the students for their efforts.

Qur'an Initiative: We are piloting a new Qur'an curriculum from an online learning resource called *Understand Qur'an Academy*, which provides video instruction and course book curriculum covering pronunciation, alphabet, writing, grammar, vocabulary, tajwid, and other topics. In the coming months we will determine the effectiveness of this program and make decisions about Qur'an curriculum in the coming year.

Library: With a generous donation of an anonymous scholar, we have remodeled one of our classrooms to serve as a community library. With approximately 1,000 volumes to start, the library will serve an important role in providing more independent learning opportunities to our young people and adults alike.

Areas of Critical Focus in 2014-15:

More Efficient Use of Volunteer Hours: At present, we cannot support the number of volunteers we are using at the school, and their time is badly used, with volunteers coming in for only 40 minute slots in some cases.

Schedule Changes: Along with the above, we are going to look at creating two longer class periods and a jamaat namaz period which will include student-directed speeches, presentations and announcements.

Lunch Changes: In accord with the concerns of parents, students, and mosque administration, we will be doing away with the lunch program we've had for some years. The lunches are expensive, require even more valuable volunteer time, and do not fulfill the nutritional or other needs of students and families.

Concentrated Focus on Adolescents and Teens: This is the most important area of focus for the coming year. We will be 'starting over' with the youth and giving them the space and time to create their own pathways of learning in areas of need and interest. We will focus on age-appropriate learning for these students who have long been neglected in favor of the younger learners.

Qur'an Initiative: Our in-house Qur'an curriculum has been found to be ineffective, students at the highest levels still struggle with recitation, they have low awareness of Arabic grammar or accurate pronunciation, and they do not possess the basic vocabulary to understand the rich heritage of Qur'an and supplications so critical to the Shi'a tradition.

Fundraising: The madressa has been running at a deficit for some years, and has operated at a greater deficit because of some of the important initiatives we've taken on this year. An important goal for this year, in cooperation with the parent group, will be to develop funding streams beyond the low tuition charged for participation in madressa.

Teacher Development: We need to offer students more dynamic and contemporary learning opportunities like some of those provided in their regular day-schools. Along those lines, we will cancel madressa for certain Sundays in the coming year during which volunteers will be expected to attend development sessions.

