

Women are an Integral Part of the Islamic Society of Central Jersey

By Dr. Sogra Saleem (ISCJ Founding Member, Current Member of Board of Overseer, past Member of the Board of Directors, Noor-Ul-Iman Schools and past Member of the ISCJ Board of Trustees)

At the Annual General Body Meeting on April 15, 2012 members of the Islamic Society of Central Jersey (ISCJ) elected new Trustees and Overseers. Two weeks later on April 30, 2012 the new Board of Trustees met and elected the executive committee to run the ISCJ. For the first time in the 37-year history of ISCJ, a female Sr. Atiya Aftab, was elected ISCJ'S Chairperson. Sr. Atiya Aftab is not only the first woman to hold this leadership position, she is also the first second generation Muslim American to lead a burgeoning organization like the ISCJ as its Chairperson.

Sr. Atiya is one of the early graduates of ISCJ weekend school who chose to be involved with ISCJ activities from a very young age. An attorney by profession, Sr. Atiya has served over 15 years as a Trustee, as an Overseer and has volunteered her time and talent generously to several ISCJ committees. She has served as the Secretary of ISCJ Board for several years with distinction and has led the ISCJ as its Acting President and Chairperson in the absence of the President and Chairperson. Sr. Atiya is renowned for her work ethic and meticulous attention to details. Sr. Atiya is an inspiration to young Muslim Americans.

Beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s, there have been other women who have served ISCJ Board selflessly and with distinction. Sr. Azra Shahidi followed by Sr. Raafat Ahmad and Sr. Atyaat El-Saady served the ISCJ as Trustees and Sr. Aziza Badr as an Overseer. These women have retired from the ISCJ community.

In the 1990's Sr. Sogra Saleem and Sr. Nadia Younes served as Trustees. Other women such as Sr. Fatima Aziz, Sr. Afaf Fayoumy, Sr. Reem Fakhry, Sr. Uzma Mehmood, Sr. Sadia Ansari, Sr. Azra Ahmed and Sr. Durriya Asghar worked as Overseers and Sr. Naheed Rehmat as a Trustee. Many of these sisters are still active in different ISCJ committees and some have served the Board in the recent past.

Following Sr. Atiya's lead several other second-generation sisters are serving the ISCJ in several important capacities. Sr. Dalya Youssef has served the ISCJ as an Overseer and a Trustee. Sr. Rabia Saeed and Sr. Azra Baig, Sr. Rabia Ahmed recently finished their terms as Overseers. Sr. Omayma Mansour served as a Trustee and Sr. Mona Abdala was an Overseer in the past. Sr. Mona is currently a full-time teacher, and Sr. Omayma a part-time teacher at the Noor-ul-Iman School.

In April 2014, there was another milestone in the history of women at ISCJ. There were two women, Sr. Tabassum Khan and Sr. Heba Macksoud elected for the position of Trustee with three vacancies to be filled. That made a total of three women to serve as Trustee in a given year. Not only that Sr. Tabassum Khan, CPA will hold the position of Treasurer as a woman for the first time.

Besides those named, there are several other women who have served the committees tirelessly and continue to do so. ISCJ acknowledges and appreciates their contributions to its success. Most of these women are wives and working mothers; there are a few who are young and pursuing higher education. The professions of women who serve the ISCJ include physicians, lawyers, educators, social workers, accountants, nutritionists, office workers and nurses.

Twenty-three women have served the ISCJ either as Trustee or Overseer in ISCJ's 39-year history.

Currently, the overwhelming majority of the teachers at ISCJ Weekend School and full-time Noor-Ul-Iman School are women. It is very gratifying to see that women take a great pride in choosing teaching as their vocation. Other than teachers, there are only a few women who join the ISCJ committees. ISCJ has 21 committees and I am confident that women can find the committee that is commensurate with their talent and become part of that committee. By volunteering, a sister not only helps ISCJ but also enriches her own life. Please volunteer and serve Islam and be rewarded by Allah subhana wa ta'ala. You may inspire and be a role model to your own children, and those of your friends.

I encourage all the sisters of ISCJ, young and not so young to get involved. It is my earnest hope that more sisters follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, seek elective office, join committees, and take the ISCJ to new heights.

May Allah subhana wa ta'ala bless and guide the ISCJ community.

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