

# Ramadan traditions making a welcome return after a two-year hiatus

By Ayman Oweida

In 2020, Ramadan came at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the lockdown in full swing, Muslims in the Eastern Townships could not establish important Ramadan traditions including congregational prayers and multi-family Iftars (Arabic term for meal of breaking the fast). In 2021, the imposed curfew prohibited Muslims from their night congregational prayers (Taraweeh) which are unique to Ramadan. This year will be different and there is much to celebrate and to be grateful for.

Being a small minority scattered across the townships, Muslims represent a diverse group of ethnicities, cultures and languages. In Sherbrooke there are two main mosques that collectively serve hundreds of families. There's also a strong presence at Université de Sherbrooke which hosts the student club, L'Association des Étudiants Musulmans de l'Université de Sherbrooke. This year, these organizations will be able to hold regular Iftars, night prayers and Eid celebrations. These activities are not only important for the adults, but they are equally, if not more

important for children.

As a child of immigrant parents, I struggled considerably during grade school when it came to observing my traditions and feeling the joy that others felt during their own celebrations. I, like many other children, was wowed by Christmas decorations and the accompanying atmosphere. At school, numerous activities were held around Christmas time that meant so much to those who celebrated Christmas. I wasn't envious; I just wanted to have the opportunity to share my joy with others and feel accepted. It wasn't easy at that time, but for my children today, things are different. We decorate our home, both inside and outside with lights and traditional ornaments. We talk to our kids' teachers about Ramadan and in turn they talk about it in their classrooms. We give candies and gifts to our children to distribute to their classmates as a way to spread their happiness and joy. Muslim children will have a lot to celebrate this year and they will surely spread that joy to those around them.

This year, the first day of Ramadan will be on Saturday April 2 and the associated Eid celebration will be on May 1. During Ramadan, most



Ayman Oweida and his son next to some of their Ramadan decorations

Muslims observe a strict fasting protocol, abstaining from food and drink from dawn (around 4:30 a.m.) to sunset (around 7:30 p.m.). Muslims can also have reasons to not fast during Ramadan such as old age, sickness, hardship and travel. This type of fasting has many benefits but ultimately it is a command from God that Muslims take to heart and practice with sincerity. While fasting, our stomachs will certainly growl, many times each day, and each time is a stark reminder of the harsh reality that many people face across the world. According to UNICEF, "2.2 million children and youth aged 5 to 24 years – 43 per cent of whom are adolescents – died in 2020". These statistics are harrowing. They far exceed the detrimental toll of any pandemic. And what hurts more is that these deaths are preventable. By fasting daily for 30 days, Ramadan forces us to not

only reflect on poverty, but to act to towards its elimination. A concerted effort by Muslims is placed during Ramadan to contribute to charitable organizations that help the poor. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims are obliged to pay a charity that must go towards helping those in need.

To my non-Muslim friends, know that we are completely fine while fasting. We are not starving and we are ok with you eating and drinking around us. Trust me, it really doesn't bother us. At home, we cook and we feed our children and we see food all around us. We just choose to not eat. To us, Ramadan is a gift that allows us to see the gifts we have.

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## CABMN

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a priority has long been a dream for our volunteer centre and this opportunity will require a lot of work and funding but we are up for the challenge," she added.

The CABMN Senior program and services include: exercise programs, Jog Your Mind training, support to caregivers, coffee hours, workshops, information sessions, training on how to use social media and devices, support with Government forms, accompanied transport, medical equipment lending program, cuisine collectives cooking, and more...

"For the community it is hard to see our churches taking on a new life and transforming into another

role," said Hastings. "Somehow I believe that knowing that part of the space will be used, cherished and occupied by programs for one of our most precious clientele groups makes the transition a little easier to accept."

To make the space all that it can be is going to take the support and efforts of the entire community and beyond. The New Horizons funding is a wonderful start and with it, the space will begin transforming into its new life and role within the MRC Memphremagog West.

For more information about the CABMN senior services or any of its many programs visit: [www.cabmn.org](http://www.cabmn.org) or call the Main Office at 450-292-3114.

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