

1 April 2022

To our Muslim brothers and sisters:

*As-salaamu 'alaykum!* Peace be with you!

On behalf of the entire St. Bonaventure University community, students, faculty and staff, and the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, it gives us great pleasure to extend our greetings to you as you begin your celebration of the holy month of Ramadan.

Every year this month is a treasured time – a time of drawing closer to God (*Allah swt*) through fasting and prayer, and a time of drawing closer to one another in shared meals (*iftar*) and in almsgiving (*zakat*) to those in need. For the past two years, the important communal aspects of Ramadan have been all but impossible to observe due to COVID concerns; but through the dedication and hard work of medical professionals – many of you and your family members among them – the shadow of the pandemic is fading, and the bonds of faith, family and friends can be strengthened and renewed.

In the years prior to the onset of the pandemic, members of the University and friar communities celebrated this blessed month with the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier, and once again we look forward to sharing *iftar* with you – *insha 'Allah* – if God wills it! In these times especially, we come to know one another in all our diversity – religious, racial, ethnic and cultural (*al-Hujurat* 49.13) – not only as neighbors in the community, but as brothers and sisters, as the children of Ibrahim/Abraham (upon him be peace!) together building a world of peace and justice where all can share creation's bounty. Your practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving resound with the other faith communities on our campus and enrich our lives of faith, especially at a time when the Catholic-Christian community is observing the season of Lent in preparation for Easter.

The rigorous fast that you observe this month is intended to turn hearts and minds to Allah (*swt*) in gratitude (*al-Baqara* 2.185). We join with you in this spirit as we are grateful for the many ways our Muslim students, faculty and staff contribute to the St. Bonaventure community and support the University's mission as an academic and spiritual community that embraces people of all faiths and cultures "to bring out the best in every individual through meaningful relationships." We are especially grateful for the tremendous support the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier has given the University's Center for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS) since its founding 2015.

In the months before the onset of the pandemic, CAIS was part of the worldwide Franciscan commemoration of the historic encounter between St. Francis and the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. By representing St. Bonaventure University at such commemorations and conferences, CAIS affirms its mission to promote a deep understanding of Arab and Islamic cultures, an appreciation of both their historical and contemporary significance in the global community, and respectful relations between Muslim and Christian people.

The missions and programs of the University and CAIS, as well as those of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) on campus and the Islamic Society of the Southern Tier remain vital in a world that is not only scarred by the effects of the pandemic, but continues to suffer from the effects of sectarian conflicts, nationalist politics, ethnic cleansing, and religious extremism of every variety. Although the pandemic drove us apart from one another, it also taught us how much we need one another for our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Although we have experienced dark days over the past two years, the two symbols of Ramadan – the crescent moon and the *fanous* (lamp) – offer us all the assurance that darkness gives way to light, so that as one community we can proclaim: *al-hamdu li-llah* – thanks be to God!

We wish you a most blessed Ramadan. *Ramadan Mubarak! Ramadan Kareem!*

Dr. Joseph Zimmer, Acting University President

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