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MUSLIM AMERICANS FOR COMPASSION



MAC Interviews: Reverend Jason Crosby

Muslim Americans for Compassion is proud to present an interview with the Reverend Jason Crosby of Crescent Hill Baptist Church. Rev. Crosby serves his congregation as Minister of Preaching, Pastoral Care and Administration, and he has been with the church since 2008. He made headlines a few years ago when Crescent Hill Baptist Church became one of the first in Kentucky to host same-sex weddings. Although criticism came swiftly from some conservative circles, the church maintained this practice and has seen other religious institutions follow suit in the time since.

MAC is proud to host the interview below between Rev. Crosby and Interviewer Aaron Burch. For more information about Crescent Hill Baptist Church, visit <https://chbcky.org/>.

AB: Rev. Crosby, thanks so much for speaking with me. How has your week been?

Rev. Jason Crosby: It's been a busy week. Our kids are getting back to school. That's been good for everybody and gave us a nice boost of energy. Also, its been wonderful to have some spring weather occasionally gracing us with its presence. Glad to be here with you.

Can you talk about morale and engagement at Crescent Hill Baptist Church during the last year? How are your co-workers and your congregation doing?

Most of the news for us has been good news. Our morale has stayed strong, and we are able to engage with our congregation in a consistent albeit limited way.

Let me preface everything else by saying that overall COVID-19 has made it difficult to feel the deep sense of connection you would with others under normal circumstances. That type of presence with one another has been absent due to social distancing, masks, etc. But, that's the cost of keeping everyone safe.

Nearly every congregation has had a chance to engage with their community on a regular basis since the first of June 2020. It took us a couple months to get some practices ironed out. While it has not been quite the same, we've had many opportunities to touch people's lives. We're seeing connections in large numbers, and that feels good.

Could you talk about some of the ways Crescent Hill engages its congregation?

On a weekly basis, we have 12-15 small groups that meet over Zoom. These are different classes, small groups, support groups, all sorts, and of course our worship service is virtual. If number of views is how we should be counting attendance these days, then our attendance has doubled. That isn't even counting multiple people who may be watching our services on the same advice.

We have upgraded our video cameras at Crescent Hill to provide a higher quality livestream for viewers. We felt it was important to make an investment into audio and video, so our presentation was that much better.

We've had people join with us on a regular basis from all over the country including

Arizona, New York and Florida. We're going to continue to provide that opportunity. Worship services are all streaming on our website, Youtube page and facebook, all simultaneously.

What initiatives taking place now (or recently) are you most proud of?

Well, all this digital advancement has been great. I think we'll be keeping much of it in place when things return to in-person. The committee meetings in particular are seeing much more participation and efficiency because people can be in several locations at once.

I also wanted to mention... At least one Saturday each month, Crescent Hill collects items for various non-profit organizations that we recognize are doing good work. We also provide at least one meal per week that people can pick up at low cost so they don't have to prepare a meal. Then we offer an opportunity to meet over Zoom and virtually eat together. This is a great way to see friends and fellow churchgoers from the safety of your home.

I'm aware of your advocacy for LGBT rights and I applaud everything you've done to stand up for equality. Do you feel public perception is shifting at all, or has the environment remained stagnant?



I believe the stance we took helped more clearly define the type of church we are and the type of theological perspective we have.

Groups like ours (including many before us) speaking up helps move the needle in society. Full equality, inclusion, whatever you want to call it, is increasing. I'm even beginning to see some positive feedback from those in the religious right camp for the first time in my life.

An issue like LGBTQ rights, perspectives on race or womens roles... I believe they really boil down to how the Bible is understood for so many folks. Increasingly, I think a lot of folks on the Conservative Christian side of the fence are saying you can still be a faithful Christian and support gay rights and equality. It takes a realignment of your personal faith. You have to approach the Bible a little differently.

I saw that you serve on the Board of the ACLU of Kentucky. When did your involvement with the organization begin, and can you tell me some successes that you have seen in your time of service?

This is my third year on the Board, but I have been supportive of ACLU for a long time. That service is a natural extension of my understanding of the Bible and what it means to be a faithful Christian. You must love and support others so they can have the strength to flourish in society.

The ACLU has been at the forefront of pushing policy legislation in Frankfort. They have supported many important causes including the end of "no knock" warrants, for instance. And the ACLU has led in providing criticism of bills that may not have the best interest of the community at heart. They have come out strongly against SB 211 which criminalizes inflammatory language of police officers and will likely be used to silence protests in the wake of the racial injustice marches we saw last year.

The way the ACLU is lobbying for and pushing back against bills to fight for equality is inspiring. I'm glad I am able to lend my support to the group.

What goals do you have for 2021? For the church or for yourself?

Opening back up to the world is going to be a real



challenge. There was so much adjustment and transition when COVID descended upon us. It took a lot of energy, thought and planning to provide for others and adjust to new ways of doing things. I believe that it's going to take close to an equal amount of energy and thoughtfulness to find where the new normal is. We don't know how many people are going to come back and sit in the pews.

What are those dynamics like? How do they feel? We thought about one Sunday a month really

encouraging as many people as possible to be physically present. The other weeks may be "do what you want to do." There will be a period of discovery.

Being in a common space, having energy you can share with folks near you... we feel really strongly about the positivity of that. We're going to do whatever we can to share that energy with our family, friends and community.

We also need to give people time to grieve. There's going to be a lot of celebration, but there are many others who postponed or delayed memorial services during COVID who are trying to get things on the calendar for later this year.

What haven't we talked about?

I'm always excited about the prospect of engaging new forms of charity work or direct service. We're tinkering now with placing a free pantry on Crescent Hill's property. Community members can supply or take food as they need or are able to give to others. That's an idea we are kicking the tires on.

We've also been able to use this year with less traffic in our building to make improvements. There has been a lot of repairs, fresh paint, renovations, organizations and more. If you haven't visited in a while, the building may look pretty different in a few places. That has certainly been a silver lining of the past 12 months.

Thank you to the Rev. Jason Crosby for all your hard work in the service of others. We wish you and the rest of Crescent Hill Baptist Church the best of luck, and we hope to collaborate with you plenty in the days ahead.



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