

## Case 8

The Call to Prayer is a centuries-old tradition in Islam. A prayer is sung five times a day to invite Muslims to pray. It is often broadcast by loud speaker in predominantly Muslim countries, but seldom broadcast in the United States. However, this Islamic tradition has created a controversy in Hamtramck, MI.

According to Abdul Algazali, Muslims in Hamtramck do not wish to create ethnic or religious division in their community over a recent controversy surrounding the Muslim Call to Prayer. On the contrary, said Algazali, the president of the Hamtramck-based American Yemeni Council, "We're in this city to build bridges." Hence, Algazali encouraged the City Council to approve a noise ordinance that will allow the Al-Islah Islamic Center, a Hamtramck mosque, to broadcast the Call to Prayer over a loud speaker five times a day between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.

Many non-Arab Hamtramck residents strongly object to the Call to Prayer. For most of its history, Hamtramck has been predominantly Polish Catholic. However, in recent years, the south suburb of Detroit has seen an influx of Arab Americans. "Where are my rights? Where are the rights of all the people who have lived in this community all of their lives?" asked Mary Urbanski, a lifelong Hamtramck resident. "I do not have a choice as to whether I hear this or not."

In response these kinds of objections, many Hamtramck Muslims argue that the call to prayer is equivalent to church bells, and that Hamtramck has several churches that ring their bells. "We hear the bells every day, every hour. We don't say anything," Algazali said last week.

However, opponents take issue with the church bell comparison, saying that church bells today are used to mark the time of day and have no religious significance. By contrast, the Call to Prayer is specifically religious. "It says that Allah is the one and only God" complained Hamtramck resident, Joanne Golen. "I am Christian. My God is Jesus Christ. That is my only objection — that I have to listen to a God other than the one I believe in praised five times a day," said Golen.

Despite petitions from non-Arabic residents, the Hamtramck City Council unanimously passed the ordinance amendment on April 27, 2004 and became law May 26, 2004.

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