

Serving the Community

By Abdul A. Seifullah

When the Honorable Wallace D. Muhammad, spiritual head of the World Community of Islam in the West, saw the need to create the office of Organization President in January, 1976, the person appointed to the position was Imam Dr. Abdul Salaam.

From the time that the New Jersey native accepted Islam some 20 years earlier one of his "earliest concerns was and always has been organizing the whole area of administrative flow and communications between the staff and the community."

Though the office has changed and evolved during the year since it was created—the Organization President is now president of the local Consensus Board of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad Mosque No. 2—Dr. Salaam still sees his function as primarily the same.

He is an organization man in the broadest sense of the term.

However, becoming the first organization president of the World Community of Islam in the West wasn't the only first for Dr. Salaam, who is a certified and qualified dentist.

When he openly accepted to become a member of the then Nation of Islam under the leadership of the Honorable Master Elijah Muhammad, he was the first professional in the field of health services to do so. That was in 1956.

"I used to catch hell from both sides of the fence," he chuckled, referring to the fact that professional and educated members of the Nation of Islam were often frowned upon by other Muslim members and the Muslims, in general, were frowned upon by most of American society at that time.

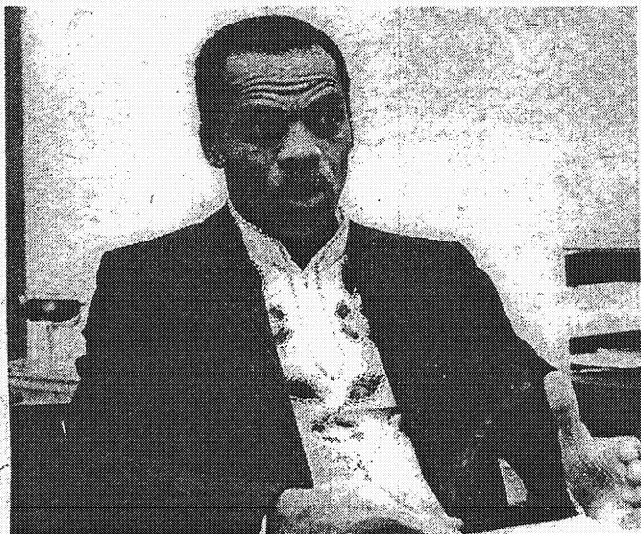
It was the young Dr. Salaam, who had just graduated from the Columbia University School of Oral and Dental Surgery who accompanied a friend to the New York mosque one Sunday to hear Minister Malcolm X speak.

"Malcolm arranged for me to meet the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (peace be upon him) and after that I was convinced that Islam was the only way to go.

"Based on that opportunity and the special attention he gave me at the time and thereafter, to aid in my understanding of Islam, I held on despite the many other obstacles I encountered."

Soon, thereafter, he joined the mosque in Newark, N.J., serving there as captain of the now defunct Fruit of Islam, (FOI), as assistant secretary of the mosque under his wife, Khadija, and eventually becoming minister of Muhammad Mosque No. 25.

"In those early years I had frequent occasions to meet and come to know the Honorable Wallace D. Muhammad. After moving to Chicago in 1970 to open a dental office at the urging of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, I eventually became an assistant minister to our Imam when he at that time was appointed as minister at the Chicago mosque by his father."



Dr. Abdul Salaam

In addition to the duties he performs as president of the local consensus board, Dr. Salaam still maintains an active practice as a dentist and is highly regarded in his field.

In 1964 he was recognized a "Man of the Year" by the Commonwealth Dental Society of Northern New Jersey and has lectured and instructed for various dental societies.

As the unsalaried president of the local consensus board and previously as the organization president, Dr. Salaam has been commended often by the Honorable W.D. Muhammad for his unselfish dedication in service to his community.

"Of course I have not been able to maintain as heavy a dental practice as before (Dr. Salaam donates two full days from his practice to attend to functions his WCIW office) but my relationship with my patients is such that I don't think I've lost very many patients," Dr. Salaam pointed out.

"I'm sure I have lost a few patients but I still have a very active practice."

Speaking of the WCIW and its directions under the leadership of the Honorable W.D. Muhammad, Imam Salaam noted that the religious community under the guidance of Imam Muhammad "is evolving to the point where this will be a thoroughly democratic society in the not-so-distant future.

"Under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, it was practically impossible for each local mosque to develop its resources to the fullest because everything was so centralized from Chicago that they couldn't make any major decisions without getting permission from headquarters.

"But the Honorable W.D. Muhammad has moved to turn over to each mosque unit the responsibility for managing their own mosque affairs. In this way each mosque and each individual in each mosque can effectively maximize their own development, and now they can either rise to prominence or mediocrity on their own merits.

"The evolution of the mosque structure under the Honorable W.D. Muhammad is one of the greatest things that could have happened to us," Dr. Salaam stated. "As long as we stay tuned in to the Imam our growth potential is unlimited."

Dr. Salaam, while serving as Organization President, frequently sought to explain the organizational structure to members.

Following the lead of the Honorable W.D. Muhammad, he is known for insisting that members get involved in the Mosque committee structure. The committees were organized in 1976 by Imam W. D. Muhammad to ensure maximum participation in WCIW affairs by the members.