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# 'The strangest Ramadan ever!' Ottawa Muslims

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Imam Muhammad Sulaiman leads a special drive-in Eid prayer at the Ottawa Mosque on Saturday. ASHLEY FRASER / Postmedia

## TRENDING

The plans for the Ottawa Mosque's first drive-in prayer to celebrate Eid al-Fitr were finalized around 2:30 a.m. Saturday.

Hours later, hundreds of cars filled a parking lot behind the mosque on Northwestern Avenue, with car radios tuned to a station where Imam Muhammad Sulaiman would lead the Eid prayer. Some cars were decorated with balloons or ribbons, a way of maintaining some cheer during one of the most significant Islamic festivals, marking the end of Ramadan and a month of fasting from dawn to sunset. Occasionally, a head would pop out of a sunroof so that person could wave at a friend.

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Organizing the event to comply with a recent Ontario order permitting drive-in religious services while maintaining physical distancing was a major logistical feat, and arranging the final details had to wait until the last minute because the Council of Imams of Ottawa-Gatineau had to confirm a moon sighting to kick off Eid al-Fitr celebrations.



A special drive-in Eid prayer was held at the Ottawa Mosque on Saturday. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia

The final scramble to prepare the drive-in prayer was the culmination of “the strangest Ramadan ever” for Ottawa Muslim Association President Ahmed Ibrahim. The mosque would normally be at full capacity, around the clock, all month. Prayer and Iftar dinners bring together a community that feels more like family, Ibrahim said.

Instead, like everyone else, local Muslims spent the month of Ramadan at home, practising physical distancing. They prayed with immediate family instead of at the mosque. There’s a lot to miss, but there have also been upsides to this disruption to the norm, Ibrahim said. Parents were encouraged to connect more their children, read the Quran and practise the rituals of Ramadan together.

“People spent more time with their families, spent more times with their kids, there were tons of connections,” Ibrahim said. “Hopefully, that will enrich the family.”

One prayer attendee, Khadra Gulaid, said her young daughter was able to complete her Ramadan fast for the first time, made easier by being at home with family, a silver lining in light of the ongoing school

closures that have disrupted the routines of every Ontario student.

“It was beautiful,” Gulaid said about her experience over the last month.



A young girl peeks out of the vehicles sunroof during the special drive-in Eid prayer at the Ottawa Mosque on Saturday. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia

Tarik Saleh, who attended the drive-in prayer with his wife and three children, said his faith had been a particular asset during the pandemic.

“Usually during calamity, you need to turn to something. Turn to your family, turn to your faith, to get strength, to get power, to stay on with daily life,” Saleh said.

“Worshipping during Ramadan actually helped with that.”

Like every religious community, Muslims have had to adapt the logistics of practicing their faith in the COVID-19 era. Most will spend the rest of the day celebrating Eid over the phone, FaceTime, WhatsApp,

and other virtual platforms, Ibrahim said. But, soon enough, he said he hoped the Ontario government would allow limited in-person religious gatherings that could allow Muslims to re-enter their mosques while maintaining physical distancing, if it was safe to do so.

From Eid celebrations over Zoom to virtual prayer, all services have been converted “from face-to-face, heart-to-heart, human-to-human, to a machine or a TV to a human,” Ibrahim said. “It is OK, but not for long.”



A volunteer prays during a special drive-in Eid prayer at the Ottawa Mosque on Saturday. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia

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