

# **Being Muslim in America**

**President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz**

**March 17, 2022**

- Welcome Imam Omar Suleiman.
  - On behalf of the Oakland University community, thank you for your tireless work to foster a greater understanding of religion, culture and our common humanity....
  
- These are anxious days....
  - We are coming together as a university, community and society after two years of physical restrictions because of the pandemic.
  
  - And, quite frankly, we are once again confronting the great potential of our pluralistic and diverse society, while we are being reminded of the underside that plays out in acts of prejudice and intolerance toward any of us who does not fit the rigid definition, by some, of what it means to be American.

- Imam Suleiman's work has brought attention to the pressing need for an interfaith dialogue and to stand together against the Islamophobia and all other types of prejudice.

< P A U S E >

- I am the daughter of a Russian immigrant, whose father was killed during Stalin's purge of Jews.
  - I am a relative to too many Jews killed in the Nazi holocaust.
  - Like many descendants of those who came to America, the path of immigrants and those who ascribe to a religion held by fewer than the majority of Americans can be an extremely difficult path.
- To quote Imam Suleiman: "America is a work in progress, and the most patriotic Americans are those that demand it live up to its promise..."
  - It's the promise in the Bill of Rights.... and the promise of a truly pluralistic democratic society.
- Like you, Imam Suleiman, we at Oakland University place the highest priority on understanding, tolerance, inclusivity and diversity.

- And we put these principles into action.
- The Oakland University Center for Religious Understanding recognizes the importance of comprehending multiple faith traditions and forging constructive linkages with them along with an informed and respectful discourse.
  - Our religious studies program examines the world's religions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity – by considering their foundational beliefs, histories and cultural significance in shaping the customs and rituals of the diverse people of the world.
  - Several years ago, we established the Cis Maisel Center for Judaic Studies and Community Engagement here at Oakland University that serves as a hub for education and community outreach on the traditions of Judaism and Jewish culture.
- As an institution of higher learning, our purpose is to offer students an academic background to understand the broader currents of these and other religions, and how religion provides its followers an ethical framework for their lives.
- And, as we look around, there is a pressing need for a discussion about private and public ethics.

- Each day, we watch reports of the bombardment of Ukraine. As the war continues, we are reminded of the intransigence and brutality that foster division, contempt and resentment among nations.
- In his writings and public actions, Imam Sulieman reminds us that what divides nations doesn't have to divide people.
- Each of us can be an advocate for peace.
- Think about the possibilities....
  - Each of us can be an advocate for peace.
- The challenges of "being Muslim in America".... should be a challenge faced by every American, regardless of religion....
- We thank you, Imam Sulieman, for your contributions toward making a better America.
- Please join me in welcoming him to Oakland University.