

On November 2, 2017, I visited the Islamic Center of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There was a fence around the mosque and the parking lot. The gate was partially opened to allow entrance of one vehicle at a time. There was a small playground on site and there were benches and shelves (I assume for shoes) stationed along the side of the building. There were lots of doors and only one had a sign, "Men Hall." The Community Hall contained a living room furniture set, tables, chairs and a rug. The Worship Hall was divided by a two-way mirror, which allows women a view of the Men's Worship Hall from the Women's Worship Hall, but men cannot view the Women's Worship Hall from the Men's Worship Hall. There is a restroom near the entrance of the Women's Worship Hall. The restroom was like any other public restroom except it had a place for one to sit and wash one's self (wudu). There was a poster of instructions on how to perform wudu correctly, posted on the wall at the entrance to the restroom. There was also a poster of tayammum (dry ablution) posted. The Women's and Men's Worship Halls appear to be identical, apart from the mihrab in the Men's Worship Hall. They were both carpeted from wall to wall and there were lines on the carpet running parallel with about a meter space between each line. The Worship Halls were trapezoidal in shape, I assume for establishing a sense of directionality. There was a semicircle alcove (mihrab) in the Men's worship hall in the northwestern direction.

My experience with visiting the Islamic Center of New Mexico (ICNM) was educational. I called the ICNM before visiting and requested permission to see the mosque, and asked if I needed to dress in an appropriate attire. I spoke with a receptionist lady on the phone she assured me that I was welcome to stop by for a visit and assured me that my pants and sweater were acceptable. When I arrived at the mosque, there were a van parked near the mosque and its doors were opened. A lady in Muslim attire emerged with a child from the van to greet us with a smile (I took my kids and my sister with me to visit the mosque). As we walked along the outside of the mosque looking for an entrance to the Community Hall, I noticed there were no grass, plants, or trees on the premises. We came across the entrance to the Men's Hall and I knew it would be inappropriate for me, as a woman, to enter the Men's Hall. The receptionist lady I spoke with on the phone appeared by the door to the Community Hall. She was very nice and quick to smile. She was dressed in dark clothing that covered her whole body except for her face and hands. She showed us the Community Hall and explained that the room was used primarily for social gatherings. She asked us to take off our shoes in the Community Hall before we went into the Women's Worship Hall. My first impression of the Worship Hall was that it was spacious, lack of windows, and plain (devoid of bright colors, only neutral colors). The lack of decoration and furniture made the room look and feel vacant. We were told that they pray in the northwestern direction following the most direct path an airplane travels from Albuquerque to Makkah. We were also informed that they worship, pray and believe in the same God and recognize the same prophets, with the addition of the last prophet Muhammad, as Christians. Our host explained how Cabal was originally built by Abraham and his son Ishmael, and before that by Adam. The mihrab indicates the Qibla is in the general direction of northwest and sometimes the Imams stand next to mihrab to read from the Quran. While we were still in the Women's Worship Hall, two men came walked into the Men's Worship Hall and stood very close to the Qibla and then they knelt for a short time and then stood up again. The two men were synchronized in their movements and it was obvious that they were following a ritual practice. On our way out of the mosque, I spoke with another lady dressed in Muslim fashion with a toddler in the Community Hall. She is a New Mexico native and converted to Islam when she married her husband. Her interest in Islam was motivated by admiring and witnessing her husband's devotion to worshipping God through prayer five times a day. She said she is very content with her choice because she feels closer to God.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to visit the Islamic Center of New Mexico. The place of worship is very different from all the Christian churches I have visited. There were no religious images anywhere in the Mosque and there were no windows or stained glass depicting religious icons. The ladies I met were very welcoming and eager to talk about the Islamic beliefs. I noticed the ladies were not wearing any cosmetic enhancements or concealers. It was interesting to see inside a Mosque and to talk to people from a different religion. I realized that Islam and Christianity worship the same God, but they differ greatly on the how they worship God. I consider myself to be a Christian and I only pray or go to church when it is convenient for me. Whereas, Islamic practicing members structure their lives around worshipping God and prayer times. We visited the ICNM during a non-prayer time, so the mosque was quiet. I wonder what it would be like to visit again during a prayer time.