

Muslim cleric to lead national association of chaplains in higher ed

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [April 12, 2017](#) issue



Imam Adeel J. Zeb. Photo courtesy of Adeel Zeb.

An imam, Adeel Zeb, will lead the National Association of College and University Chaplains.

Members of the Baltimore-based organization chose Zeb, who is a chaplain at the Claremont Colleges, to be their next president at a recent annual conference. When he takes up his post in June, he will be the first Muslim to serve in the role since the association's creation in 1948.

Among the challenges he sees for chaplains in higher education today is making religious traditions a tool for bringing students together.

Attending college is often students' first experience of getting to know people at a deeper level who are from a different ethnic or religious background, he said, but "they're tired of bigotry, and racism, and xenophobia."

Zeb finds hope in the many examples of people of faith who have worked for a better society.

"We're not the first people who have created pathways of intersecting social justice issues and faith and spirituality," he said.

He tries to add to that legacy while adapting to current circumstances, such as the anxiety caused for Muslim communities and international students and professors after the travel ban for people from several predominantly Muslim countries, first signed in late January.

"What was beautiful," Zeb said, was "how many people flooded the airport. Muslim people were praying publicly, openly in a group at the airport. I don't think people understand what a big deal that is."

Usually, when Muslims pray by themselves at an airport, they face secondary screening or are watched by security guards, Zeb said.

Thinking about the rise of Islamophobia, he recalled a meeting he attended with then attorney general Loretta Lynch when he worked at Duke University, after three Muslim students were killed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in early 2015. Black Lives Matter was also taking off. He asked Lynch about response to Islamophobia and police shootings of black people. She said that it takes everyone, not just those who are suffering.

"There's an onus on everyone," he said, "to speak out against injustice." —the *Christian Century*