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## Community Honors Iman Dr. Salahuddin M. Muhammad

By Jennifer Warren

**Newburgh** - The soon-to-be conferred Iman Dr. Salahuddin M. Muhammad glanced at the guests who showed up for his ceremony Sunday afternoon. Smiling, with a glint of pride in his eyes, he welcomed the audience the only way he knew how...straight from the heart.

"This is a beautiful thing," beamed Muhammad. "I see Muslims, Jews and Christians in this room; it's just a wonderful thing to see."

The setting seemed to echo the very vision Muhammad has diligently worked to create for the past 30 years. Committed to building bridges amongst all people, Muhammad has served as the religious leader at Newburgh's Masjid Al Ikhlas Islamic Learning Center as well as a Chaplain in the New York State Department of Corrections and Bard College. His countless hours of unselfish devotion earned him a host of accolades from grateful friends, colleagues, and family members Sunday. Those remarks included; "a beacon of hope," "role model," "hero," "teacher who gives what he gets," "involved educator," and "man of his word."



The newly conferred Iman Dr. Salahuddin M. Muhammad received his doctorate degree from Dr. Efrain Agosto of Hartford Ministry Sunday in a service held at Masjid Al Ikhlas Islamic Learning Center of Orange County in Newburgh.

Each of those praises fell under one of Muhammad's chief passions: education. And so it was that arena that was celebrated Sunday, when the man who means so much to so many was granted his Doctorate of Ministry from Hartford Seminary. Conferring the prestigious degree was the school's Academic Dean, Dr. Efrain Agosto, who spoke of the rigorous academic courses, application of cooperative restructuring to bridging divides amongst all peoples, and oral exam requirements that Muhammad completed. He further relayed the countless miles of commuting Muhammad logged over his approximately seven year PhD religious journey. It was a quest not overlooked by his wife Fonda as well as three children. The four were seated to the left of Muhammad on "Center Stage."

"This man has gone from Harlem to Hartford, making his good better and his better best," exclaimed Fonda Muhammad. "This degree symbolizes hope; it shows what you can do when you get out of the dark and stop telling yourself stories that hold you back."

Each of Muhammad's children recognized those conquered obstacles as well, referring to their father as someone they were proud of, was a true role model, and was loved. In addition to family members saluting the newly bestowed doctor's accomplishment, a long line of others expressed their gratitude for having had been touched in some way by Muhammad. One spoke of his rare down to earth nature in the upper Muslim ranks. Still another, a longtime convict, relayed the difference Muhammad's words of hope and encouragement made in his life, in and out of jail. Finally another man told of how the world would be a far better place if more people like Muhammad inhabited it.

Religious leaders and politicians were also on hand. Amongst them was City of Newburgh Mayor Nick Valentine.

"It is a proud moment for me to be up here and honor this doctor," said Valentine. "The City of Newburgh is blessed that we have people from all faiths and religions that come together to help make this City great."

Just as so many felt the indelible mark of Muhammad's presence in their lives, he too has felt their presence.

"Thank you so much for all of your support," said Muhammad to the over 100 people, many of them standing for the close to two hour ceremony, within the Mosque's quarters. "I am so grateful to all of the people who were involved in this amazing journey with me."