

- c. Be aware of the Islamic clock. When planning events with members of the Muslim community, it is respectful to be aware of the times of Islamic daily prayer in one's locale and to accommodate them in the event schedule.
- d. Be aware of the Islamic calendar. When planning interfaith events, take note of the dates of the two Eids and avoid scheduling interfaith events on those days. Take note also of the dates for Ramadan. If an interfaith event is planned during Ramadan, avoid a focus on food during the hours of fasting.
- e. Label negative behavior appropriately. When speaking and writing of blatant, virulent, and aggressive promotion of negativity about Islam and Muslims, consider avoiding tventant promises to strive for justice and peace among all people, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to love one's neighbor as oneself.

- 6. Making common cause. While our understandings of salvation history differ considerably, Episcopalians and Muslims can participate collaboratively in God's mission in three traditional ways: mitigating human need, challenging structural injustice, and caring for creation. The Islamic principle of *ihsan* (doing the beautiful; defined by tradition as behaving as though one can see God because, without doubt, one is seen by God) offers a basis on which Christians may join with Muslims in loving service to God, ecological stewardship, and concerted effort toward the public good.
- 7. Resources for deepening understanding. This collection of guideposts is a starting point. Recommendations of print and audiovisual resources about Islam or Christian-Muslim engagement are available from the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. For resources for dialogical close reading of Scripture (Bible and Qur'an) and other theological texts, see the archives of the Building Bridges Seminar.



THE
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CHRISTIAN- MUSLIM RELATIONS

Theological and Practical Guidance
for Episcopalians (Abbreviated)

As we live in increasingly multireligious communities, Episcopalians and Muslims are working together on a daily basis. This guide provides theologically grounded tips and best practices for those new to such engagements.

- 1.** The authenticity of openheartedness. These guidelines rest on the conviction that positive relationship with Islam and Muslims accords with our baptismal covenant promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to strive for justice and peace among all people.
- 2.** The matter of names. "Islam" is itself the Arabic word for "submission." It is pronounced with the accent on the second syllable. Things mandated, influenced, or inspired by Islam may be termed "Islamic." An adherent of this religion is a Muslim. (The term "Mohammedan"—while found in some literature—is not an appropriate synonym.)
- 3.** Islam's complexity. Worldwide, one in every five persons identifies as Muslim.
 - a.** The binary "the Muslim world vs. the West" is rarely accurate. Speaking of "Muslim-majority" countries or regions is often more appropriate.
 - b.** Through immigration and commerce, Muslims, in all their diversity, have introduced Islam to every locale in which The Episcopal Church is present.
 - c.** Muslims, like Christians, are not monolithic in their attitudes, experiences, and priorities. Diversity among Muslims results from many factors. Broad generalizations about Islam and Muslims are likely to be inaccurate.
- 4.** Basics. Given the complexity of Islam, essentializing is to be avoided; but Episcopalians engaged in interreligious dialogue or projects need basic information on Islamic history, beliefs, and practices.

- a.** Naming God. Allah is Arabic for "God." It is the primary name of God for all Muslims. Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews also call God "Allah."
- b.** Qur'an. The Qur'an (sometimes spelled "Koran") is Islam's holy book. Muslims believe it to be God's speech. In length it is similar to the New Testament. Its 114 suras (chapters) are organized primarily by length rather than theme. When exploring it in English (or any other language), it is best to use at least two respected translations and to be careful to acknowledge that you are not working with the authentic text. Be aware that, second in authority to the Qur'an, is a large body of literature known as the Hadith (report; tradition). These compendia of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad are records of his Sunna (his example).
- c.** Muhammad. Muhammad (570–632 CE) is recognized by Muslims as a prophet of God. He is also known as a messenger of God, because he was the conduit for a holy book. Since he is fully human, Muslims do not worship him; but they do revere him.
- d.** Biblical figures in the Qur'an. The Qur'an has a number of biblical personalities—Jesus and Mary among them.
- e.** Five Pillars of Islam. Sunni Muslims speak of five basic practices:
 - i.** Shahadah: The assertion of in God and in Muhammad as God's messenger.
 - ii.** Salat: A brief worship ritual performed five times daily at specific times, using a fixed text and a set pattern of prostration and other postures.
 - iii.** Fasting: Abstention from food, drink, and sex from daybreak to sunset during the 30 days of the holy month of Ramadan.
 - iv.** Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca.
 - v.** Zakat: The obligatory annual returning of 2.5% of one's disposable wealth to

the Muslim community for sustenance of the poor, maintenance of places of worship, and several other specific purposes.

- f.** Supplication and remembrance. In addition to salat, Muslims may offer supplication (dua) or may worship by chanting one or more of God's Names—a practice called dhikr (pronounced "thikr" or "zikr"), the literal meaning of which is remembrance.
 - g.** Holidays. Muslims around the world observe two principal festivals. Eid al-Fitr (pronounced "eed al-fitra"; the Festival of Fast-Breaking) marks the end of the month of Ramadan (a period of obligatory fasting during daylight hours). Eid al-Adha (pronounced "eed al-ahd-hah"; the Feast of Sacrifice) begins on the tenth day of the month in which Hajj (pilgrimage) is made to Mecca, about two-and-a-half months after Eid al-Fitr, and extends over four days.
 - h.** Shari'ah. For Muslims, shari'ah (broad path) is God-given comprehensive guidance, touching on all aspects of life and reflecting Islam's proclamation of God's intimate concern for justice between human beings. Often, when mention is made of shari'ah or Islamic Law in non-Muslim sources, it would be more appropriate to have spoken of fiqh (jurisprudence).
 - i.** Halal. Islamic legal reasoning defines what is halal (permissible), what is haram (prohibited), and what falls into several categories in between. Many Muslims strive to eat only foods that are halal or neutral. It is always appropriate to inquire about preferences.
 - j.** Jihad. The noun jihad means "struggle." While it does sometimes refer to armed struggle on behalf of the faith, translating jihad as "holy war" is misleading. It comes from a linguistic root meaning "to endeavor, to strive, to labor." Hence, it can name one's own effort to better one's relationship with God.
 - k.** Hijab. The root meaning of hijab refers to guarding one's modesty (which is expected of Muslim men and women alike). What constitutes "Islamic clothing" varies from place to place within the compass of The Episcopal Church's reach. Hijab is often synonymous with "headscarf." Avoid the assumption that Muslim women who wear a head covering are oppressed in some way; in fact, some who choose to do so feel empowered by it. Whatever their practice in public, Muslim women cover their hair when in a mosque. Christian women who visit a mosque for any purpose should bring and wear a headscarf as a sign of respect to the host community.
- 5.** Dialogue and Collaboration. Given the commitments made through our baptismal covenant, dialoguing theologically and making common cause with our Muslim neighbors are indeed acts of faithfulness. When engaging in dialogue and collaboration:
- a.** Know your dialogue partners. Again, keep in mind that Muslims (as do Christians) differ among themselves on a plethora of issues.
 - b.** Anticipate gender segregation. When religious matters are on the agenda, Muslim dialogue partners will most likely be men. Gatherings organized by Muslims, especially those held in local mosques, often practice gender segregation in prayer areas and places of socializing, dining, and fellowship. Many Muslims prefer to avoid handshaking with people of a different gender. Some Muslims may disapprove of The Episcopal Church's stance on LGBTQ+ understandings or policies. Episcopalians in dialogue with Muslims need to be aware of the reality of that possibility.