



Moving beyond Muslim media images

In many towns and cities, it's a growing possibility that Lutheran youth know someone who is Muslim. If they don't, it may not be long before they encounter them in their travel, away at school, or in the workplace. By the turn of the century, Islam will be the second largest religion in America. Yet, too many of us know little more about Muslims (followers of Islam) than what we see on the evening news.

These are the images that come to our minds: violence in the Middle East, the World Trade Center bombing, women veiled in black, and mosques that echo a call to prayer in a language we don't understand. These images produce stereotypes which distance us from our Muslim neighbors. Yet, Islam itself is fundamentally about something much more familiar to Christians: surrender to God.

Five times a day, Muslims are to profess their faith in one God, and Muhammad as his prophet. Their exercises of self-denial and spiritual growth are giving to the poor and fasting. Every Muslim should once in his or her life make a spiritual pilgrimage to Mecca (in Saudi Arabia), the birthplace of Islam. These five duties -- profession of faith, prayer, giving to the poor, fasting, and the pilgrimage--are designed to draw the Muslim into a peace that comes only from surrendering to God.

While Muslims and Christians differ in significant ways, it's important to not allow stereotypes of terrorism to prejudice our feelings toward these neighbors. As Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). When we meet our Muslim neighbors in love, we discover how much we can learn from them, and how much we have to give as Jesus Christ reveals himself in us.

Reasons to learn about Islam

- There are so many Muslims (friends, neighbors, coworkers; 1/5 of the world).
 - To promote peace in our world. (Misinformation and prejudice lead to fear and violence. As we learn, we can move from fear to understanding.)
 - Muslims may be the largest group of people for whom a Christian understanding of Jesus is still a mystery.
 - Muslims are generally nice people and wonderful friends.
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Ideas to help junior and senior high youth learn about Muslims

- Visit a mosque
 - Call to make arrangements. Most mosques, located in major cities, will welcome your visit.

- Ask your group to brainstorm about ways they might be polite and gracious.
- Tell them in advance that men and women are separated inside the mosque and that they should accept this graciously.
- Alert everyone that shoes cannot be worn inside, and that girls will be asked to cover their head before entering (the mosque usually has scarves, but bringing your own is even better).
- Schedule time immediately following the visit to discuss the experience (at church, out for pizza, etc).
- Use one or more outside resources for a special session on Islam.
- Invite a speaker to share with your youth.
- Check your local library for the following videos:
 - "Five Pillars of Islam" by Films for the Humanities, Inc.
 - "Living Islam: Foundations Vol #1" by Ambrose Video Productions, Inc.
 - "Islamic Conversations: Islam and Christianity" by Films for the Humanities, Inc.
- Copy and use the discussion starter included on this "Help Sheet."
 - Begin by saying to your group, "When you think of the words Muslim or Islam, what immediately comes to mind?" Write all answers on newsprint or chalkboard. Discuss positive and negative answers. Follow the discussion with a video. Introduce it by saying, "Today we're going to go beyond our first impressions and learn a bit more about our Muslim neighbors."
 - Distribute copies of the discussion sheet and ask the group to complete it as best as they can (you may want to use this as a community building exercise by letting them work in small groups). The correct answers are provided. Ask participants to share answers in each section and allow comments and questions.
- Use print resources for your own preparation, discussion aids, or small group study:
 - Brochure: "[Our Muslim Neighbors](#)" by ELCA Global Mission.
 - Book: *Christian Witness Among Muslims: A Guide to Understanding the Muslim Religion Through the Eyes of Jesus* by The Voice of Martyrs (1.918.337.8015 to order copies).
 - Book: *Muslim Friends: Their Faith and Feeling, An Introduction to Islam* by Roland E. Miller (Concordia Publishing House--1.800.325.3040)
 - Study: "Islam: An Introduction for Christians" by Paul Varo Martinson (published by Augsburg Fortress; study guide also available--1.800.848.2738).
 - Booklet: "Your Muslim Guest" by Fellowship of Faith (1.416.778.6702 or write P.O. Box 65214, Toronto, ON M4k 3Z2).

Islam discussion starter

True and False

Which statements are true and which are false (T or F)?

- _____ All Arabs are Muslim.
- _____ Muslims believe God dictated the Qur'an.
- _____ Muhammad is to Muslims what Jesus is to Christians.
- _____ Muslims believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.
- _____ Muslims trace their roots all the way to Abraham.

Muslim Creed

If you know the Muslim creed, you know something about what a Muslim believes. Fill in the blanks (if you can).

There is no _____ but _____, and _____ is the messenger of God.

Matching

Allah, People of the Book, Saudi Arabia, Muhammad, Indonesia, Ramadan

_____ Month of Muslim fasting

_____ 6th century Founder of Islam

_____ Arabic Word for God

_____ Country where Islam began

_____ Term for Christians and Jews in the Qur'an

_____ Country with largest population of Muslims

Reflection

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-10: (1) =agree; (10) =disagree.

1. _____ Muslims students should get out of school early on Friday because it's their Holy Day.
2. _____ Muslim girls should not be allowed to wear a veil over a school uniform.
3. _____ School cafeterias should provide a separate menu for Muslims who don't eat pork.

Answer key

True and False

- *All Arabs are Muslim.* (False: Many Arab people are not Muslim and, in fact, only about 15% of the world's Muslims speak Arabic as their mother tongue.)
- *Muslims believe God dictated the Qur'an.* (True)
- *Muhammad is to Muslims what Jesus is to Christians.* (False: Muslims do not worship Muhammad or see him as equivalent to Jesus. Muslims believe Muhammad was a prophet who spoke what God revealed to him, which was later written into what they now call the Qur'an. Muhammad is seen as a great leader and moral example, but not God.)
- *Muslims believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.* (True: It is recorded in the Qur'an 3:45-47.)
- *Muslims trace their roots all the way to Abraham.* (True: Muslims trace their spiritual heritage through Ishmael, son of Abraham.)

Muslim Creed

- There is no *god* but *Allah*, and *Muhammad* is the messenger of God.

Matching

- *Allah*= Arabic word for God
- *People of the Book*= Term for Christians and Jews in the Qur'an
- *Saudi Arabia*= Country where Islam began

- *Muhammad*= 6th century Founder of Islam
- *Indonesia* Country with largest population of Muslims
- *Ramadan*= Month of Muslim fasting

Reflection

- (1) = Agree and (10) = Disagree: Let those who want, share their answers. Discuss reasons why Muslims might desire special consideration, and other options (like providing space for prayer in school building, always having a vegetarian option at lunch for everyone, etc.)
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Using "Our Muslim Neighbors" as a resource with youth

- Use "Al Fatihah" (The Opening) to begin your time together and "A Call to Prayer" as a closing.
- Divide into groups and assign each group a portion of the pamphlet: "The Six Articles of Faith," "The Five Principles of Islam," "Islamic Holy Days", "What is Jihad?", "A Brief History of Islam," and "Islam and Christianity." Allow each group 15-20 minutes to read and reflect on their portion of the pamphlet and to creatively (and in a positive way) report to the other groups what they learned. Encourage skits, songs, artwork, a radio show, etc.
- Ask each small group to come up with one discussion question for the rest of the groups.
- Bring the small groups back together for their sharing and discussion.
- Direct the group to the "What Can YOU Do?" section of the pamphlet and ask for their additions. Decide on a group project and make specific plans to DO IT.
- Encourage young people to take the pamphlet home to their families, with whom they might design a "family project" that promotes understanding and respect.

"[Our Muslim Neighbors](http://archive.elca.org/globalmission/resource/muslim.html)," (ELCA Global Mission) is available at <http://archive.elca.org/globalmission/resource/muslim.html>

Other resources

- ["Ten Ways You Can Promote Positive Relationships Between Christians and Muslims"](#) (ELCA)
 - [Selected Resources](#) For Learning About Islam (ELCA)
 - ELCA Message on terrorism: "[Living in a Time of Terrorism](#)"
 - BBC's Religion & Ethics Web site on [Islam](#)
 - [Glossary of Islamic Terms](#) and Concepts (University of Southern California)
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