

10 Practical Ideas for You & Your Congregation

"Ten Ways You Can Promote Positive Relationships Between Christians and Muslims"

IDEA



PURPOSE



1. Increase Education

- Host and attend forums/classes on Islam.
- Read materials on Islam (see bibliography for some suggestions).
- Meet and talk with Muslims. At work, school, the park, perhaps even in your family, etc. don't avoid someone who appears to be Muslim. As you make an effort to be a friend you will learn more about and likely respect the faith of your Muslim friend.
- Let a Christian convert who loves Muslims share their story with a small group, luncheon, etc.
- For youth use the "ELCA Youth Ministry Help Sheet" on Islam from the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries 1-800-638-3522.

- Mis-information and Ignorance breed fear.
- Correct information can break down stereotypes and help to breed understanding.

2. Eliminate words like "crusade" from all aspects of ministry.

- Muslims often see Christians as a violent threat and such language confirms their fears and suspicions.

3. Experience Interfaith Activities: e.g.: Interfaith groups organized for dialogue Interfaith community service or advocacy Interfaith concerts Visit a mosque.

- Create and model non-threatening contacts that encourage personal relationships between Muslims and Christians.

<p>4. Avoid false witness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember that the words or actions of any Muslim individual, group or nation most likely do not represent ALL Muslims. Always strive for the best possible construction when speaking about Muhammad, The Qur'an, and Muslims. Distinguish between Islam and terrorism flying the banner of Islam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage continued good will, dialogue and friendships by avoiding needless offense and unfair judgments.
<p>5. Treat Muslims with kindness and hospitality, e. g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome immigrants and refugees into your neighborhood, youth group, etc. Create/support ESL classes or other basic services which will meet practical needs for some Muslims neighbors. Smile. If you are a woman, offer to help a veiled woman if you see them walking in the rain, need a door opened for them, look lost, etc. If you are a man you can greet Muslim men, open a door, help a stranger in need. But respect a Muslim woman's space by not initiating a handshake, patting her on the back, or seeking eye contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create positive experiences with Christ's followers. We have a responsibility to reflect Christ whose actions gained him a reputation for benefiting to the "least of these."
<p>6. Joint social ministry efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create unity in concern for the well being of society and for promoting good moral values
<p>7. Incorporate positive attitudes toward Muslims and positive responses to injustice or suffering in sermons as well as any public speech. Always imagine that your Muslim friends are there listening.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently call Christians to a higher standard of love and compassion rather than wallowing in fear, prejudice, or retaliation.
<p>8. Do not passively or actively participate in labeling Islam as our enemy or an evil religion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Such labels only create false division and mistrust between Christians and Muslims.
<p>9. Publicly interact with Muslims.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model cooperation.

10. Support and create media models for Christian-Muslim friendships and partnerships.

- Public opinion is shaped more by TV, radio, and film than anything else and generally the media show negative images of Islam.

Suggested Introductory Reading

1. ***Muslim Friends: An Introduction to Islam***, by Roland E. Miller (Concordia Publishing House, 1995).
This easy-reading introduction to Islam is marked by its depth of scholarship and the author's style oriented toward giving the non-Muslim a sense of what it "feels like" to be Muslim. The Rev. Dr. Miller (a retired Lutheran missionary and professor who served in India, Canada and the USA) treats such wide ranging topics as basic beliefs and practices, developments and divisions throughout the history of Islam, Islamic thought and theology, as well as some hopes and fears of many Muslims.
2. ***The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality***, 3rd edition, by John L. Esposito (Oxford University Press, 1999).
This is an invaluable summary of 20th century Islamic revival that illustrates the diversity of Muslims and confronts grave errors that our analysts make by assuming a hostile and monolithic Islam. He details leading Muslim figures and movements around the globe while underlining the vitality of Islam as a global force and the tendency away from violence and toward parliamentary practice. Dr. Esposito is a Professor of Religion/International Affairs and Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.
3. ***Christian Witness Among Muslims: A Guide to Understanding the Muslim Religion Through the Eyes of Jesus***, (Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1994).
This very short book provides helpful insights on 11 Christian beliefs, questions Muslims ask about them, and practical suggestions to help you explain these to your Muslim friend. Also included is a helpful section titled "Christian attitudes toward Muslims." Written over many years by anonymous contributors in various parts of Africa and the Middle East, this book is a labor of love.