



# a MATTER of SPIRIT

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## Islam

*“It is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam.”*

—Pope Francis, March 23, 2013

We hear a lot about Islam and Muslims from news media and politicians these days. As of 2015, there were 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, roughly 24% of the global population, according to Pew Research Center.

But how much do non-Muslims know about the practice of Islam? How can we seek to “love our neighbor” before we understand where they’re coming from? In this issue of *A Matter of Spirit*, we invite you to step outside of your comfort zone to learn about another Abrahamic tradition and gain new insights from faith experts and practicing Muslims.

Sr. Susan Van Baalen, OP shares the basics of Islamic tradition, Afeefa Syeed offers insight about how Islam shapes her work for social justice, Sr. Cecilia Ranger, SNJM, Ph.D., educates Catholics on our call to interfaith dialogue with Muslims, Marwa Abdelghani talks about the intersection of Islam with race and immigration in the United States, Tahira Zafar offers her personal story as a Muslim woman living in the U.S, and Arsalan Bukhari gives us practical ways we can challenge stereotypes about Muslims.

We hope that you gain new insights about Islam, and seek to understand a faith tradition that may have many similarities to your own.

## Understanding Islam

### A Simple Introduction to a Complex Topic

By Sr. Susan Van Baalen, OP

**W**ho are the Muslims? What is Islam all about? To become a Muslim, one need only sincerely confess the Muslim profession of faith three times in the presence of two witnesses: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger.”

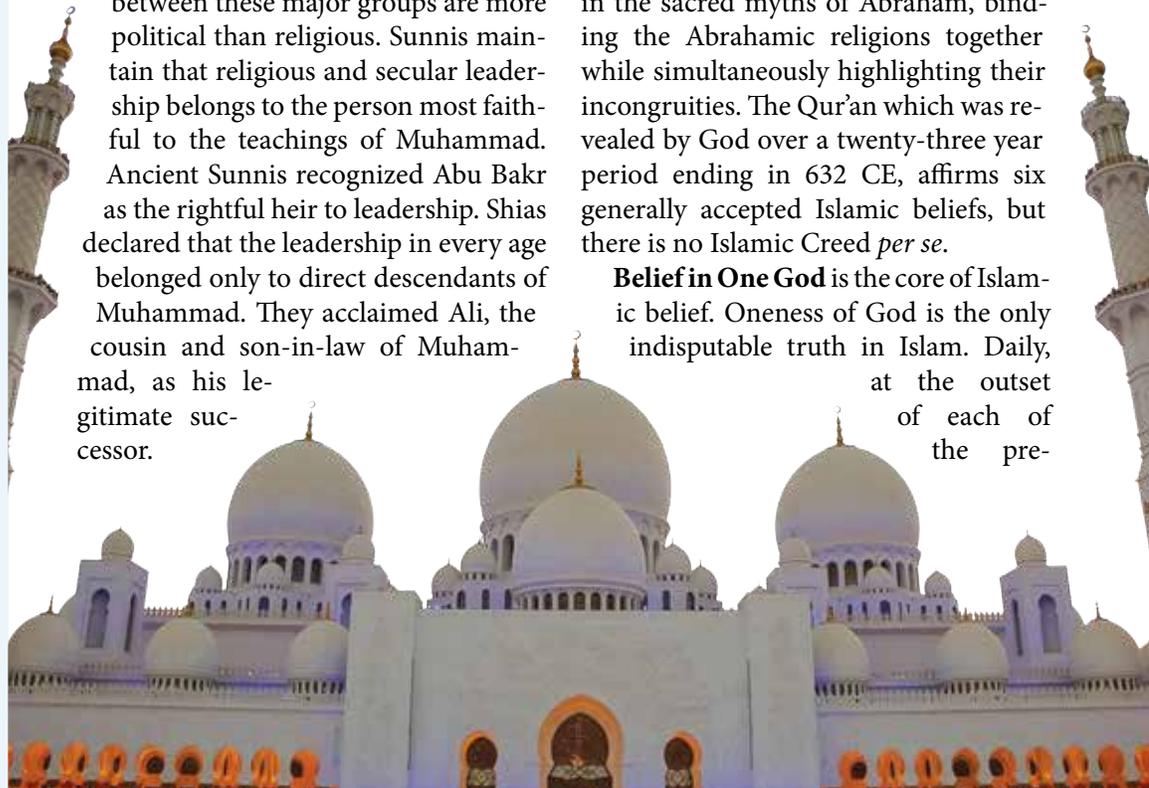
Sunni Islam embodies the system of beliefs and practices for almost 90% of the world’s Muslims. Sunnis believe themselves to be the only authentic Muslims and the protectors of the message of the Qur’an. Shias, the second largest denomination, make up approximately 10-13% of global Islam. Differences between these major groups are more political than religious. Sunnis maintain that religious and secular leadership belongs to the person most faithful to the teachings of Muhammad. Ancient Sunnis recognized Abu Bakr as the rightful heir to leadership. Shias declared that the leadership in every age belonged only to direct descendants of Muhammad. They acclaimed Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, as his legitimate successor.

Countless obscure denominations grounded in geographic and cultural differences comprise only 3-8% of Muslims. Salafism, an 18th century Sunni fundamentalist movement, arose when there was a concern for the purity and integrity of the Muslim tradition. Wahhabism is the militant arm of Salafism that justifies violence and militant jihad to restore the purity of Islam as professed by Muhammad and his followers.

### Beliefs

Notwithstanding religious and tribal differences, Muslims share basic beliefs and practices. Similarities among Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions converge in the sacred myths of Abraham, binding the Abrahamic religions together while simultaneously highlighting their incongruities. The Qur’an which was revealed by God over a twenty-three year period ending in 632 CE, affirms six generally accepted Islamic beliefs, but there is no Islamic Creed *per se*.

**Belief in One God** is the core of Islamic belief. Oneness of God is the only indisputable truth in Islam. Daily, at the outset of each of the pre-



scribed prayers, and at the beginning and end of life Muslims acknowledge God's Oneness. Oneness is a particularly strong attribute that mystically draws the community into God's Oneness. While all three Abrahamic religions profess monotheism, Muslims and Jews reject the dogma of the Trinity defined for Christians at the Council of Constantinople.

**Belief in Angels and Demons** is easily grasped by Judeo-Christians because the Muslim understanding of the existence and function of angels and demons closely parallels Judeo-Christian beliefs. The angel, Jibril (Gabriel), delivered the Divine Revelations from God to Muhammad (Qur'an 2:96). The same Gabriel delivered the Divine Revelation of Mary's virgin birth (Luke 1:26-28). Mikail (Michael) manages humanity's earthly needs, inducing rain and safeguarding nature. Nor does Islam forget individual guardian angels. Recording angels guard and record an individual human's acts worthy of reward. "... and He sends guardians (angels guarding and writing all of one's good and bad deeds) over you ..." (Qur'an 6:61).

Demons are evil jinni led by Iblis, the jinn who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden. Demons are lesser beings existing somewhere between angels and humans with preternatural powers for either good or evil. Being anthropomorphic, demons sometimes assume the characteristics of humans or animals.

**Belief in God's Prophets/Messengers.** The Qur'an offers a subtle distinction between prophets and messengers. Messengers receive divine revelations of the law directly from God through a mystical experience and are called to transmit the law to others. Prophets are called to receive the revelation and to live by it. Islam's prophets include all of the major Judeo-Christian prophets and the Prophet, Muhammad. Just as Christianity asserts that Biblical revelation was closed following the death and resurrection of Jesus, Muslims aver that

divine revelation was sealed with the death of Muhammad. In each case, divine revelation through scripture ended for believers with the death of their founder/leader.

**Belief in God's Revelations, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.** The Sunnah contains a collection of memories of the Prophet committed to writing after his death by his closest followers. The Sunnah is similar to the Acts of the Apostles wherein the struggling community looks back to their experience of Jesus to give meaning to their beliefs and practices. Islamic belief in sacred revelation is broader than Christian and Jewish belief, in that Muslims accept the Torah, Psalms and

God's mouth to Muhammad's mind. The Qur'an, a mystical teaching written down in seventh century Arabic by early believers, is treated with the greatest respect by even the weakest of believers.

**Belief in a Day of Judgment** demystifies the manner in which Muslims will be held accountable for their actions. Muslims, like Christians, will be eternally rewarded in paradise or damned to punishment.

**Belief in Predestination** maintains that people are subject to God's preordained plan for them. Muslim belief in God's foreknowledge is similar to the Calvinist belief that God determined before all creation those who would be saved by grace, and those who would receive eternal punishment. Predestination is held by Calvinists, but not a universal belief among Protestants.

## Religious Rituals and Practices

The Five Pillars of Islam are less complex than the beliefs and may strike even stronger chords of recognition between your personal religious practices and those of Muslims. Muslims are obligated to live by the Pillars. Similar to other religions, the extent and intensity of individual practices depend on the depth of one's spiritual connection with God.

**Shahada**, the first pillar of Islam, is testimony to the one God and to the prophethood of Muhammad. Initiation into Islam, one's acceptance of the call to Islam, is contained in the words "There is no God but Allah (God) and Muhammad is His Messenger." Muslims chant or hear the Shahada five times daily during the call to prayer. It is said to be the first sound heard by a newborn and the last words heard or proclaimed by the dying. The practice is so imperative that grieving family members painstakingly whisper the Shahada into one's ear at the very moment of death.

**Salat**, or prayer, obligates Muslims to pray daily at prescribed times. Min-

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM		
	<b>SHAHADAH</b> FAITH	Testifying that there is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.
	<b>SALAH</b> PRAYER	Offering prayer five times a day
	<b>ZAKAT</b> CHARITY	Giving alms or charity
	<b>HAJJ</b> PILGRIMAGE	Going to pilgrimage to the House of Allah at Mecca
	<b>SAWM</b> FASTING	Fasting in the month of Ramadan

Gospels as sacred revelation in addition to the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an holds the cardinal position in the hierarchy of Sacred Revelations; still, it is remarkable to note that Christian and Jewish scriptures are revered as sacred, and that Jewish and Christian believers are called "the people of the book (5:68)." The Judeo-Christian scriptures are sacred revelations, Islam teaches, but through countless oral retellings and errors in translation the texts were unintentionally corrupted, making it necessary for God to re-reveal, once and for all in the Qur'an, the sacred truths with accuracy. The Qur'an, on the other hand, is believed to be inerrant. It only exists in the careful transmission from

utes before the five prescribed times, the chanting of the *adhan* in Arabic reminds all within hearing of the Muslim obligation to pray. The Muezzin chants the Shahada two times, after beginning with the phrase “God is greater (*allahu akbar*).” Salat can be recited anywhere. It is always prayed in Arabic, even if the person praying does not read or understand the language. This is so because of the description of the Qur’an provided above. If those in prayer were to pray in translation, there is always the possibility that mispronunciation or poor translation might alter the meaning of the prayer. This poses a particular prayer burden on Western Muslims whose hearing and pronunciation of Semitic languages is very limited. Tedious oral memorization often precedes understanding the full meaning of the prayer for those who are unfamiliar with Arabic. Not only is the wording and language of the prayer prescribed, but the rubric defines the pre-prayer purification ritual, direction one should face during prayer, and the gestures and prostrations prescribed in the Sunnah.

On Fridays, the weekly day of observance, men congregate for the compulsory afternoon prayer (**Jumaah**). Women are not required to participate, because their household and family obligations take precedence over congregational prayer. Women who do congregate form rows in a separate chamber or behind the rows of men, to protect the modesty of men who may be distracted in prayer by women making inclinations and prostrations in their line of vision.

**Zakat** (almsgiving) is a ritual of Islamic life prescribed in the Qur’an (7:156). Muslims contribute 2.5% of their annual worth after setting aside funds for family obligations and debts. Donations are distributed first among the local poor before reaching out to the global community. Donations are customarily offered during the holy month of Ramadan, but other donations may constitute part of one’s Zakat obligation. Purification of wealth en-

## Regional distribution of Muslims

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Muslim population in each region as of 2010



Note: Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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sure one does not become so attached to money that s/he neglects the needs of others.

**Sawm** (fasting) is more rigorous than in Christian or Jewish traditions. During Ramadan, the month during which the Qur’an was first revealed to Muhammad, Muslims refrain from all food and drink, every kind of selfish desire, and wrongdoing from dawn to dusk. Smoking and all sensual pleasures are prohibited. The breaking of the fast often occurs at a community supper called the *iftar*. After the meal the men study 1/30th of the Qur’an, while the women clean up the kitchen! Sawm purifies the body and spirit, cleansing observers from impurities derived from food, drink and sensual pleasures. The month-long fast of Ramadan ends with a community feast, the *Eid al Fitr*.

**Hajj** (pilgrimage) is a journey to Mecca tracing the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad’s “farewell pilgrimage” in 632 CE. The rigorous pilgrimage is required of adults once during their lifetime, unless one is prevented from

making the journey due to financial or health constraints. At a prescribed time soon after Ramadan, millions of Muslims from around the world make the five-day pilgrimage to Mecca. Oneness, without regard to wealth or prestige, is emphasized by prescribing that all Hajji dress exactly alike. A ritual stoning of Iblis (*shay-tan*) renounces *shay-tan* and seeks forgiveness to conclude the Hajj.

An introduction to the religious beliefs and practices of Islam is merely a launching point from which one begins to analyze the myths and half-truths that often misrepresent the devout faithfulness of more than a billion people who worship one God and adhere to practices that have nourished and sustained their faith in one God for thirteen centuries.

▲ *Susan Van Baalen, OP, an Adrian Dominican sister, began her study of Islam during her twenty-eight year tenure as a federal prison chaplain. She later earned a Doctor of Liberal Studies from Georgetown University with a concentration in Islamic Studies.*



# What Would Muhammad Do?

## Social Justice from a Muslim Perspective

By Afeefa Syeed

*“Whosoever witnesses an injustice, he or she must try to fix it with their hands.*

*If they are not able, then with their tongues, if that is also not possible, then in their hearts – they should pray for it to be gone and feel the hurt of its existence.” –Prophet Muhammad*

*“Oh you who believe! Be standard bearers for Justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or own your kin, whether any be rich or poor. For God can best protect both. Follow not distracting lusts, lest you swerve, and if you distort justice or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do.” –Qur’an 4:135*

As a Muslim activist, educator, policy maker and mother, I’ve been buoyed by social justice as well as pressed to make it a cornerstone of whatever I am engaged in. Besides a calling, it has been a fundamental aspect of my identity and I continue to explore the many spiritual connections across faiths and traditions. I’m told through scriptures and traditions that the poor, oppressed, discriminated, younger and older, unjustly treated have rights over me in that I am obligated to serve them through my belief in the Divine. My faith is not complete unless I do.

In 622 CE, Prophet Muhammad directed his fledgling community to migrate from the bustling big city of Makkah to a smaller northern one called Yathrib and then later known as Medina. Facing persecution, these early Muslims would make the journey to where they had been assured refuge, accepting that they may never go back again to their home-

land. There, basic tenets of the faith he was teaching could be practiced freely while building a model society rooted in principles of social justice.

While Makkah had been his birthplace, Muhammad’s own conscience and then divine revelations would lead him to question and then stand up to injustices being committed daily in Makkan society. Female infants were buried alive to make room for males considered more desirable; women were relegated to property status with no rights. Slavery was not only a norm, it was recognized as a necessary institution that kept people in their place. Racism and tribalism—the assertion that there was some inherent value in birthplace, ethnicity, religion or appearance—made judgment acceptable and kept individuals and families at war with one another. Economic disparity was rampant with elite families and businessmen imposing untenable conditions in the form

of usury and unfair trade practices. And when a man, an orphan himself, named Muhammad, questioned and opposed these injustices by naming them and creating bonds between the underdogs and underprivileged, those in power and keeping the tribal traditions intact felt threatened. Muhammad and his followers were persecuted for thirteen years in Makkah before the migration to Medina.

Once in Medina, Muslims gradually built institutions geared towards creating and sustaining a social justice framework for society. American Muslims today learn from this model and glean lessons on how we contribute to and strengthen the work of social justice in our country.

This framework included these three elements:

**Justice and Dignity.** Muslims are compelled to have a personal relationship with God whose recurring name is The Most Just. We seek justice, which is a form of dignity, for our own selves. This was the basis of migration from an unjust existence to Medina where God’s attribute could be practiced

*“Prophet Muhammad’s saying about witnessing injustice emphasizes work as imperative and provides options so we have no excuse to not engage.”*

# Glossary of Common Terms in Islam

in human endeavors. We reject forms of injustice inflicted on us when our dignity is compromised. We also interrogate ourselves about justice in our own lives, in our actions towards others.

**Social responsibility as way of life.** In Medina, Muhammad's teachings became more focused on how tenets were practiced towards the institutionalization of justice. One example is obligatory *zakah* or alms giving. The very essence of *zakah* is to ease suffering and build self-sufficiency. But it is also a right the poor have in society. The systematic collection and distribution of *zakah* supports institutions addressing domestic violence, child neglect, criminal justice, refugee support and basic education. Every day actions also count towards ensuring social justice is established. Prophet Muhammad said to pay the laborer before his sweat dries—be conscious of workers' rights and our responsibility to them.

**Sanctuary and building community.** The first mosque built in Medina served the poor and unprivileged by providing shelter and food for anyone who needed it as well as refuge for those suffering or threatened in any way. Schools were integrated into these to emphasize the role of education for all and Prophet Muhammad held daily council with citizens of the city to hear and respond to concerns. Divine revelation further ordered that all houses of worship were considered sanctuaries from persecution, unjust treatment or inhumane conditions.

When Medina was built, interfaith relations were prioritized and elevated both through community interaction as well as establishing agreements of rights and freedoms. The Prophet conscientiously paired individuals and families with one another as partners in building the community and in this manner, crossed lines that had previously separated them. He also ordered all blood feuds from pre-Islamic days be forgotten and forgiveness made a priority. Even though the refugees fleeing Makkah had been the closest companions of the Prophet, he made it clear that all were on equal footing in the new land as far as spiritual work was concerned.

Prophet Muhammad's saying about witnessing injustice emphasizes work as imperative and provides options so we have no excuse not to engage. Even being against something in your heart is work, it's an active understanding of why something is wrong, that it must be corrected and that awareness is the first step.

Fundamentally, as Muslims globally strive to live out tenets of the faith in a social justice framework, Muslim Americans are faced with the challenge of engaging more conscientiously with inequality, racism, domestic violence, discrimination within their own communities as well as building alliances across faith and social justice efforts to address the larger US context.

▲ *As a cultural anthropologist, Afeefa Syeed has worked for the past 25 years in government and non-profits on areas of religion and development, educational innovation, social justice, gender inclusion, countering extremism and integrating cultural context into policy and programming. Afeefa is a founder and Head of School for Al Fatih Academy, a nonprofit independent model school in Reston, VA with peace and civic education as its core curriculum.*

**Adhan:** the call for daily ritual prayers (Salat).

**Allah:** a Divine name of God. It is the perfect name for God as it truly denotes the absolute Oneness of God.

**Eid:** an Islamic holiday. The four Eids are: Eid ul-Adha, Eid ul-Fitr, Eid-e Ghadeer and Eid-e Mubahala.

**Five Pillars of Islam:** 5 central practices of Muslims to help establish a spiritual relationship with God. They are: shahada or profession of faith; salat or five daily prayers; zakat or mandatory donation; sawm or fasting in Ramadan; and hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if one is able.

**Hadith:** Sayings or actions of the Prophet Muhammad that were recorded by his companions and later collected and preserved for later generations. They help to elaborate on certain teachings, beliefs and verses in the Qur'an.

**Halal:** something that is lawful and permissible to use/consume in Islam.

**Hijab:** the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by some Muslim women.

**Iftar:** the breaking of the fast.

**Imam:** means Leader in Arabic. The term is generally applied to religious leaders.

**Islam:** the religious faith of Muslims including belief in Allah as the sole deity and in Muhammad as his prophet.

**Jumu'ah:** a congregational prayer that Muslims hold on Friday.

**Mosque:** a building used for public worship by Muslims.

**Muhammad:** the Last of the Messengers of Allah to mankind.

**Muslim:** A follower of the religion of Islam.

**Prophet:** A person Muslims believe was chosen by God to teach two core messages: 1) God alone should be worshipped; and 2) people should strive to live ethically by treating others as they wish to be treated (The Golden Rule).

**Qur'an:** the Holy Book, the Living Miracle, revealed from Allah as a guidance to mankind.

**Salam:** a salutation. It is also the last recitation at the end of Salat.

**Shari'ah:** the rules and regulations of Islam, the divine Law. Shari'ah is the totality of Allah's Commandments relating to people's activities.

Sources: Al-Islam.org, Merriam-Webster, Islamic Networks Group (ING)

# Catholic Call to INTERFAITH Dialogue

By Cecilia A. Ranger, SNJM, Ph.D.

With iPhone in hand we recall our world as it was in October 1965. The vision of the Fathers of Vatican Council II in *Nostra Aetate* has become a clear 2017 necessity—a call to Catholics and Muslims to dialogue with and work beside each other, especially in a USA where doors are closing and violence increasing toward our Muslim sisters and brothers. For 52 years we Catholics have been urged to engage in interreligious dialogue with non-Christian religions.

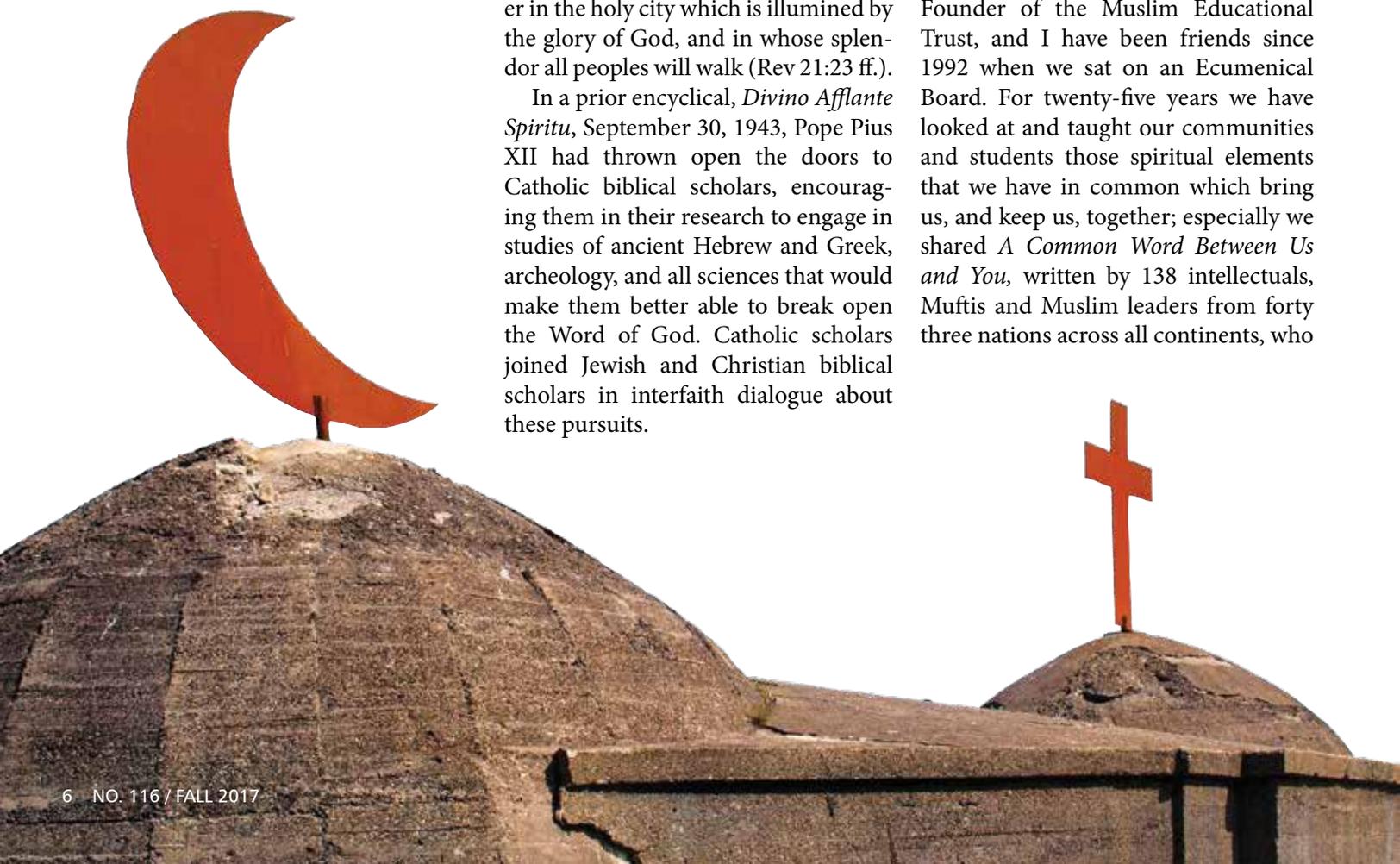
*Nostra Aetate* begins with the recognition that in our day, when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines more carefully its relations with non-Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate* 1-2). Humanity forms but one community because we all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. God's providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all humankind (Wis 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom 2:6-7; 1 Tim 2:4) against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city which is illumined by the glory of God, and in whose splendor all peoples will walk (Rev 21:23 ff.).

In a prior encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, September 30, 1943, Pope Pius XII had thrown open the doors to Catholic biblical scholars, encouraging them in their research to engage in studies of ancient Hebrew and Greek, archeology, and all sciences that would make them better able to break open the Word of God. Catholic scholars joined Jewish and Christian biblical scholars in interfaith dialogue about these pursuits.

*Nostra Aetate* took giant leaps forward from 1943, asking Catholics to dialogue with our non-Christian sisters and brothers, among them Islam, the third Abrahamic tradition.

*Nostra Aetate* continues with affirmation that the church has a high regard for Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet; his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting (*Nostra Aetate* 3).

Wajdi Said, President and Co-Founder of the Muslim Educational Trust, and I have been friends since 1992 when we sat on an Ecumenical Board. For twenty-five years we have looked at and taught our communities and students those spiritual elements that we have in common which bring us, and keep us, together; especially we shared *A Common Word Between Us and You*, written by 138 intellectuals, Muftis and Muslim leaders from forty three nations across all continents, who



wrote to Pope Benedict XVI an amazing open letter on October 13, 2007. Their interest was to try to establish a more solid cooperation between

Christians and Muslims, calling for peace, for working for common ground and understanding between Muslims and Christians. It did indeed open a world-wide dialogue.

The President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, told Vatican Radio that Pope Benedict XVI appreciated the positive and non-polemical spirit of the text. The document began:

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the

necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity.

*“Nostra Aetate took giant leaps forward... asking Catholics to dialogue with our non-Christian sisters and brothers.”*

Catholics have a firm ground on which to base their dialogue with Muslims, not only the Vatican II Documents and *A Common Word* but also theological commonalities. Theologically, Catholicism and Islam are based on similar truths: Worship of the one true God (in their case, with 99 names, but not a Trinity of one God in Three Persons), a basic life stance of submission to that God (Allah), veneration of Jesus as Prophet (not as God) and Mary as Mother (Surah 19, Maryam, Section 2), Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, Pilgrimage, day of Judgment, Resurrection, a reward in Heaven.

Both Catholics and Muslims observe that the Bible preceded the Qur'an, and that Muhammad was no doubt familiar with those texts. Starting dialogue sessions with familiar or parallel texts from the Bible and Qur'an could ground the sharing in the mutual Traditions, and

avoid the offering of divisive personal opinions. Passages from the Hebrew and Catholic Bible might be: Deut 10:17, Lev 19:33-34, Psalm 67:4, Eph 2:14, Col 3:10-11, Acts 10:34-35. Selections of Qur'anic reflections might be something like C.61. Surah 4 (“All humankind are one, and mutual rights must be respected. . .”), C. 99,

Surah 10 (“Glory to the One True Allah, Who made Humankind as One and holds alone the secrets of the Universe in His Great and good Universal Plan.”).

*Nostra Aetate*, though written 50 years ago has never struck us as more alive than in this decade of unrest and violence. Catholics call the Holy One “God” and Muslims name this One Supreme Being “Allah,” Arabic for God. But all are called to listen to *The Common Word* and together help bring about a world of justice and peace.

▲ *Cecilia A. Ranger, SNJM, Ph.D. resides at Mary's Woods, a retirement center, with 475 accomplished seniors from all over the USA and abroad. Though much of her life she has served as theology professor in seminaries, primarily to prepare ministers of many religious traditions, she now provides spiritual direction, offering parish or group retreats, and facilitating World Religion classes for seniors of all faiths.*

Visit to Mosque and Islamic Center, Shoreline, WA hosted by IPJC in 2011



# A Muslim Woman's Story

By Tahira Afzal

October 2008, a young girl stepped on a foreign land, a land she had never seen nor fathomed the magnitude of. She was scared but was ready to take the bull by the horns.

People told her she would be looked upon as different just because she was a Muslim and she wore a head covering and an outer coat which she proudly strutted in the elegance of.

That girl was me, and this is my story.

Soon after having my Nikah (a religious marriage in Islam) in Pakistan, I came to America.

As a 22-year-old who had never been outside Pakistan, I was excited yet nervous. I looked forward to this new chapter but somewhere between coming to the States and starting my life here, whatever people had told me started to influence me. I thought I should listen and conform, as they say, "when in Rome, do as the Romans do."

From taking off my outer coat and head covering while going through security, to feeling like I had to shake hands with men when it was not my comfort, what I perceived around me made me believe that conformity was the culture here and that's what I should do.

The more I tried to gain acceptance in this society by changing, the more my discomfort grew.

This was not me! I was the confident girl who studied in a co-ed college in Pakistan in full observance of parda (the Islamic practice of modesty) and I never second guessed it. In fact parda, and every part of my faith, was my pride and identity.

Something didn't feel right.

This discomfort then led to finding my inner voice and strength again. I began to self-analyze and, ultimately, reconnect with my identity and beliefs. I started respectfully telling airport security personnel that I won't take off my head covering or coat. Instead of feeling like I had to shake hands with men here in the west, I started to respectfully smile and greet them without extending my hand.

What happened as a result was astounding!

Those who told me that I won't be accepted in the west were incorrect in their judgment. The more I was confident in my faith, the more I could engage respectfully and confidently with people, the more people showed respect. People respected the authenticity of who I am. They understood and even admired my parda. They wanted

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*"People respected the authenticity of who I am."*

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to know more about me, my culture and faith. I received questions about parda, my family and values. I started making friends and building a community. Sure, I was judged by some, but the acceptance far outweighed judgment. That's when I realized the true beauty of America and I fell in love with this country there and then.

The beauty of the United States lies in the acceptance of people from all cultures, faiths and races. This beautiful country accepted me with open arms once I accepted myself from within and became confident in my own skin, faith and culture.



As a Muslim, I always respected and abided by the laws of the country where I lived as that is part of my faith. Prophet Muhammad taught, "Love of one's country of residence is part of Faith."

But now, I fell in love with this country for what it was as well.

The United States of America stands for its diversity. As a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (Muslims who believe in the Messiah) whose motto is "LOVE FOR ALL, HATRED FOR NONE," I am fortunate that I can put these words into practice in this country freely. Here, I can practice and talk about my faith openly.

I respect this country and this country respects me. This was when I realized this, that my true journey here had begun and I looked forward to it.

▲ *Tahira Afzal is a Muslim woman in America, a wife to a born and raised American Muslim, a mom to a 4 year old boy and expecting another child by the grace of God. Tahira's identity comes from her faith and she respects America for giving her the opportunity of practicing her faith freely, speaking of it, and enjoying and evolving in it to the best extent.*

# The Intersection of Islam with Racism & Immigration

By Marwa Abdelghani

There is no doubt that American politics has become heavily influenced by race. As a country, our defining values of equality and justice for all are being challenged by those that seek to divide us, some of whom hold high public office and make decisions that determine our policies. Americans are now pitted against one another in a clash of status, privilege and cultural acceptance. Fear perpetuated by hate speech has been the driving force behind racist policies, especially on immigration. Recent catastrophes, including multiple terrorist attacks and the refugee crisis, are major factors that have led to this political climate.

During the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump announced a campaign promise to ban Muslims from entering the U.S, violating our Constitution, according to many court rulings. When the Muslim Travel Ban (which suspended immigration from six Muslim-majority countries) was signed into an executive order in the first two months of Trump's presidency, many

Americans came together to resist, and others tried to spread hate and fear.

At a time when color, faith and nationality are often the first identities we see in each other, religious and ethnic boundaries have become political banners. Controversial issues like "Black Lives Matter," a Muslim registry, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the Muslim Travel Ban became platform issues upon which many Americans based their votes in the 2016 election. Immigration, trade and national security became issues that many Americans connected to their identity. For the first time in U.S. history, American Muslims were catapulted into national politics like never before. Suddenly, Jews, African Americans, Latinos, LGBT and other groups who have faced a long history of discrimination in this country felt compelled to defend their Muslim neighbors. For many, Islamophobia, a political force used to spread hate and fear of Islam and Muslims, became seen as unacceptable. Our identity as Muslims was being challenged, and numerous Americans took a stand against Islamophobic rhetoric and policies.

After the Muslim Travel Ban was signed into an executive order, crowds of people organized and banded together to stand outside mosque doors across the country, holding signs of support and solidarity after every Friday prayer. About a thousand demonstrators attended the "Today I Am a Muslim, Too" rally in New York City holding placards of a woman in a headscarf. Airports across the country were crowded with people protesting the Muslim Travel Ban and fighting for the release of Muslims who were detained.

These acts of love and solidarity with American Muslims provided a significant amount of support. However, it is important to address those on the other side who have not yet come to regard American Muslims, and other minority groups, as a part of this country's fabric. Our own President's track record has shown him trying to ban an entire religious group from coming into this



CC Fibonacci Blue

*“Islam...came as a message of peace to relieve a society from oppression, misogyny, and racism.”*

country, and defending those who try to divide us. There is fear that the Muslim Travel Ban paves the path for other policies that discriminate on the basis of nothing other than religion and nationality.

In June and September of this year, ACT For America set up over 60 anti-Muslim rallies across the country to push for “anti-Shariah” legislation. The Southern Poverty Law Center calls this organization the “largest grassroots anti-Muslim group in America.” Shariah, one of the most commonly misinterpreted Islamic terms, is a methodology by which Muslims understand the Qur’an. Islamophobic groups have twisted the word and define Shariah as a tool that violent extremists use to spread their ideologies.

For Muslims all over the world, it is a difficult reality to grasp how their religion is being twisted and turned into a banner for evil. While only a fraction carry out extreme violence in the name of Islam, we often forget that there are close to 2 billion Muslims living peacefully and coexisting with others. To put this into perspective, it is important to understand the following four points:

**1. Islam, in its fundamental essence, came as a message of peace to relieve a society from oppression, misogyny, and racism.** Yet, it is currently being used as a banner, a tactic, and a tool to erase this message and promote one of supremacy and death by groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

**2. Many refugees who are running from persecution are Muslim.** The Rohingya, Burmese Muslims, are fleeing Myanmar in an attempt to escape rape

and murder by the Burmese military. Syrians are fleeing their country to escape the wrath of Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian refugee crisis is the worst refugee crisis since World War II. Muslims all over the world are escaping hunger, persecution, and death.

**3. Violent extremists and people who call for the killing of all Muslims are two sides of the same coin.**<sup>1</sup> Both groups do nothing short of creating division and spreading hate that perpetu-

*“Will we welcome those running away from harm and create a society that is inclusive?”*

ates violence.

**4. As a result of the anti-Muslim hate speech by some politicians during the 2016 election campaign, hate crimes against Muslims in America have risen sharply, nearly 44%.**<sup>2</sup> Muslims continue to be targeted, whether it is a woman wearing a headscarf getting attacked or a Muslim-owned business being vandalized.<sup>3</sup> And now, policies like the Muslim Travel Ban force many Muslim families to be cut off from their relatives. The ban is the result of a long assault on the American Muslim community.

In the same way that other minority groups stood and continue to stand alongside American Muslims, Muslims themselves can connect with issues that are affecting other communities. The plight of undocumented immigrants who come to America to find more

opportunities and a better education streams alongside the challenges of Syrian refugees escaping war. The Trump Administration recently announced plans to repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a policy that is meant to protect young people who were brought to the United States as children from deportation. The Muslim Travel Ban, which has been debated in the courts since its signing, was recently reintroduced by the Trump administration with revisions that will make it even more difficult for refugees to find a new life away from war. More countries were added to the ban, as well as tighter restrictions on immigrants.

Immigration has a foundational relevance to Islamic history, very similar to the Jewish Diaspora, where Jews fled persecution and were exiled from their homeland. In the year 622 A.D., Prophet Muhammad and his followers fled to Medina after escaping persecution in the city of Mecca, not unlike what we see today. Medina was where Muslims worked hard to create a society of coexistence with preexisting religious communities and to fight against religious persecution.

Today, humanity is being tested with the same task. Will we welcome those running away from harm and create a society that is inclusive? People all over the world are looking for a new place to call home, away from poverty, mass killings, and hunger. Recently introduced executive orders and immigration policies make it harder for people to seek refuge in the United States. The words etched on Lady Liberty, “Give me your tired, your poor...yearning to breathe free” are being challenged, and we must come together to uphold the foundation of America.

▲ *Marwa Abdelghani is the Media Fellow at the Muslim Public Affairs Council. She works to ensure an authentic and accurate representation of Muslims and Islam in the media.*





Bothell, WA Muslims march in 4th of July Parade. Courtesy of CAIR-WA

## Challenging Myths about Islam

While there are numerous myths about Islam and American Muslims, it is important to remember that you have the power to educate millions of fellow Americans with fact-based information and stories of the lives and contributions of American Muslims. Here are some common questions you might hear and some knowledge worth spreading.

*What effect does religiosity and mosque attendance have on American Muslims?*

According to a Harvard University research study, the more involved an American Muslim person is in mosque-related activities and the more religious the person is, the more likely she/he is to believe that Islam is compatible with civic participation.<sup>1</sup>

*What roles do American Muslim women play in society?*

Muslim parents often teach their children Prophet Muhammad's teaching that Muslims, both women and men, should pursue high levels of education. Islamic teachings, brought by Muhammad in the 7th century, provide women the right to enter into contracts, inherit property, choose whom to mar-

ry, own many businesses, among many more rights.

A 2009 Gallup Poll found that American Muslim women are the second most highly educated religious

community in the U.S., and are just as likely as American Muslim men to have a college degree or higher education.<sup>2</sup>

*How do Muslims view peace and violence?*

Muslims believe that God favors the peaceful. American Muslims and Muslims worldwide have repeatedly condemned violence. Violence against civilians is never justified. Major Muslim leaders and organizations around the world have consistently condemned violence against civilians in clear terms, including the U.S. Council of Muslim

Organizations and the Union of Islamic Organizations of France.<sup>3,4</sup>

Furthermore, according to a 2010 Gallup Poll, compared to other faiths, American Muslims are most opposed to attacks on civilians.<sup>5</sup>

Empirical research by Gallup Poll and Pew Research, consistently show that American Muslims are not only middle class and mainstream but in Gallup's words, "exemplify diversity, potential."<sup>6,7</sup>

*Are American Muslims patriotic?*

American Muslims uphold the Constitution and the laws of the United States and share the same American values and freedoms that we all cherish, knowing that we are all in this together. American Muslims believe in the right and freedom of all U.S. citizens to live and worship in their own way.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, between 10,000 and 20,000 American Muslims serve honorably in

# How **you** can change **millions** of hearts and minds in just **10 MINUTES**

By Arsalan Bukhari

*"By taking just 10 minutes of your time, you can educate millions, counter the hate and help stop hate crimes, and may be even save a life."*



to Muhammad; it therefore talks less about Muhammad than it does to Muhammad about other subjects, including previous prophets such as Jesus.

Muslims generally believe that Mary is the Virgin Mother of the Prophet Jesus. Multiple chapters in the Qur'an talk about Jesus and Mary. One entire chapter in the Qur'an is named after her. The chapter called Mary (Maryam in Arabic) and other verses in the Qur'an emphasize her piety, righteousness, and status as an exemplar for all people. The Qur'an describes her as the

greatest of all women: "God chose and preferred her above all the women of the worlds." (Qur'an, 3: 42)

### What you can do

As you read the news of the day, or hear commentary about Islam and Muslims by political and other leaders, you might wonder, 'what power do my friends and I have to change fellow Americans' hearts and minds?'

You have a lot more power than you might think. Most of us have a cell phone or a computer with access to e-mail. You can use that power so your words, amplified through media, educate millions, counter anti-Muslim prejudice and help stop hate crimes.

Here are 3 easy ways you can educate hundreds, even millions well beyond your circles, with just 10 minutes of your time:

Write letters to the editor telling stories about American Muslims you know and remind our fellow Americans of our shared values. (letters@nytimes.com; letters@usatoday.com; letters@washingtonpost.com; wsj.ltrs@wsj.com; voicers@nydailynews.com; letters@nypost.com) Even if your e-mail is not published, your e-mail will impress upon powerful national editors the importance of incorporating coverage of American Muslims' lives and contributions in their news and feature articles. If it is published, you'll educate

our nation's armed forces, and many made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation, including U.S. Army Specialist Kareem Khan, U.S. Army Major James Ahearn, U.S. Army Specialist Rasheed Sahib, and U.S. Army Captain Humayun Khan.<sup>8,9</sup>

Thousands more American Muslims serve honorably in police and fire departments, the FBI, and the Secret Service.

According to a Pew Research Center study, American Muslims believe America is a country where they can work hard, raise families, and pursue the American Dream. The study also found that 44% of American Muslims display the U.S. flag.<sup>10</sup>

*What do American Muslims contribute to our society?*

According to a study by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), there are approximately 50,000 American Muslim medical doctors across America, providing compassionate care and saving lives everyday across our nation.<sup>11</sup>

Tens of thousands of American Muslims are IT professionals, creating the latest cell phone and computer technology that we use every day.

American Muslims raised more than \$150,000 to help rebuilding of the churches that were burned across the

South around 2015. American Muslims responded to the Flint water crisis by donating more than 100,000 bottles of water to families and children in Flint, Michigan. Almost 100 American Muslim volunteers went to Louisiana to help with flood relief. American Muslims are part of the solution, building our nation, knowing that we are all in this together.<sup>12,13</sup>

*What do Muslims believe about Jesus and Mary?*

Muslims overwhelmingly revere Jesus and believe that he was born to the Virgin Mary through an act of God, just

.....  
*"Muslims believe that  
 God favors the peaceful."*  
 .....

as Adam is believed to have been created by God without a father or mother. The Qur'an describes his conception and birth, as well as his many miracles such as healings of the sick. The Qur'an also emphasizes that Jesus was a great prophet of God, as well as a messenger who received revelation from God, but that he was, like all other prophets, a human being.

The Qur'an talks more about Jesus than about Muhammad. Most of the Qur'an depicts itself as a text addressed

the millions of their daily readers.

Incorporate information about American Muslims you know, or some facts listed above, in your speeches and other public comments along with reminders about our shared American values of religious freedom.

Ensure that your American Muslim neighbors are treated fairly and equally. Ensure that your workplace and school have clear religious accommodations policies and that they're applied to your Muslim coworkers and classmates. Ensure that you call out anti-Muslim hate when you see it, and publicly call on business and political leaders to act against proposals like religious registries that threaten our shared American values.

**Here's why it matters:** Hate speech leads to hate crimes. When hate speech and conspiracy theories against an American minority are constantly spread publicly and go unchallenged, they foster an atmosphere that causes hate crimes. Throughout 2015, CAIR offices around the country received at least 1-2 daily reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes nationwide.

As an ally, you'll often be called on to answer common questions. The website [islamfactcheck.org](http://islamfactcheck.org) has a list of facts, which are hyperlinked for you to use in class assignments, presentations, etc. In addition, [cairseattle.org/allies](http://cairseattle.org/allies) has ways to educate yourself and take specific actions. You can learn more about Islamic theology and its similarities with Christian teachings at [ing.org/faq](http://ing.org/faq).

In times like now, fair-minded people across our nation have a duty to publicly and vocally affirm American values of religious freedom, and publicly and vocally tell stories of the lives and contributions of American Muslims they know. This can be done in simple ways including letters to editors and during speeches at large public events. By taking just 10 minutes of your time, you can educate millions, counter the hate and help stop hate crimes, and may be even save a life.

▲ *Arsalan Bukhari is Public Affairs Director at CAIR-Washington State, a chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Raised in a middle class American Muslim household in North Seattle, Arsalan Bukhari's strong work ethic, values, faith, and sense of responsibility to community and country came from his upbringing as a practicing Muslim, and as a member of a U.S. military family.*

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<sup>1</sup>Download the footnotes at [ipjc.org/a-matter-of-spirit](http://ipjc.org/a-matter-of-spirit)

# Resources on Islam

## Discover Islam

[www.discoverislam.com](http://www.discoverislam.com)

This six part documentary series was created by Muslims for non-Muslims to learn more about the faith, the people, and the challenges of practicing Islam in America in the 21st century. The purpose of these documentaries is to dispel the most popular misconceptions about Islam and portray it, and American Muslims, as part of the American mainstream. The films are all roughly 30 minutes long, covering some of the biggest topics with nuance and complexity, all the while lifting up our diversity and unity as humans seeking beauty. Available to borrow from IPJC.

## JustFaith Module: The Sultan and the Saint

[www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org)

This eight-session JustMatters module brings Muslims and Christians together in dialogue. It aims to cultivate mutual understanding and appreciation of what these faith traditions hold in common, as well as the ways in which they differ. By nurturing relationships across religious boundaries, participants will model interfaith cooperation as they live out a central tenet of both faiths: to love God and to love our neighbor. Registration for the 2017-18 year available at JustFaith Ministries.

## The Sultan and the Saint Film

[www.sultanandthesaintfilm.com](http://www.sultanandthesaintfilm.com)

The Sultan and the Saint Documentary tells the story of St. Francis' visit to the Sultan of Egypt in the midst of the war-torn period known as the Fifth Crusade. Using dramatic re-enactments alongside interviews with both Muslim and Franciscan experts, UPF has developed a unique visual retelling of this beautiful meeting. Learn more at [sultanandthesaintfilm.com](http://sultanandthesaintfilm.com).

## Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians and Muslims

*By Joan Chittister, OSB, Murshid Saadi Shakur Chishti, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow*

The Tent of Abraham is the first book to tell the entire story of Abraham and to reenergize it as a basis for peace. Written by three leaders belonging to different faiths, the book explores in accessible language the mythic quality and the teachings of reconciliation that are embedded in the Torah, the Qur'an, and the Bible. Available to borrow from IPJC.



# INTERCOMMUNITY

## A New Solidarity with Creation

Catholics Acting on *Laudato Si'*

Visit [www.ipjc.org](http://www.ipjc.org) for information, events and resources for shared use.

## ▶ Season of Creation

September 1, World Day of Prayer for Creation through October 4, Feast of St. Francis

Climate Science: *Laudato Si'* & the Northwest, September 14, with Meteorologist Jeff Renner



Jeff with *Laudato Si'* Leadership Team members Jesse Dye, Earth Ministry, Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, Seattle University Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture, Patty Bowman, IPJC

## Mass Celebrating the Season of Creation



## ▶ Justice for Women

DACA Renewal Clinic and Q&A/Info Session



IPJC collaborated with the Washington Dream Coalition, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and Colectiva Legal del Pueblo to organize a DACA Legal Clinic with a concurrent bilingual Q&A/Info Session on September 22 at Everett Community College to assist DACA recipients. A team of seven immigration attorneys gave free legal advice to thirty five young adults. Twelve DACA renewal applications were completed and fully funded. Three participants who didn't qualify for renewal found other forms of relief.



- ☞ All Saints Parish, Puyallup, *Human Trafficking*
- ☞ Blanchet High School: *Discerning our Call to Justice and Mercy*
- ☞ Holy Rosary Parish, Edmonds, *Poverty in Washington: Taking Action; Corporate Responsibility on Environmental Issues*
- ☞ Ignatian Spirituality Center, *Ignatian Contemplation and Discernment For Such a Time as This*
- ☞ St. John the Baptist, Covington, Parish Mission: *Who is My Neighbor? The Face of Poverty in Washington State*
- ☞ St. Michael Parish, Snohomish, *Just War or Just Peace: Catholic Social Teaching on War and Nonviolence*
- ☞ St. Michael's Parish School, Snohomish, WA and St. Francis Xavier School, Phoenix, AZ, *Human Trafficking Webinar for Junior High Students*
- ☞ Westside Interfaith Network, West Seattle, *Human Trafficking*

# PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

NEWS • ANNOUNCEMENTS • UPCOMING EVENTS

## ▶ Young Adult Justice Cafés



The 2017-18 Justice Cafés are off to a great start! In September, young adults around the world met to discuss Addiction as part of Justice Café Season 1 which will focus on issues related to Health. Are you a young adult who wants to build community, deepen spirituality and act for justice? It's not too late to start your Justice Café. Contact [ipjc@ipjc.org](mailto:ipjc@ipjc.org) today.

### Season 1: Health

SEPT  
OCT  
NOV

Addiction

Mental Health

Wellness

### Season 2: Community Participation

JAN  
FEB  
MAR

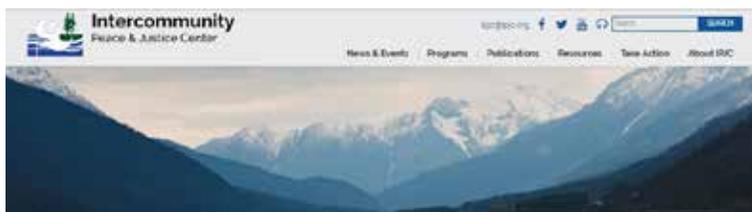
Solidarity & Charity

Intergenerational Wisdom

Popular Movements

April: Act for Justice

## ▶ We have a new website!



Visit us at [www.ipjc.org](http://www.ipjc.org)

## ▶ Donations

**In honor of:** Adrian Dominican Jubilarians; Elizabeth Behnken; Patrice Eilers, OP; Linda Haydock, SNJM; Jamie Margolin; Joan Kowalski, OP; Anthony Nguyen; Marnel Ramirez; Sisters of Providence Jubilarians

**In memory of:** Diana Bader, OP; George Burrows; Annette Jones; Margaret Lichter

## ▶ Mark Your Calendar

### Contemplative Practices: A Path to Transformation



**February 10**  
9:00-12:30 pm  
St. Matthew  
Parish, Seattle

Presented by **Anne Kertz Kernion**, the creator of Cards by Anne, who has degrees in Environmental Engineering and Theology.

Her thought-provoking presentation will invite us to deepen our spirituality

- ☞ **Explore** our Christian tradition and the latest neuroscience findings as we
- ☞ **Ponder** how the practices of Mindfulness, Meditation, and Gratitude can lessen the stress we experience, boost brain function, support our DNA and overall health and increase our awareness ... improving the quality of our days.

1:30-2:30 pm Optional "Chair Yoga" Session

**Registration opens January 2, 2018**

Suggested donation: \$15

## SAVE THE DATE †

# CATHOLIC ADVOCACY DAY

## FEBRUARY 21, 2018

Catholic Advocacy Day is sponsored by:  
Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center • Washington State Catholic Conference  
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## For Reflection

As a nation, one of our most fundamental principles is the guarantee of religious liberty. For such liberty to flourish, we must create a society that values diverse expressions of religious faith. Let us gather to reflect on our call to interfaith understanding and respect.

**Leader:** As we gather, I invite us to take a few minutes to consider the following:

- ☞ What do I know, and what do I not know, about Islam, the faith practiced by 1.8 billion people worldwide? What am I still curious about?
- ☞ Do any of the practices and beliefs of Islam resonate with my own faith and values? If so, in what ways?
- ☞ Where do I see fear of and prejudice against Muslims in my community or in the world today? What does my own spiritual tradition have to say about such treatment of Muslims?
- ☞ Where do I see signs of hope for greater peace and understanding among peoples of different faith traditions?

**Leader:** I now invite you to share any reflections. What insights came to you as you reflected on these questions? In what ways can you help to build interfaith understanding?

*(Allow time for discussion)*

**Leader:** Let us close with these readings from the Qur'an and the Christian Scriptures:

**Be upright** for God, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; **act equitably**, that is nearer to piety, and be careful of (your duty to) God; surely **God is aware** of what you do. God has promised to those who believe and do good deeds (that) they shall have forgiveness award.

—Surah 5:7-5:9

“**Teacher**, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall **love the Lord**, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall **love your neighbor** as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

—Matthew 22:36-40