

The nature of the relationship between Christians and Muslims is significant to the whole human family. We have been in contact with one another for more than fourteen centuries. Today both together comprise nearly half the world's population.

Christian-Muslim relations have sometimes been marked by constructive living together, sometimes by rivalry or violent conflict. The present-day relationships of Muslims and Christians in the U.S. and in other countries reciprocally affect one another.

Islam is becoming the second largest religious community in the United States. Our growing Muslim community is composed of both indigenous and immigrant Muslims, plus temporary residents such as students. Muslims have concerns about their identity and involvement in American society that parallel those of their Christian neighbors.

In the last century, many countries with predominantly Muslim populations emerged from colonialism. As they have taken their place among the community of nations, they have struggled to achieve political order and economic growth while preserving the integrity of their Islamic way of life. In some situations, Muslims are a minority among people whose ways are unfamiliar to them. In other places, they are a majority. Even as a majority, Muslims often find their way of life threatened by political antagonisms, secular indifference, and the trends of globalization. All these factors and others — such as each community's relative degree of access to political power, economic resources or social influence — affect interaction between Muslims, Christians, and others.

Many parts of the Islamic world have turned anew to religious traditions in reaction to political, social, and economic changes, and to the spread of western values that have accompanied modern science, technology, and industry. They have turned with fresh vigor to their scriptures, traditions, and law code to shape communal life. Contemporary Islam is in the midst of a deep, comprehensive revival, though there is no unanimity among Muslims about the form the revitalization will take.

As a religion that began after the time of Christ, Islam has always presented a theological challenge to Christians.

A number of issues are currently matters for dialogue:

- the relations between religion, the world, and the state
- choices between integration into the values of the larger society and assertion of a religiously shaped identity
- the balance between community and individual rights
- the nature of the struggle and the role of violence in achieving changes in society and the world
- family and roles of women in the family and society
- pastoral concerns rising from life in a religiously plural world (such as those occasioned by interreligious marriage)
- appropriate forms of missionary activity

Muslims and Christians can make important contributions through working together in areas such as social and racial justice, defense of human rights, refugee/displaced person needs, safeguarding religious freedom, and conflict resolution.

Christians respond to the challenges of our contemporary encounters with Islam through faith in the sovereignty of God over the world. Our search for faithful living must be motivated by a desire to love God, to be obedient to God's will, and to love neighbors as ourselves—whether they be “neighbors” or “enemies.” Where this may lead and how it will bring new understanding between Christians and Muslims rest in the mercy and grace of God. Both Christians and Muslims are challenged to allow God to guide them into a future free from hatred, free from fear, and directed by hopeful love. The future holds the possibility that in our shared life, Christians and Muslims may faithfully respond to God and realize the peace and justice so desperately needed.

Support the search to promote understanding.

- Get to know and become friends with Muslim neighbors. Plan reciprocal visits, as appropriate.
- Identify and counteract prejudicial and abusive behavior toward Muslims in your community and our society.
- Be sensitive to stereotypical characterizations of Islam and Muslims.
- Consider questions arising from key dialogue issues facing Christians and Muslims.
- Study about Islam.

Support the search for cooperation.

- Promote relationships and dialogue with Muslims, giving attention to practical, theological, and historical dimensions.
- Identify common concerns with Muslims. Explore ways to address concerns cooperatively and to engage in joint efforts.

- Recognize that Muslims' perceptions of the United States' role in the Islamic world often affect their response to Christians.
- Work together with Muslims for world peace and social justice.
- As possible, work with Muslims and Jews to find common ethical grounds within our three communities that enable solidarity for justice, peace, and the sustainability of creation.

Support the search for faithful witness.

- Affirm continuation of the long Presbyterian history of witness in word and deed among Muslims.
- Participate in considering appropriate forms of Christian witness for our time.
- Work for full religious freedom (including the right to practice the faith of one's choice) and for equality of citizenship for all persons in their societies — whether Muslims or Christians or others, whether in the U.S. or elsewhere.
- Identify the political use of religion for purposes of power and oppression.
- Pray for partner churches in predominantly Muslim areas.
- Work through ecumenical and interfaith channels and organizations whenever possible.

See General Assembly actions on which this content is based: *Islamic Study 1986 and 1987, Ecumenical Statement 1993, and the commendation of Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call for Reflection and Action, 2002.* See also *Haines and Cooley, eds., Christians and Muslims Together: An Exploration by Presbyterians, 1987* (out of print, but available in some resource centers).

Resources

Brown, Stuart. *The Nearest in Affection: Towards a Christian Understanding of Islam.* Trinity Press International, 1995.

Church & Society magazine. *You Shall Love Your Neighbor: Christians and Muslims in a Time of Fear.* January/February 1994 issue. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). PDS #72-630-94-601.

Esposito, John L. *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Haddad, Yvonne, ed. *The Muslims of America*, Oxford, 1991.

Jomier, Jacques. *How to Understand Islam*, John Bowden, transl., Crossroad, 1991.

Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue: Facets of a Relationship.* 2002. PDS#74-292-02-001.

Smith, Jane I. *Islam in America*, Columbia University Press, 1999.

Speight, Marston. *God Is One: The Way of Islam*, Friendship Press, 2nd edition, 2001. Order by phone, 1-800-889-5733.

Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action. World Council of Churches, 2000.

World Council of Churches. *Issues in Christian Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations.* 1992. In *Church & Society*, January/February 1994. PDS#72-630-94-601.

“The search for understanding is much more than a discussion of similarities and differences... It is a search to discover and know the inner nature of Islam and of the Muslim believer.”

“At the heart of Islam is the worship of God... It is submission to the will of God... Because the believer is thankful to God for the divine grace and mercy that has made life possible... (The Muslim’s) faith and practice must be taken seriously by all who in their own way have responded to the divine call to faithfulness.”

*Christians and Muslims Together:
An Exploration by Presbyterians*

“Muslims often suspect that Christian educational, medical and philanthropical activities... conceal the hidden objective of proselytism. But diakonia is a form of witness that has its own integrity. Therefore, Christians are constantly called to preserve that integrity, and to be seen as engaged in disinterested and loving service.”

*Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations:
Ecumenical Considerations*

“Current developments, political and otherwise, may be threatening to build up new attitudes of distrust and hostility. This imposes a new urgency in the consideration of Christian-Muslim relations.”

“Participants have discovered that interreligious dialogue is informed by, and informs, the internal dialogue within each religion.”

Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS



Interfaith Relations
World Mission
General Assembly Council
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396
1-888-728-7228, ext. 5289
www.pcusa.org

PDS 26-474-08-002
To order call 1-800-524-2612 or email pds@pcusa.org

