

Some Scholars and Religious Leaders Featured in the DVDs

Narrators

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Rev. Allan Jones, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, California

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Rev. Bryan Fulwider, Congregational Church of Winter Park, Florida (UCC)

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Imam Zaid Shakir, Zaytuna College, Berkeley, California

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Marwa Zeini, lawyer

Yusuf and Dilara Saeed, doctor and teacher respectively, Chicago, Illinois

Lori Ismail, former model, Santa Clara, California

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Catherine and Farid Sareini, Detroit, Michigan

Hassan Dan Mekled, youth counselor, Michigan

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Prepared by Carol Schersten LaHurd, Ph.D., with the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Office of the Presiding Bishop, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations; and A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2012.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the *Discover Islam* videos are those of the producers and may not necessarily reflect official positions of the Evangelical Lutheran in America or A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

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Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



An Introduction to the Series

A word from ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

In a historic first, an Islamic leader was invited to bring greetings to the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly – a bold witness to our church's commitment to inter-religious relations, and specifically our commitment to Lutheran-Muslim dialogue. Dr. Sayyid Sayeed is the national director for the Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances of the Islamic Society of North America, one of the largest Islamic organizations in the U.S.

As he closed his greetings, Sayeed said to those gathered, "It is a new millennium – your leadership is critical, your understanding is critical not only for this country but for the entire globe. You have a certain set of standards of cooperation, of understanding, those are a great asset for us, and it's with this kind of understanding that we will be moving forward. ... We pray God almighty to bless us together and deliver this mission that is ours." He received a standing ovation from the Assembly.

Not long thereafter, we received a generous invitation to distribute throughout our church complimentary copies of a six-disc DVD series titled *Discover Islam* – produced by Discover Islam – USA, and endorsed by the Islamic Society of North America. What a wonderful gift to all of us! ELCA synod offices, seminaries, and members of our nationwide Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network received copies of this DVD, and it is also available for purchase online at www.discoverislam.com.

Through the leadership of the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations, and in particular the expert knowledge, skilled research, and exceptional authorship of Carol Schersten LaHurd, Ph.D, we have produced this study guide. It is intended to be used as an interpretive tool, unpacking how we, as Christians, might best approach and better understand each of the topics covered by the short DVDs in the series. Importantly, we hope that your use of "Discover Islam" will deepen your self-understanding as a Lutheran, and enhance your relationship to your Muslim neighbors.

We extend our thanks to Carol, to members of the Consultative Panel, and to our partners at Discover Islam – USA. May our endeavors together continue to deepen our relationships in the spirit of mutual understanding and peace.

In peace,

Donald S. McCoid and Kathryn M. Lohre

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Staff, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Introduction

Imagine that you and your family are moving to a remote Asian village, where you will set up a health clinic under the sponsorship of your denomination. You quickly recognize that the local people with whom you will live and work not only are ignorant about Christianity but hold some negative stereotypes toward it. You begin to create learning resources to explain the Christian religion to them. You recognize that you should feature the diversity of Christian practice around the world. You want even to acknowledge the occasional misuse of the tradition by extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and cults such as the Branch Davidians. But mainly you want to help your new community understand your own Christian faith and how it shapes your life and motivates your work.

The producers of the DVD series *Discover Islam* had very similar goals, as expressed in these words from the DVD cover: "There are over a billion and a half people across the globe that claim to be followers of Islam. Yet few people outside the faith truly understand Muslim beliefs, practices and values. There is great misinformation about issues ranging from jihad to women's rights. These DVDs aim to remedy this situation."

This study guide has been developed by the Evangelical Lutheran in America (ELCA) and A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, in part because the series has been distributed to many church offices and institutions and has generated wide interest. **Although church leaders do not endorse these DVDs' content, they believe the series, accompanied by this study resource, merits use by congregations and institutions seeking to better understand Islam and to form positive relationships with their Muslim American neighbors. They believe there is value in learning about Islam from Muslims.**

Church leaders also readily acknowledge that *Discover Islam* is not a resource created mainly by academic experts. Instead, it is a resource that represents some authentic American Muslim voices sharing their vision of Islam and their hopes for constructive Muslim participation in American public life and for friendship and mutual understanding with religious others. We have chosen to honor these voices and to provide guidance for the use of these DVDs in Christian congregations and institutions.

Understandably, the DVDs showcase Muslims who are faithful and ardent practitioners of their tradition. **But to the credit of the producers, the DVDs also expose real-world distortions of Islam and the Qur'an in such radical**

actions as prohibiting women's education or terrorist attacks for political ends. It could well be argued that such extremists are no more representative of authentic Islam than are the KKK and Branch Davidians of Christianity. It is our hope that through viewing and discussing these DVDs, your church community will learn enough about Islam and Muslims to make the distinctions that Christians routinely make among the varied expressions, both positive and destructive, of the Christian tradition.

How to Use This Guide

1. The six DVDs and accompanying study guides can be used separately, in a series, or together over the course of a longer event, such as a retreat:
 - #1 Islam: Faith and History
 - #2 Islam: an American Faith
 - #3 Women in Islam
 - #4 African Americans and Islam
 - #5 Islam: a Faith Hijacked
 - #6 Christians and Islam
2. The leader should plan to introduce the DVDs by reading or summarizing the **Introduction** above to help create an atmosphere of openness to learning from the experience of watching and discussing the segments.
3. The leader should plan how to incorporate the **Elaboration on Key Topics** material and which discussion questions to use in each segment. This step is important in order to supplement the material presented in the DVDs.
4. Material from each study guide can be duplicated for participants or projected on a screen. In addition, the leader may wish to print some of the supplemental material from the recommended online resources.
5. Especially useful for supplementing this study guide are these resources developed by the ELCA:
 - "Christian-Muslim Talking Points"**
www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints
 - "Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations"**
Scroll down at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx.

examples of that in the DVD and discuss similar examples from books and movies portraying the Christian tradition.

4. Now that you've been introduced to the history and basic beliefs of Islam, discuss what you would most like Muslims to understand about your own Christian faith and practice.

Learn more

ELCA resources

For insights on a variety of topics comparing Islam and Christianity, see

"Christian-Muslim Talking Points" www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints.

For more on the history of Islam and its interaction with Christianity,

see especially pp. 16–19 of **"Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations."** Scroll down at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx.

"Understanding Islam" Summer 2003 MOSAIC

What do Muslims believe? Who was the Prophet Mohammed? How does Islam relate to the Christian faith? This DVD from Mosaic Television helps members of your congregation understand Islam. <http://archive.elca.org/mosaic/summer03.html>

To view on Google:

<http://DVD.google.com/DVDplay?docid=7250353128530739405&pr=goog-sl&hl=en>

Other resources

Basic information about Islam <http://islam101.net/>

Beliefnet on Islam www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Islam/index.aspx

What Is Islam? <http://globalministries.org/mee/resources/what-is-islam.html>

Islam FAQs www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200305/islam-faqs.htm

Esposito, John L. *Islam: the Straight Path*

_____. *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, 2nd ed.

_____. *The Future of Islam*

Goddard, Hugh. *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*

Kaltner, Islam. *What Non-Muslims Should Know*

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Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



#1 Islam: Faith and History

Summary of DVD content

The DVD opens with the Muslim call to prayer and a common etymology for the term "Islam," which derives from the same root as the Arabic word for "peace," though it is more correctly translated as "submission." The DVD explains that Islam is the same faith revealed by God to the biblical prophets and addressed to all humankind through the final prophet, Muhammad. While Jesus is not the divine Son of God in the Qur'an, he is a major prophet, born of a virgin, who performed miracles through God's power.

According to the traditional account, Muhammad was born in Mecca around 570 C.E. and encountered an Arabian culture in spiritual and ethical darkness.

Revelations from God began when he was 40 and continued for 23 years until his death. He was commanded by the angel Gabriel to recite what had been revealed to him. These revelations were gathered together into the Qur'an. This revealed scripture and the personal example of Muhammad form a practical guide to life for most Muslims. The first Muslim community was formed in Medina in 622 C.E., and by the time of the Prophet's death, most of eastern Arabia had accepted him as the Prophet of God.

By the eighth and ninth centuries Islamic influence had spread as far west as Italy and Spain, and there was an "explosion of knowledge" as different cultures and faith groups came together under Islamic governance. The presence of intolerance, sexism and extremism in modern-day Islamic societies is explained as part of the legacy of colonial disempowerment of Muslim people. Terrorism and "holy war" are condemned as distortions of Islamic teachings, and all Muslims are urged to "take back Islam" and work with others toward peace.

Elaboration on key topics

1. The DVD says the **majority of people in Africa are Muslim**. While it may be true that Islam is the single most populous religion in certain parts of the African continent, overall, the numbers of Muslims and Christians in Africa is about the same, according to a recent Pew Research report: While sub-Saharan Africa has almost twice as many Christians as Muslims, on the African continent as a whole the two faiths are roughly balanced, with 400 million to 500 million followers each. Since northern Africa is heavily Muslim and southern Africa is heavily Christian,

the great meeting place is in the middle, a 4,000-mile swath from Somalia in the east to Senegal in the west. Similarly, the figure of eight million **Muslims in the United States** is considerably higher than recent estimates by the Pew Research Group, which puts the 2010 population for the combined Americas at about 5.3 million. [See <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1564/islam-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa-survey> and <http://www.pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php#Islam>.]

2. The DVD presents the Islamic concept of "**Tawhid**," **the unity and oneness of God**, as expressed in the Qur'an. Helpfully, Hamza Yusuf of Zaytuna College explains that the Christian concept of a Triune God does not mean that Christianity fails to share Islam's commitment to monotheism. Isaiah 44:6-9, John 1:14 and this passage from the Qur'an illustrate a shared commitment to the one God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as a difference regarding Jesus' relationship to God: "In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, Say, He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him." [Surah 112]

3. Many Christians are not aware that **Jesus is one of the most important prophets mentioned in the Qur'an**, which presents the story of his virginal conception and birth to Mary in great detail, as well as some of his miracles and his future return at the end of time. The Qur'anic versions of these stories do not match the canonical gospels precisely, though the overall story is in keeping with most Christian tradition. The Surah of Mary (19) is an excellent starting point for Muslim-Christian dialogue. Most Muslims consider Jesus one of the greatest prophets along with Muhammad and have deep reverence for him. Whenever practicing Muslims say or hear the name of Jesus, they pronounce the honorific "peace be upon him." The DVD presents a common Muslim interpretation that the coming "**advocate**" or "**paraclete**" **Jesus proclaims in John 15–16** is actually a prediction of the Prophet Muhammad, while acknowledging that Christians understand Jesus to be referring to the Holy Spirit. Using the Greek word "parakletos," Jesus in John's Gospel gives his followers the assurance that God's Spirit will act as their defender and consoler. An early historian, Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), read the Gospel in a Syriac translation where "parakletos" is rendered as "munahhemana," which sufficiently resembles "Muhammad" to suggest this claim. (Read more in F.E. Peters, "Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives," p. 175.)

4. According to the DVD, **Islam's rapid growth** in just a few centuries led to a "united and peaceful community" stretching from Cordova in Spain to Timbuktu in Africa. While there was never a single, united Muslim polity or community after the death of the prophet, it is certainly true that travel and trade in much of the territory from Spain in the West to India in the East was encouraged and led to a flourishing and largely peaceful economy. However, **the DVD underplays the military aspect**

of these conquests and over-emphasizes the actual spread of the religion. In fact, like all religious traditions, Islam took many centuries to develop its theology and law. Further, evidence shows that it took centuries for the local populations to convert to Islam, and many Arab nations still have significant Christian minorities left from the ancient churches established in the early Christian period. **Under Islamic rule Christians and Jews were granted protected minority status** and continued to practice their own traditions. Although there were occasional periods of discrimination and even persecution, these minorities sometimes thrived under Islamic rule, especially in comparison to the treatment of minorities under imperial Christendom. It is also quite true that **the "renaissance" of Europe owes much to these larger and more advanced cultures to the south and east** of Europe, as represented in our many words from Arabic (algebra, admiral, algorithm, alcohol, alchemy, etc.). While history remembers a litany of wars with the Muslim world (from the initial conquests to the crusades and the "Reconquista" of Spain), there are also outstanding examples of the "convivencia" (peaceful coexistence) in Andalusia and many cultural, scholarly and artistic exchanges that are worth recovering. **Learn more:**

- Amin Maalouf, *Leo Africanus*
- Jonathan Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*
- Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Christians, and Jews Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*

5. The DVD's **overgeneralization that early Islamic empires were entirely free of intolerance, sexism and extremism was not true under all Muslim rulers.** Second, while it is the case that **most Muslim countries were colonized and Muslims disempowered as a result, that legacy is not the only cause for the ills afflicting some Muslim societies today.** For more on women's roles and rights in Islam, see study guide "#3 Women in Islam." Read more about decline and renewal in Islamic societies in the books by John Esposito listed below.

Discussion questions

1. What most surprised you in this DVD segment? What did you find disturbing? Reassuring?
2. How does the transmission of the Qur'an via the angel Gabriel and the human prophet Muhammad compare with the revelation that led to the Old and New Testaments? See the "Christian-Muslim Talking Point" on the Bible and the Qur'an at www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints.
3. It could be argued that the DVD's portrayal of Islamic history demonstrates the general human tendency to idealize one's own tradition's past. Talk about

"War, Terrorism, and Peace" in **Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations** (pp. 28-29)
www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx

Other resources

"Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-first Century"
August 2004 | U.S. Institute for Peace Special Report No. 125
www.usip.org/publications/ijtihad-reinterpreting-islamic-principles-twenty-first-century
"Debunking the Mythical 'Sharia Threat' to Our Judicial System"
www.aclu.org/blog/religion-belief/debunking-mythical-sharia-threat-our-judicial-system
"Dispelling myths about Sharia"
www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=RS1108-4817
"The sharia myth sweeps America"
www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2011-06-12-Sharia-law-in-the-USA_n.htm
"Top Five Sharia Myths"<http://sharialaws.blogspot.com/2012/01/top-five-sharia-myths.html>
Defending Religious Freedom: Understanding Shari' a
www.icna.org/defending-religious-freedom-understanding-shariah/
"The Diversity of Muslims in the United States: Views as Americans"
www.usip.org/publications/diversity-muslims-united-states-views-americans

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Becoming American? The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America*

_____ *The Muslims of America*
Hallaq, Wael B. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*

Smith, Jane I. *Islam in America*, 2nd ed.

Abdul Rauf, Feisal. *What's Right with Islam Is What's Right With America*

"Islam and Democracy," John L. Esposito and John O. Voll. *Humanities*, November/December 2001, Volume 22/Number 6. www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2001-11/islam.html

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Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



#2 Islam: An American Faith

Summary of DVD content

This segment opens by describing Islam's diverse population worldwide and notes how the September 2001 attacks have tarnished the image of all Muslims. Scholars and Muslim Americans explain why such terrorist acts are condemned in Islam. Georgetown University professor John Esposito urges Muslims and non-Muslims to interact in their local communities to bring about mutual understanding and respect.

Islamic beliefs and principles begin with submission to God, a submission that frees believers to live a moral life. Islamic ideals are presented as compatible and consistent with the United States Bill of Rights; various Muslim Americans describe how Muslims can be freer to thrive in the United States than in many other countries.

The film traces the presence of Muslims in America back to mapmakers and explorers who may have visited during the early Middle Ages. The slave trade brought millions of Muslims from Africa, slaves who were forced to accept the religion of the white and mainly Christian slave owners. Starting in the early 1900s, such African Americans as Marcus Garvey and Elijah Poole (later Elijah Muhammad) began researching their African roots and combining elements of Islam with a new Black Power movement that became the Nation of Islam. A leading adherent, Malcolm X, eventually embraced orthodox Islam based on the Qur'an and was assassinated soon after. Elijah Muhammad's son W.D. Muhammad was for decades the spiritual leader of African American Muslims following orthodox Islam.

After World War II more immigrants came to the United States to create an ethnically diverse community of Muslims who have made many contributions to American life, including heroic military service.

Elaboration on key topics

1. The DVD sites the **global Muslim population at 1.5 billion, and that in the United States at 8 million.** The Pew Research Group estimates that in 2010 there were 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide and about 5.3 million in the combined Americas. Correctly noting that the U.S. census undercounts Muslims, various

Islamic groups estimate 3 to 8 million Muslims in the United States. Of course, it is very important to note that **most of the world's Muslim population is neither American nor Arab, but rather South and Southeast Asian** (from Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, etc.) [www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx]

2. Speakers in the DVD describe **terrorism as "a crime against humanity"** and urge all Muslim leaders to speak out against it. As will be explored further in the DVD segment for "#5 Islam: a Faith Hijacked," the history of Christianity also exhibits the tendency for religious traditions to be co-opted with violent results: for example, in the Crusades, for defenses of slavery and racism, and in support of totalitarian regimes, including the Nazis. In today's world many Muslims live in conditions of poverty, displacement, and oppression — conditions that may make Islam particularly vulnerable to being misused as a political weapon. Such factors do not in any way justify terrorism. But American Christians can seek to understand these factors and also to recognize that the huge majority of Muslims experiencing such hardships do not choose the path of violence. They can also add their voices to those of devout Muslims who call for redress and change.

3. Several speakers talk about the **compatibility of Islam and American democratic principles**. Countries with Muslim majorities represent varied political systems on a continuum from a semi-secular republic (Turkey) to an avowed Islamic state (Iran). Islam's central belief in the unity and sovereignty of God means that all of human life, including political life, should acknowledge God's will. That conviction has led some Muslims (e.g., in Iran) to experiment with a theocracy led by a religious leader representing God's authority. But this is the exception in Islamic tradition. Majority Sunni Muslims strongly contend that the principle of God's sovereignty means that no one human can stand in for God. Instead, believers must rule together by consensus, a Qur'anic principle that well-known Muslim scholars assert is compatible with American-style representative democracy.

4. The DVD refers to the **arrival of non-African Muslim immigrants** after World War II. While it is true that such an influx occurred, many Muslims, especially from the Middle East, came to the United States in earlier waves in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The earliest documented mosque and Muslim cemetery was 1929 in Ross, North Dakota. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought large numbers of Muslim professionals to the U.S. Today the top countries of origin for Muslim immigrants to the U.S. are Pakistan and Bangladesh.

[The Future of the Global Muslim Population; Projections for 2010-2030; 27 Jan 2011
www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx]

Discussion questions

1. Share your own stories of meeting Muslims in your educational experience, workplace or neighborhood. What have these people shared about being Muslims in America? If they are immigrants, what obstacles and opportunities have they faced? If you have never met a Muslim, what accounts for that fact?

2. One speaker says that a problem in the United States is that some Muslim parents equate maintaining one's ethnic identity with being a good Muslim. What do you think he means? Try to think of parallel cases for other religious minorities in the United States.

3. Muslim Americans cite some of the following areas as challenges as they strive to be faithful Muslims and good American citizens:

- Modesty in dress, especially in public schools and hospitals
- Attending midday Friday prayers at a mosque and celebrating feasts, when those may not be recognized in secular work and school calendars
- Availability of "halal" meat, slaughtered according to Islamic ritual
- Interfaith dating and marriage

Discuss ways your congregation might learn more about these challenges and assist in their resolution. What are some ways you struggle to be a faithful Christian in American society? What similarities do you observe with those cited in the video?

4. The topic of Islam and terrorism is covered fully in the study guide for the DVD segment "#5 Islam: a Faith Hijacked." Many non-Muslim Americans also perceive "Shari'ah," Islamic law, as a threat to American secular democracy. In Islam Shari'ah means primarily "the way of God" for human life. More specifically it refers to legislation that is derived from the Qur'an, the lifestyle and sayings of the prophet Muhammad, historic legal consensus, and application of human reason to new situations. Islamic law can vary somewhat by region; and in most majority-Muslim countries the legal systems today are a combination of secular civil law and Shari'ah-based family legislation for marriage, divorce and inheritance.

How do you respond to the assertion by some that American Muslims are seeking to replace our current legal system with Shari'ah? Is this approach substantially different from that of some Christian Americans who want to shape the legal system according to what they believe to be biblical principles?

Learn More

ELCA resources

"Law in Islam," **Christian-Muslim Talking Points**

www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints

5. Read some of the Bible and Qur'an passages listed here that deal with women's issues. What do they tell us about gender roles and rights in both Christian and Muslim holy books? Discuss ways in which actual practice in both traditions more often than not deviates from these scriptural ideals. See Qur'an Surahs 33.35, 4.34, 2.228, 24.30-1, 33.59 [find online at www.quranbrowser.org/]; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; Galatians 3:2; Acts 2:17. Note that some Muslim women may wear special clothing for prayer and ceremonies, but take off the hijab (e.g., cloak and headscarf) for a leisure activity such as a walk with their children. Discuss times that Christian women might choose to dress in a particular way for religious activities.

Learn more

ELCA resources

See in Women in Islam, "**Christian-Muslim Talking Points**"

www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints

For more on rights of women in Judaism and Islam see pp. 30–31 of "**Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations.**" Scroll down at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx

Other resources

Ahmed, Leila, *Women and Gender in Islam: The Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*

_____ *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and Jane I. Smith, *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*

Safi, Omid. *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*

Smith, Jane I. *Women in Contemporary Muslim Societies*

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*

Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*

Organizations

Musawah www.musawah.org

Karamah, Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights www.karamah.org/

Muslim Women's League www.mwlnusa.org/

Imaan, LGBT Muslim Support Group www.imaan.org.uk/

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Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



#3 Women in Islam

Summary of DVD content

The DVD begins to answer "Who are Muslim women?" by discussing what are seen as media misconceptions about the status of Muslim women, some of whom were given the right to vote centuries before women in the West. Islam in principle protects the rights of women. But Muslims, often following cultural practices that pre-date Islam, do not always comply; and there are widely varying practices around the globe. The prophet Muhammad respected women, and his teaching and leadership eliminated many unjust traditions in seventh century Arabia and elsewhere when Islamic precepts were adopted. Muhammad's wife Khadija helped promote his role as prophet and transmitter of revelation from God, and women had important roles in the early days of the Islamic community. In fact, Khadija was a successful businesswoman for whom Muhammad initially worked.

The Qur'an reveres Mary as mother of Jesus and symbol of piety, submission, chastity and purity. She is depicted in modest apparel – the expectation for all Muslim women – and is held up as a model for the modesty expected of both Muslim women and men. The DVD contends that Muslims have exercised freedom of conscience regarding how to dress, and that there is also to be no coercion in marriage. Although women and men exercise differing roles and responsibilities, in the Islamic ideal they are equal in status, and both have a right to education. Parenthood is the responsibility of both parents. In some geographic areas where Islam is the majority religion, practice fails to curb discrimination against women, and Muslim women are speaking out against such violations and organizing for the betterment of society.

Elaboration on key topics

1. The DVD refers to the **gap between the Islamic ideal and actual practice** regarding women's rights, and mentions treatment of women by the Taliban in Afghanistan as a negative example. This particular DVD highlights women in the American and Middle Eastern contexts. However, it is important to recognize the **cultural differences that affect the status of women** in such places as West Africa and Indonesia, where conditions may be dissimilar. **The DVD overall portrays a uniformity of Islamic practice on gender and sexual matters that does not fully reflect the diverse realities across many nations and cultures.** For example,



although many Islamic religious leaders condemn homosexuality as forbidden by the Qur'an, there are organizations dedicated to helping gay Muslims be both authentically themselves and observant Muslims, as is the case in the Jewish and Christian traditions. You can learn more about efforts by Muslims globally to correct abuses and achieve equal rights by visiting the websites of such organizations as those listed below at [Learn more](#).

2. **Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a major figure in the Qur'an**; in fact, she is the only woman referred to by her proper name. To this day Mary is a female role model for Muslim children and a person revered by many Muslims. The story of Mary in the Qur'an has some important differences from the Christian gospels. In the Qur'an, she is a pious virgin dedicated to God's service. The birth of Jesus without a human father is a miracle of God's power – but the Qur'an does not in any way suggest that God is Jesus' father. Some details of Mary's family background have parallels in such second century Christian texts as the Infancy Gospel of James, not included in the New Testament. Read the Qur'anic stories of Mary's and Jesus' births in Surah 3, The House of 'Imran, and Surah 19, Mary. For more about the Qur'anic portrayal of Jesus and his importance, see the study guide for the DVD segment "#1 Christians and Islam."

3. Two important assertions merit further discussion: "**Muslim women and men have freedom of conscience**" and there is to be "**no compulsion in religion**." Regarding the first of these, it is true that in Islam every human being, whether male or female, is accountable to God as an individual. Thus, under the best of circumstances, individual women can choose how to express their submission to God in their choices of dress, education, family life and career. While it is true that the Islamic ideal is to have no compulsion in religion, in practice in some parts of the world Muslim females may be prohibited from attending school, may not be accorded the right of refusal of a marriage partner, and may experience other such restrictions. But it must be remembered that practitioners of all religions fall short of the ideal the religion holds and which they themselves may claim to hold. In the Christian tradition, for example, despite Paul's declaration of equality in Galatians 3:28 ("There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"), there are Christian cultures and denominations that curb women's public roles in society and in organized religion and make wives subservient to their husbands.

4. The DVD gives examples of **female leaders** in Islam's early history and features some professional Muslim women today. Muslim women's access to education and work life in many countries is similar to that for western non-Muslim women, with some exceptions based on cultural and geographic context. More controversial and

much more limited is **women's access to religious leadership roles**, as is the case for some Christian and Jewish denominations. Muslim women often are permitted to lead prayers and Qur'anic instruction for other women, but not for men. In 2000 African American Islamic scholar Amina Wadud led gender-mixed Friday prayers in an Anglican church building in New York City, evoking both praise and condemnation. [Read more at <http://pluralism.org/reports/view/111>.] Although not a case of worship leadership, in 2006 Islamic scholar Ingrid Mattson became the first female president of the Islamic Society of North America. For many years Lena Larssen chaired the organization of the Norwegian Muslims. Recently religious authorities, for example in Morocco and Turkey, have begun to encourage women's leadership roles.

5. Most Muslim women in the DVD appear in modest clothing and a headscarf, perhaps the new common form of "**hijab**," a term commonly used for adherence to approved apparel standards. Although some speakers assert that Muslim women have complete freedom regarding such apparel, the degree to which that is true can depend on one's family and cultural setting. In the United States religiously observant Muslim women exhibit a wide range of dress, from ordinary Western clothing to full cloak, headscarf and face veil. Similar variation exists even in many predominantly Muslim countries, and not all women wear a form of hijab. But in general both Muslim women and men are expected to dress modestly.

Discussion questions

1. Discuss some of the new insights for you in this DVD.
2. What questions did the DVD evoke for you? What are some topics you would like to explore further?
3. Compare and contrast what you may have previously heard about the prophet Muhammad and his views on women's roles with what you heard in the DVD.
4. Brainstorm which countries have the greatest percentage of women in government positions. Then check the statistics on national parliaments at www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm. Discuss what role predominant religious affiliations might play in such discrepancies. How can we explain that a society like ours in the United States, which claims to treat women equally, has a much lower percentage of female political leaders than some Muslim countries? How do we explain the fact that Muslim countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Turkey have had female heads of state, but the United States never has (even if these Muslim women, as members of the aristocracy, are somewhat exceptional in their own contexts)? [Learn more at www.catalyst.org/publication/244/women-in-government and <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/>.]

3. Reflect on the apparent reality that the African American speakers in the video seem to feel they must show how Islam is connected to and very much like Christianity. This approach may well be as much for the benefit of other African Americans as for Christians generally. How do you respond to this aspect of the DVD? Brainstorm some ways you and your congregation might learn more about dynamics in African American religious life and then contribute to enhanced mutual understanding and collaboration on social issues.

Learn more

ELCA resources

ELCA Racial Justice Ministries: www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Multicultural-Ministries/Racial-Justice-Ministries.aspx

ELCA African Descent ministries: www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Multicultural-Ministries/Ethnic-Ministries/African-Descent.aspx

Other resources

"African American Islam Reformed: 'Black Muslims' and the Universal Ummah"

<http://pluralism.org/resources/tradition/essays/islam8.php>

"Islam in America: From African Slaves to Malcolm X"

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/islam.htm>

"Slavery in Islam," BBC 2012

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/slavery_1.shtml

Malcolm X and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
Lincoln, C. Eric. *Black Muslims in America*, 3rd ed.

Prepared by Carol Schersten LaHurd, Ph.D., with the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Office of the Presiding Bishop, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations; and A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2012.

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



#4 African Americans and Islam

Summary of DVD content

The DVD opens with an African American Muslim sharing the breaking of the Ramadan fast in his home. He explains that for him "Islam" means peace and giving oneself to God. He and others talk about what Islam and Christianity have in common. Islam embraces all races and nationalities; and Muslims' relationships with Africans date back to the prophet Muhammad, when Muslims were sent to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) for asylum with the cooperation of the Christian king there. Of particular interest is the African slave Bilal, who was tortured by his master for his Islamic beliefs and later freed by companions of Muhammad. Bilal eventually became the first person to chant the official call to prayer five times each day in Medina, a tradition that continues today.

From Medina, the Muslim community prospered and spread to much of the African continent. Imam Jowhari Abdelmalik, chaplain at Howard University, explains that Mansa, the Muslim king of Mali, sent ships to the New World many years before Columbus. African Muslims were brought forcibly to the Americas during the centuries of slave trade from West Africa. Some of those enslaved were Islamic scholars, and a few were freed and returned to Africa. Gradually the African slaves and their descendants were forced to adopt the slave-owners' Christian religion, but in the early 1890s some began researching their African and Muslim roots. Marcus Garvey and the Moorish Science Temple movements evolved into Elijah Poole Muhammad's Nation of Islam, which combined Islamic symbols with Black Nationalism.

Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little in 1925) became a follower of the Nation of Islam while in prison and become a leading hero and speaker for African American empowerment. In 1964 he embraced orthodox Islam, founded a mosque in New York, and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He began preaching a universal Islam of all races, but was assassinated in 1965. W. D. Muhammad, son of Elijah Muhammad, rejected the exclusivist ideology of the Nation of Islam and for many years served as spiritual leader for African American Sunni Muslims. Over time

Muslim immigrants came to the United States from all continents, building an American Muslim community of all races.

Elaboration on key topics

1. According to the DVD, **30 to 70 percent of African slaves in the New World had been Muslims in Africa.** Various academic sources report a range of 10 to 20 percent; see for example, "Islam in America: From African Slaves to Malcolm X," listed below, which cites 10 percent. However, even those slaves who had practiced Christianity or African traditional religion may have been exposed to Islam before being brought to the Americas.

2. For most Americans the word "slavery" represents the centuries of involuntary African slave experience in the United States. But the practice of slavery is probably as old as human civilization. Recall, for example, that the biblical patriarch Abraham moves to Canaan accompanied by his slaves and is commanded by God to circumcise them as well as his own sons. **Until recent modern history the three monotheist traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have taken slavery as a basic fact of life.** However, it is the case that the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad counseled humane treatment of slaves, and Islam assigned a portion of "zakah" (alms) to free the slaves long before slavery was abolished.

3. Speakers in the video might be understood to place **the arrival of non-African Muslim immigrants** in the United States after the development of an African American Muslim community. While it is true that there was an influx of new Muslim immigrants to the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, many Muslims, especially from the Middle East, came to the U. S. in earlier waves in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The earliest documented mosque and Muslim cemetery was 1929 in Ross, North Dakota. In addition, there are many recent immigrants from such African countries as Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, etc. Today the top countries of origin for Muslim immigrants to the U.S. are Pakistan and Bangladesh.

[The Future of the Global Muslim Population; Projections for 2010-2030; 27 Jan 2011
www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx]

4. Although the DVD refers briefly to Elijah Poole Muhammad and the founding of the Nation of Islam, it should be noted that the Nation is still active today under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan in its home base of Chicago. **Note that the term "Black Muslims" has been used to refer both to members of the Nation of Islam and to African Americans who practice orthodox Islam.** Estimates of membership in the Nation vary from 20,000 to 50,000, and the organization may be best known to the general public as the sponsor of the 1995 Million Man March in Washington, DC, to reinforce African American solidarity and family values. On the other hand, African Americans who follow "orthodox" (i.e., Sunni) Islam may

number as many as one to two million, and may comprise 20 percent of all Muslims in the U.S.[See Pew Forum reports at www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Muslim-Americans-Middle-Class-and-Mostly-Mainstream.aspx and <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>; and <http://pluralism.org/resources/tradition/essays/islam8.php>.]

5. **The first U.S. Muslim military chaplain was an African American** who began serving as a captain in the Army in 1994. By 2008 the U.S. Department of Defense reported that the 11 Muslim chaplains represented an average of one per 500 Muslim service personnel. Some African Americans have accepted Islam in prison, others while serving in the military, especially during recent deployments to the Middle East. Providing mainstream Muslim chaplains in both prison and the military remains an important societal priority, in part to provide an orthodox alternative to radicalization by militant groups. Moreover, African American Muslim ministries in prisons and among urban youth have made significant contributions toward combating drug addiction and crime. **This heightened Muslim presence in American cities** has led to constructive collaboration and occasionally to competitive friction with African American Christian ministries.

6. **Famous African American Muslims** include Malcolm X, featured in the video, and boxer Muhammad Ali (born Cassius Clay). Other notable Muslim athletes are Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (Lew Alcindor, before converting), who played for the Los Angeles Lakers in the 1980s, and Shaquille O'Neal who played for the Boston Celtics. Less well known is Dr. Amina Wadud, a scholar of the Qur'an and an Islamic feminist. Striving to expand Muslim women's leadership roles, in 2005 Dr. Wadud led mixed-gender Friday prayers in an Anglican church building in New York City, evoking both praise and condemnation. (Read more at <http://pluralism.org/reports/view/111>.) Congressman Keith Ellison is the nation's first Muslim member of Congress, representing Minnesota's Fifth District in the House and co-chairing the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Discussion questions

1. Summarize what you learned from the DVD about the history of Islam in the African American community. List some remaining questions and consult the online resources below.

2. Share impressions and experiences you have of both African American Muslims and the Nation of Islam, a continuation of the Black Power movement initiated by Elijah Muhammad. Compare the website of the Nation of Islam (www.noi.org/) with that of the Islamic Society of North America (www.isna.net/) to discover possible differences between a Black Nationalist movement and an umbrella organization of mainstream North American Muslims.

immunity and proportionality. The principles for post-war conduct include showing mercy to the defeated and assisting them to rebuild. Justifiable national and international commitment of forces to armed conflicts depend on adherence to these principles.

www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Peace.aspx

Learn more

ELCA resources

Living in a Time of Terrorism, message approved April 2004 by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Messages/Terrorism.aspx

Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations, Scroll down at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx.

Other resources

The Muslim American Public Opinion Survey www.muslimamericansurvey.org/

"Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," Pew Forum on Public Life, August 2011

www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Muslim-Americans--No-Signs-of-Growth-in-Alienation-or-Support-for-Extremism.aspx

"Public Remains Conflicted Over Islam," Pew Forum, August 2010

www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Public-Remains-Conflicted-Over-Islam.aspx

Islamic Views Regarding Terrorism & Suicide, Muslim Public Affairs Council

www.mpac.org/programs/anti-terrorism-campaign/islamic-views-regarding-terrorism-and-suicidem.php

Islamic Perspectives on Peace and Violence

24 January 2002 | U.S. Institute for Peace Special Report No. 82

www.usip.org/publications/islamic-perspectives-peace-and-violence

"Martyrdom And Murder" The Economist, January 8, 2004

www.economist.com/node/2329785

Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*

Bayoumi, Mustafa. *How Does It Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America*

Gopin, Marc. *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs*

_____. *When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*

Maalouf, Amin. *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*

Pape, Robert. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*

Prepared by Carol Schersten LaHurd, Ph.D., with the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Office of the Presiding Bishop, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations; and A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2012.

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Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



#5 Islam: a Faith Hijacked

Summary of DVD content

The terrorist attacks of September 2011 were an excruciatingly painful watershed event for the victims and their families and indeed for all people in the United States and throughout the whole world. American Muslims experienced a two-fold pain: first the sense of shock and vulnerability of having their country attacked by enemies and, for some, the loss of friends and relatives in the attacks. But Muslims also have had to face the negative fallout from attacks conducted in the name of a distorted understanding of their religious tradition. Several American Muslims describe the harassment they experienced in the wake of 9/11, such as hate mail and threats of "go back to where you came from." Such harassment was also directed against Arab-American Christians and Sikhs. Georgetown University scholar John Esposito points out that Christians and Jews can recognize extremists as not being representative of their own traditions, but often cannot do so for Muslims and Islam. Those who know and have experienced the positive values of Islam can recognize 9/11 as a hijacking of this third great monotheistic religion.

Muslim scholars and citizens talk about the reasons Islam condemns the kind of violence used by modern-day Muslim extremists — and observe that such extremism occurs in all religions and societies. The Ku Klux Klan is a valid example from the Christian tradition in America. Muslim leaders in the video ask non-Muslims to distinguish between the acts of extremists and the faith they claim.

Although popular media often use the related term "jihad" interchangeably with "holy war," "jihad" derives from the Arabic verb "jahada," which means "to exert an effort" or "to struggle." Jihad broadly means to work for peace and to rid oneself of evil, whether internal or external. One meaning can include military action in defense of Islam and/or Islamic territory. John Esposito explains that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all have the idea of sacred struggle. But the notion of "holy war" developed later in European Christianity. The term should be distinguished from "just war," an important tradition of Christian thought to which St. Augustine made decisive contributions. As is true in Christian just war teaching, Islam has guidelines for warfare, such as protection of civilians and natural resources. The guidelines are intended to prevent the kind of violence against the innocent that occurs in terrorist attacks.



(Sikhism is monotheistic tradition with roots in the 15th century Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent.)

Elaboration on key topics

1. The DVD opens with scenes of America's most lethal terrorist attacks in September 2001. Specialists do not agree on a single **definition of terrorism**, but this description from a 2004 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America message is helpful: "Terrorism may be understood as violence or the threat of violence directed toward civilians to create a climate of fear and uncertainty. State actors use terror to maintain their grip on power. Non-state actors use terror to disrupt a political, social, or economic order." [See "Living in a Time of Terrorism" below.]

Terrorism is a hijacking of Islam in several important ways. First, the core of Islam is about achieving peace and harmony with God and with the rest of creation. Although military force is permitted to protect the innocent and to defend Islam and Islamic territory, numerous Qur'an passages call Muslims to make peace with their enemies as soon as they incline toward peace. Second, the Qur'an explicitly condemns both suicide and violence against civilians. Third, even in warfare, Islamic tradition decrees that care must be taken not to harm civilians and the natural world.

2. One speaker describes the 9/11 terrorists as "imitating the nihilistic philosophies of other modern terrorist groups." Although the popular perception in our culture is that most contemporary terrorists are Muslim extremists, the reality is that there are numerous examples of terrorism perpetrated by people of many religions and cultures. Suicide missions by the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka date back to 1987. Some other contemporary groups that have used terror tactics, even against civilian populations, are the Irish Republican Army, the Kurdish PKK, Peru's Shining Path, and Italy's Red Brigades. El Salvadoran death squads reportedly killed tens of thousands in the 1980s. **Even when people engage in terrorist acts in the name of God or a particular religion, their goals are more often more about political power or economic gain.**

3. **The attacks of September 2001 led to a temporary 1600 percent surge in harassment and hate crimes against Muslims in the United States** and even against others, such as Arab Christians and Sikhs, perceived to be part of a Muslim menace. [http://www.adl.org/Learn/hate_crimes_laws/HCSA_FBI.asp] Anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate crimes then declined until a new upsurge in 2009 and beyond, when hate crimes were accompanied by increasing opposition to mosque construction in the U.S and intensified political rhetoric maligning Islam and Muslims. Sadly, as recently as March 2011 near Sacramento, two elderly Sikh men in traditional turbans were fatally shot — apparently mistaken for Muslims.

Polling data reveals anti-Muslim attitudes among some Americans, even if most do not act out against Muslims. In the 2010 Pew Research Center Poll of 1003 adults, the percentage with an unfavorable view was 38 percent, with 30 percent having a favorable view, and 32 percent offering no opinion. Also not surprising is that in the same poll 55 percent of Americans reported knowing little about Islam, and most did not know a single Muslim personally. [See sources for statistics below in Other Resources.]

Discussion questions

1. In the DVD Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, talks about the need to distinguish between the acts of extremists and their faith traditions. For example, a few Christians have murdered doctors who perform abortions in the name of their personal understandings of the Christian faith. But the news media do not refer to them as "Christian terrorists." "Muslims also deserve that distinction," says Awad. Do you think Awad is right? Discuss ways you and your fellow churchgoers might help overcome the tendency in the United States to paint all Muslims with the same brush.

2. The DVD gives a few examples of discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in the United States, and more are presented in "Elaboration on key topics" above. Brainstorm specific ways you and your congregation might counter such occurrences in your own community.

3. Read the Qur'an texts listed below and the passages on Christian just war principles from "For Peace in God's World," a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, adopted August 1995. List some guidelines for warfare that can be extracted from these sources. Discuss your impressions of biblical and Christian teachings about warfare and about when military action may be justified. What are some historical examples of U.S. military actions that meet the just war requirements? Which actions do you think have failed to meet them? Read the Holy Qur'an, Surahs 4.74, 8.59, 2.190, and 22.39 available online at www.quranbrowser.org/.

For Peace in God's World excerpt: We seek guidance from the principles of the "just/unjust war" tradition. While permitting recourse to war in exceptional circumstances, these principles intend to limit such occasions by setting forth conditions that must be met to render military action justifiable. We begin with a strong presumption against all war; support for and participation in a war to restore peace is a tragic concession to a sinful world. Any decision for war must be a mournful one. The principles for deciding about wars include right intention, justifiable cause, legitimate authority, last resort, declaration of war aims, proportionality, and reasonable chance of success. The principles for conducting war include noncombatant

Other resources

A Common Word between Us and You, a letter to Christians from global Muslim leaders
www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1
An Ecumenical Response by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
<http://acommonword.com/en/christian-responses/11-an-ecumenical-response-to-a-common-word-between-us-and-you.html>
Response from Yale Divinity School Scholars
www.acommonword.com/index.php?page=responses&item=1
Basic information <http://islam101.net/>
Beliefnet on Islam www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Islam/index.aspx
What Is Islam? <http://globalministries.org/mee/resources/what-is-islam.html>
Islam FAQs www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200305/islam-faqs.htm

Brown, Stuart. *The Nearest in Affection: Towards a Christian Understanding of Islam*
Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*
Esack, Farid. *The Qur'an: A Beginners Guide*
Esposito, John L. *Islam: the Straight Path*
Goddard, Hugh. *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*
Kaltner, John. *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers*
_____. *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*
Rahman, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed.
Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*
Speight, R. Marston. *God Is One: the Way of Islam*, 2nd ed.
Volf, Miraslov. *Allah: A Christian Response*

Prepared by Carol Schersten LaHurd, Ph.D., with the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Office of the Presiding Bishop, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations; and A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2012.

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Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



#6 Christians and Islam

Summary of DVD content

As is the case in other segments, Muslims explain their understanding of the Arabic term "islam" as a whole way of life leading to peace and wholeness through submission to God. With the call to prayer as backdrop, a series of Christian pastors talk about similarities between Islam and Christianity and conclude that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Ecumenical leader the Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana explains that "Allah" is the same name for God used by Arab Christians. "Allah" is the Arabic word for God.

Muslim scholars and practitioners describe Islam as a tradition that embraces all the biblical prophets. The video presents passages from the Qur'an on such biblical figures as Noah, Moses, Mary and Jesus. Although the Qur'an denies that Jesus is the divine Son of God, Islam affirms Jesus' miraculous conception, prophethood, and predicted return to participate in the Day of Judgment as a righteous ruler. Muslims also interpret Jesus' words in John 15 as foretelling the arrival of God's final prophet, Muhammad: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf" (John 15:26).

Muhammad's life story is summarized, including the beginning of revelations from God at age 40 and the migration of the Muslim community to Medina in 622 C.E. Muslims believe that Muhammad, who followed the monotheist tradition of the biblical prophets, was sent to all humanity as the final prophet, referred to by Muslims as the "seal of the prophets." In Muslim perspective, the Qur'an records the exact words of God revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel and is intended to serve as Islam's chief source of faith and practice.

The Prophet's sending of persecuted followers to asylum in predominantly Christian Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) is likely the world's first interfaith encounter between African Christians and Arab Muslims. The video concludes with Christian clergy calling for Muslims and Christians to live in harmony, while celebrating their similarities and respecting their differences, and an invitation to Christians to visit a mosque.

Elaboration on key topics

1. The **portrayal of Islam** in this segment and in the DVD series overall appears to focus on Sunni Islam as the norm. Such is understandable, since Sunnis make up approximately 85 percent of Muslims worldwide. At the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E. his followers differed about his succession. Those who believed that Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, was the designee successor came later to be called "Shi' at 'Ali," meaning the party or group of Ali. **Shi'i Islam** shares with **Sunni Islam** many core beliefs and religious practices but differs on political governance and has additional rituals and feast days commemorating the martyrs of those early struggles. Shi'a Islam adds to the statement of faith, "Shahadah," the belief in the spiritual and political authority of the Imamate, the historical leaders called "imams," meaning for Shi'ites the succession of divinely gifted leaders from the Prophet's family.

The largest branch of Shi'a Islam is the Ithna Ashriyyah, or the "Twelvers," so called because they accept the notion of twelve imams. Also noteworthy are the Zaidis ("Fivers") of Yemen and the Ismailis ("Seveners"), with one branch led by the Aga Khan. All believe that the Imam is an infallible person inspired by God and having the sole authority to interpret the Qur'an. An American Ismaili Muslim active in interreligious relations is Eboo Patel, founder and executive director of the Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core (ifyc.org).

The majority of Shi'i Muslims live in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain, with significant populations in Yemen, Lebanon and Afghanistan. In addition, both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims can practice Islamic mystical approaches grouped under the umbrella term **Sufism**. Sufi mysticism is a very diverse popular movement within Islam. Some emphases include seeking direct knowledge of God, simplicity in lifestyle, meditation, devotional exercises, and membership in "orders" established by great Sufi teachers. Noteworthy Sufi Muslims are the 11th century scholar al-Ghazali and the 13th century poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose work inspires the "whirling dervishes." (Read more in John L. Esposito, "Islam: the Straight Path.")

2. In the DVD leaders from both faith groups answer "yes" to the central question, **"Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?"** The **Arabic name for God, "Allah,"** is indeed linguistically related to such biblical terms for God as "El" and "Elohim." Featured Muslim and Christian leaders also point out that there are **differences in how we think about God**, depending on scripture, religious tradition, and our own experience. Muslims stress the unity and oneness of God, while Christians understand God as not three deities but as Triune in essence. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has written of "God the Father, the Son

share a dinner and learn more about Islamic worship and daily practice. The pastor at Our Saviour's explained that they hosted the series so that members could know and understand their Muslim neighbors and so be able to love as Christ has loved.

6. Use the resources listed below to create a one-time event or adult study series for Christians and Muslims to do together. You could begin your program by asking each participant to prepare to 1) share the earliest personal memory of God and/or 2) bring an object with special significance for worship or a life event.

Find other similar ideas and resources from Southern California's Christian-Muslim Consultative Group, which has produced "Standing Together," a joint study with DVDs and discussion guides to "build bridges between Christians and Muslims." Learn more and order the materials at <http://thecmcg.org/>.

Learn more

ELCA resources

"Christian-Muslim Talking Points" www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints

"Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations," especially pages 17-21 comparing Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Scroll down at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx.

Journal of Lutheran Ethics: Multi-Religious Neighbors 2011
www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/May-June-2011.aspx

Journal of Lutheran Ethics: Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God? 2002
Walter R. Bouman
www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/March-2002/Do-Christians-and-Muslims-Worship-the-Same-God.aspx

Carol Schersten LaHurd
www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/February-2002/The-Lord-is-Near-to-All-Who-Call-on-Him.aspx

Ryan LaHurd
www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/February-2002/La-illaha-ilallah-There-is-no-God-but-God.aspx

Harold Vogelaar
www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/April-2002/Christians-and-Muslims-Do-They-Worship-the-Same-God.aspx

with you wherever you are; He sees all that you do; 5control of the heavens and earth belongs to Him. Everything is brought back to God. 6He makes night merge into day and day into night. He knows what is in every heart.

Surah 45.36-37

So praise be to God, Lord of the heavens and earth, Lord of the worlds. 37True greatness in the heavens and the earth is rightfully His: He is the Mighty, the Wise.

Surah 2.255

God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. All that is in the heavens and in the earth belongs to Him. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, but they do not comprehend any of His knowledge except what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; it does not weary Him to preserve them both. He is the Most High, the Tremendous.

NOTE: Qur'an quotations are from *The Qur'an* (Oxford World's Classics), M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translator.

3. A Muslim scholar calls the prophet "Muhammad a direct descendant from Abraham via Ishmael." Note that biblical Hagar and Ishmael are often considered, symbolically if not literally, to be the ancestors of Arab Muslims and Christians, and, by extension, the ancestors of all Muslims. **Read together Genesis 21:1-21 and 25:7-20.** What surprises you in these passages? What new insights into Islamic tradition can we glean from this part of Abraham's story?

4. Now that you've had a basic introduction to Islam and how it compares with Christianity, what questions do you have about Islamic faith and practice? Share with others how your own faith has affected the ways you relate to individuals from other religious traditions such as Judaism and Islam.

5. The DVD ends with a call to Muslims and Christians to move beyond tolerance to acceptance, respect, trust and community — and the invitation to Christians to visit a mosque. Discuss ways your congregation or group might engage local Muslims. Discuss whether "acceptance" of Muslims and appreciation for their beliefs and practices might in any way diminish Christian commitments.

Consider this experiential and educational model from Illinois: In winter 2011 more than 100 people, including Muslims from a nearby mosque, attended the series "Understanding Our Muslim Neighbors" at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights. Topics included Islam 101, Why Do Interfaith, the History of Christian-Muslim Relations, the Qur'an, and Women in Islam. Presenters were seminary professors, Islamic scholars, and Muslim laypeople. The Islamic Society of the Northwest Suburbs invited the group to hold one session at its mosque to

and the Holy Spirit, that 'God exists in a threefold pattern of interdependent action.' But Christians, he insisted, uncompromisingly affirm that 'there is only one divine nature and reality.'" [Quoted by Miroslav Volf, "Allah and the Trinity; a Christian Response to Muslims," *The Christian Century*, February 25, 2011.] While the issues are complex, many Muslims and Christians can affirm that they worship the same God while acknowledging that there are very different understandings of God between their two traditions and indeed within each.

3. **Muslims generally believe that every word of the Qur'an in Arabic comes from God** via the angel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad. That **theology of revelation** differs somewhat from the understanding of most Jewish and mainline Christian denominations that the **Bible is the inspired word of God expressed in the words of human beings** in their particular historical and cultural circumstances. Muslims also believe that God's revelation to Muhammad is like the revelation to the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. The Qur'an contains references to many of the historical figures in the Hebrew Old Testament, and considers them to be prophets of God, beginning with Adam. Many Muslims believe that the original revelation to Moses and Jesus as it appears in the Old and New Testaments has been corrupted by human writers, hence the need for a new revelation in the time of Muhammad. One very important point not stressed in the DVD is that for Islam **the Qur'an is verbatim revelation from God to the Prophet Muhammad as the speech or Word of God ("Kalam Allah"), and thus parallel to the place of Jesus Christ in Christianity.**

4. Many Christians are not aware that **Jesus** is one of the most important prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, which presents the story of his virginal conception and birth to Mary, as well as some of his miracles and future role on judgment day. In fact, many Muslims consider Jesus among the greatest prophets along with Muhammad and have great reverence for him. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus, although filled with God's spirit, was not the divine Son of God and, in the most common interpretation, did not die by crucifixion. The DVD presents the common Islamic view that Jesus was raised up to heaven alive before he could be crucified.

Whenever practicing Muslims say or hear the name of Jesus, they pronounce the honorific "peace be upon him." The video presents the Islamic interpretation that the coming "**advocate**" or "**paraclete**" **Jesus proclaims in John 15–16** is actually a prediction of the Prophet Muhammad, while acknowledging that Christians understand Jesus to be referring to the Holy Spirit. Using the Greek word "parakletos," Jesus in John's Gospel gives his followers the assurance that God's Spirit will act as their defender and consoler.

5. The DVD stresses **what Judaism, Christianity and Islam have in common** but also acknowledges that **important differences exist**. Because Christians and Jews have also received written scripture from God, the Qur'an refers to them as "People of the Book" and offers this challenge and invitation: *Say: 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.'* [Surah 3.64]

Judaism, Christianity and Islam share beliefs in the sovereignty of the one God of the Scriptures, as well as the convictions that God is active in history and that God provides law and guidance for the human community. All three religions emphasize prayer to sustain obedience to God's will in daily life. Judaism and Islam stress right practice (orthopraxy), while Christianity stresses right belief (orthodoxy). For example, Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims around the world all practice the same five pillars of the faith, even if the two groups disagree and even fight about some historical and political matters. On the other hand, Christians have formed denominations, divided among themselves in response to doctrinal disputes.

Finally, **both Muslim and Christian believers consider their own faith tradition to be a universal religion to be shared with all humankind.** This fact may account for some of the competitive spirit between the two religions. Perhaps to add a Jewish perspective, the DVD includes a married couple, identified as "Messianic Jews," who refer to the Qur'an as "another book of the New Testament." Jewish rabbis and scholars also would have valuable insights into how Islam compares with Judaism and about the place of the Qur'an in the history of revealed scriptures.

Perhaps the most significant theological difference between Christianity and Islam is the **comparative understanding of how God relates to sinful humankind.**

Muslims believe human beings are inherently able to respond positively to God's guidance in the Qur'an. Thus salvation (or "success") in Islamic terms is mainly a matter of overcoming human weakness by submitting to God's will, staying on the "straight path," hoping for God's mercy, and consequently spending eternity in Paradise. Each human is accountable to God. Christians, on the other hand, believe that God's grace is required to reconcile sinful human beings to God. Salvation is then a matter of believing in and accepting God's grace-filled willingness to take on human flesh and to suffer and die and rise again on our behalf. For Muslims, the Christian notion of incarnation violates God's absolute transcendence and immanence. God's guidance is given by the scriptures and the Prophets and finally culminates in the Qur'an.

Contrary to many Christians' perceptions of Islam, the **Qur'an places a strong emphasis on God's mercy and compassion.** Each of its chapters begins with the

phrase, "In the name of God, the Merciful and compassionate." These attributes of mercy and compassion include the idea not only of forgiveness, but also of a bounteous mercy that sustains, protects and rewards people. God forgave Adam for his sin of disobedience. Thus the sin of Adam has no lasting effect upon subsequent generations, and there is no original sin in the Christian sense of that phrase. The Qur'an therefore emphasizes the moral responsibility and accountability of each believer before God, to whom we shall all return and by whom we shall all be judged.

To further explore these issues, read the ELCA's "**Christian-Muslim Talking Points**" at www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints. Especially pertinent are the segments on Believing in God, The Bible and the Qur'an, Forgiveness and Salvation, and Jesus and Muhammad in the Qur'an.

Discussion questions

1. Read together the paragraph above on whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Has your opinion on this issue been altered by watching the DVD and learning more in the Key Topics section? How?

In the DVD the Rev. Allan Jones of Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco argues that many American Christians have lost the sense of God's sovereignty and need to gain some of Islam's great reverence for God and for God's "otherness." Discuss whether you agree or disagree and why.

2. Read the following passages from the Bible and the Qur'an and discuss any new insights they may provide on the question of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

Read together Psalm 145, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Isaiah 55:8-9.

Read the "Shahada," the basic Muslim statement of faith and a pillar of Islam to be lived out daily: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

Read these Qur'anic passages:

Surah 57.1-6

1Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God—He is the Almighty, the Wise. 2Control of the heavens and earth belongs to Him; He gives life and death; He has power over all things. 3He is the First and the Last; the Outer and the Inner; He has knowledge of all things. 4It was He who created the heavens and earth in six Days and then established Himself on the throne. He knows what enters the earth and what comes out of it; what descends from the sky and what ascends to it. He is