www.neighborlyfaith.org /6-things-christians-should-know-about-ramadan
Singer , K., & Stackaruk , C. (n.d.). 6 things Christians Should Know About Ramadan. Neighborly Faith.
Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://www.neighborlyfaith.org/6-things-christians-should-know-about-ramadan

6 Things Christians Should Know About Ramadan I Neighborly Faith

6-8 minutes

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2. What Is the Purpose of Ramadan?

This holy month is a time for introspection. Muslims are encouraged to be thankful for what they have and to remind themselves of others who are less fortunate. Ramadan is also intended to bring Muslims closer to their faith and to Allah ("God").

How to Offer Support: If you know someone well enough that the question is comfortable for them, you can ask how their spiritual journey is going or what they are learning during Ramadan. Be sure to ask in an appropriate context (for example, if they're a coworker, don't ask this very personal question in front of everyone during a work meeting).

3. When Is Ramadan?

Ramadan occurs during the ninth month of the twelve-month Islamic calendar, which follows the phases of the moon. This calendar doesn't align with the Gregorian calendar used by much of the world, so observance of this holy period doesn't start or end on the same day each year. In fact, it begins 11 days earlier every Gregorian calendar year and eventually passes through all calendar months over time. Ramadan 2022 begins on Saturday, April 2nd and ends on Monday, May 2.

How to Offer Support: You don't have to know when the holiday begins and ends in a given year, since this changes, but you can be mindful of it once you know it's happening. Be flexible about scheduling activities like school or work meetings with your Muslim friends so they can participate in fasting, praying, and attending special mosque services.

4. What Are the Rules for Eating and Fasting During Ramadan?

- Eating times. Fasting Muslims eat a pre-dawn meal called suhur and a post-sundown meal called iftar. For iftar, dates and water or milk are often consumed before the dinner itself. Everyone is also allowed to snack and hydrate between dusk and dawn. At sunrise, the fasting day begins again.

- Fasting exceptions. Only healthy adults are required to fast during Ramadan. Children, the elderly, those mentally or physically incapable of fasting, pregnant or breastfeeding women, and travelers are not expected to fast.

How to Offer Support: In general, be sensitive to the fact that your Muslim community members may be hungry, dehydrated, or fatigued during this month. Avoid scheduling social meals or work lunches during the daylight hours when Muslims cannot partake (or understand if they don't attend). In particular, avoid asking a Muslim to do anything taxing near the end of the day, when they will feel weakest. Don't joke that you should fast, too: religious fasting is not about appearances or weight loss. If you're invited, you can also join someone for an iftar meal.

5. What Other Practices Take Place During Ramadan?

- Praying and reading the Quran. During Ramadan, Muslims spend a great deal of time praying and reading the Quran as part of their efforts to be closer to Allah. They also attend special services in mosques.
- Donating to charity. Donating to charities is another major traditional part of observing Ramadan.

How to Offer Support: As with everything else, be sensitive about scheduling concerns. If your Muslim friend is comfortable talking about their Ramadan practices, you can ask how a mosque service went for them, or whether they plan to donate to a particular charity and what inspired them to do so. Remember that despite the fasting, Ramadan is generally a joyful time for Muslims; don't pity your practicing friends or acquaintances or focus too much on the negative.

6. Muslims May Be More Vulnerable to Discrimination During Ramadan

Studies show that "Islamophobia" (or anti-Muslim bigotry) and anti-Muslim activities like slurs, hate speech, and hate crimes have increased substantially since 2015. This is hard enough for Muslim communities to cope with during an ordinary month, but it's even more difficult during this challenging holy month. In recent years, mosques have had to strengthen security measures during Ramadan as a precaution against anti-Muslim violence. UN human rights experts have stated that hatred and targeting of Islam and Muslims have now reached "epidemic proportions."

How to Offer Support: First, educate yourself and others about Islam and Islamophobia as much as you can. Teach kids how to recognize and counteract related bullying at school. Set a good example by speaking up

when you encounter anti-Muslim jokes or remarks yourself. Consider attending a community event at your local mosque to find additional ways to help. You can also volunteer with or donate to nonprofit organizations dedicated to ending Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims.

Make New Muslim Friends with Neighborly Faith

Neighborly Faith brings Christians and Muslims together to dialogue and build real friendships on college and university campuses. We don't ask participants to bring the most watered-down or diplomatic version of themselves into our spaces – we encourage Christians and Muslims to be authentic and transparent.

After all, if there's at least one thing that we can say for sure that evangelical Christians and Muslims have in common, it's that some of their beliefs and practices may seem strange in a secular culture. Our events shouldn't be one more space where they feel they must filter themselves. This doesn't result in division; genuinity promotes trust.

If there's one thing we've learned in the last six years of leading Neighborly Faith, it's that well-intentioned efforts to engage with Muslims are often stifled by outdated techniques, leading to flash-in-the-pan outreach or heated debates – both of these fail to promote authentic listening and enduring relationships.

We believe Christians should be known by Muslims as being the most curious, generous, and empathetic members of our society. Muslims won't become Christians because we oppose Islam, or by making it harder for them to be Muslims. They will be attracted to Christ by our good works (Matthew 5:16).

Let your light shine this Ramadan season. As we hope that Muslims will express curiosity about Christianity, it is the perfect time to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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Kevin Singer and Chris Stackaruk are Co-Directors of Neighborly Faith (@neighborlyfaith).