

A COMMON  
**WORD**  
C A N A D A



**Seeking A Common Word:  
A Local Christian-Muslim Dialogue Guide**

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**Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Canada**  
*In Mission for Others*



The Anglican Church of Canada

# A COMMON WORD

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## CANADA

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# 1. Introduction to *A Common Word Between Us and You*

Christians and Muslims have had a very complicated history with one another, to say the least. Although there are examples through the years of peaceful encounters and positive regard, it has more regularly been a history characterized by significant hostility and violence. One need only check the news to find that this is still very much the case all the way up to the present day. What we are calling the *Seeking A Common Word* initiative is all about trying to change that.

The statement known as *A Common Word Between Us and You* first began to take shape in the context of a Qur'anic studies conference hosted in 2007 by the Royal Ahl al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan. The conference theme was love in Islamic Scripture, and it was only natural that the exploration of this topic would lead to an interest in comparative reflection with respect to places where the content of the Qur'an intersected with the Christian Scriptures and Hebrew Scriptures. The conference would end with the issuing of a public letter proposing exactly this kind of engagement, and would eventually be co-signed by 138 Muslim religious leaders and scholars from different parts of the world and across the diverse spectrum of global Islam. The title, *A Common Word*, is drawn directly from a passage in the Holy Qur'an, which speaks positively about the unique possibilities of dialogue with Christians and Jews as people of Scripture: "O people of the book! Come to a *common word* between us and you..." (Surah Ali'Imran, 3.64). It is an invitation, recorded in the Qur'an itself, to engage together in the task of interreligious dialogue.

*A Common Word* was addressed to the then leaders of many Christian churches and global communions, including the Bishop of Rome, Orthodox and Oriental Patriarchs, the senior Anglican and Lutheran bishops at the world level, and Christians leaders of many other denominations. It called on them – and by extension the members of their communities – to attend together to the common convictions found in both the Qur'an and the Bible regarding the inextricable connection between the central ideals of "love of God" and "love of neighbour." While not minimizing the differences in the ways which Muslims and Christians understand and respond to God, nevertheless these primary convictions were seen as a basis for peaceable relationships, mutual learning, and common cause.

Since 2008, *A Common Word* has received formal responses and sign-on endorsements by Christian leaders and churches around the world. These have included the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC), the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC), and the United Church of Canada (UCC). In 2019, the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), jointly added their signatures as well, giving public expression to their intent as churches to adopt the spirit of *A Common Word* in their relations with the followers of Islam in Canada and abroad.

While symbolic gestures such as these are important, the real impact of an initiative like *A Common Word* is the capacity it has to generate genuine contact and relationship between Christians and Muslims at the level of the grassroots. It is for this reason that this *Seeking A Common Word Local Dialogue Guide* has been produced. Drawing on the content of the letter itself, as well as on examples of ways that various groups have used *A Common Word* to inspire local engagement, we have designed this set of resources to assist individuals and congregations across Canada to respond to the invitation to hold a 'Day of Dialogue' where they live, or to give some additional structure and support to those connections that have in many places have been forming for some time.

Whatever your context, it is our hope that you will find these materials useful for putting you and your group's love of God into action through a dialogue of love, learning, and friendship with your Muslim neighbours, wherever you may find yourselves.

## 2. An Orienting Essay for Canadian Christians

When added together, the global population of Christians and Muslims accounts for more than half of the population of the world. It is no secret that in many places the relationship between these two religious communities is characterized by tensions or even violence. There can be little doubt that the 21st Century is being shaped, in no small measure, by the way that Christians and Muslims engage with one another, both around the world and closer to home.

In Canada, Muslim believers currently account for nearly 4% of the national population.<sup>1</sup> This number has continued to grow for some years, to the point where Islam is now the second largest organized religious community in Canada. While roughly 60% of all Canadian Muslims are centred in the Province of Ontario, Muslims are increasingly coming to call other regions of Canada home as well, with significant populations in Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia. In recent years, connections and relationships between Christians and Muslims have become increasingly common in many parts of the country. Some of this is as a result of church-assisted immigration and refugee settlement from majority-Muslim countries. This presents our churches with a singular opportunity *and responsibility* to get to know these neighbours and seek peace with them.

### Loving Our Neighbours

The principle that one's relationship to God implies both blessings and obligations is one that Christians have learned a great deal about from the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, who regularly emphasize that one's theological beliefs and liturgical practices ought correspondingly to issue in works of justice and compassion and mercy (Amos 5:21–14, Isaiah 58:1-9, etc.). In a similar way, the New Testament stresses that what we hold to be true of God, and the words we say about God, must lead to consistency in the way we use our resources, organize our communities, care for those in need, and so on (Hebrews 13: 15–16, James 1:22–25, etc.). Followers of Jesus are also called to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–40), even those we have sometimes perceived to be our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

The word *neighbour* in Christianity is of course one that carries a lot of theological freight. Far from being simply a description of people who happen to share space or live nearby to one another, *neighbour* is regularly used by Christians to identify those to whom we are connected by our very existence or with whom we share something of ourselves and our lives. In Christ, Christians are shown that, in fact, contrary to our typical human assumptions, the list of those with whom we are brought into this kind of *neighbourly* relationship is long. We are all created bearers of the divine image, and we are all chosen for grace and salvation.

It would appear that one of the main gifts which God seeks to give us from our neighbours is their capacity to surprise us about what God is doing, and where, and with whom. The Gospel narrative about the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25–37) – among the most important New Testament texts to inform a Christian understanding of neighbour – makes precisely this point when Jesus reveals that the Samaritan, who at that time would have been considered to be a follower of a different religion, in fact must be judged to have discovered the very truths which the Law of Israel had intended to teach. Even more, this apparent outsider is pointed to as someone deserving of emulation by the original hearers of the story. We are left to conclude that we can and indeed ought to learn from our neighbours, even when they are our interreligious 'others'.

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1 Based on statistics from the Pew Research Centre, 2017.

## Love of Neighbour and the Call to Dialogue

What love of neighbour means, and what it looks like in a given context, are both regular points for discernment within Christian communities. This is certainly true when it comes to involvement in interreligious dialogue, and dialogue with Muslims specifically. However, with the scriptural directives above firm in mind, surely at least one element of what it means for Christians to live with love towards our Muslim neighbours is to take an interest in, and seek to show respect for, that which our neighbours hold to be of greatest importance, just as we would hope they would do for us. This has sometimes been described as a form of ‘spiritual hospitality’ – a way of welcoming and making room for the other just as they are, and seeking their comfort and wellbeing. It is an expression of this kind of loving hospitality that compels Christians to take seriously and to heed the call to interreligious dialogue with our neighbours of other faiths as a dimension of our own discipleship.

The word dialogue, as its etymology itself suggests, must always allow for ‘two words’ to be spoken. In order to be genuine, a dialogue must be based on the presumption that each party has something legitimate to say, and which the other can benefit from hearing. As the example of St. Paul in dialogue with the Athenians illustrates (Acts 17:16-34), the Spirit of God does reveal truths to people in many different ways, and such truths encountered in the beliefs of others are to be rightfully recognized as having their source in God. While for Christians this does not mean compromising the important call which we have to give witness to the uniqueness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, genuine interreligious dialogue can also never operate as if the conversation about truth goes only one way. Indeed, it might serve us well to be quicker to listen than to jump at our turn to speak.

However, it is also critical to note that such a dialogical engagement does not imply parties to the conversation having to give up their cherished distinctives, nor minimizing areas of significant difference, nor avoiding the difficult questions. While love is always patient, kind, and humble, it can also be an act of love to offer one another challenges and criticisms, and to state clearly what it is about our own faith in God which we believe the other partner needs to hear. It is equally inappropriate for Christians to cease adhering to the core of Christian revelation (the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the death and resurrection of Jesus, etc.) for the sake of ‘getting along’ as it is to expect Muslims to set aside their central convictions (strict monotheism, the pre-eminence of the prophet Muhammad among the prophets, etc.) in favor of a generic pluralism. While *A Common Word* does presuppose that some of what Christians and Muslims hold to be true about God is indeed shared, it does not imply that it is all the same. Indeed, both faiths understand and teach, in their own ways, that sameness need not be viewed as a necessary condition for living together with respect and peace. We are called to these things even in our diversity.

## Forms of Dialogue

*A Common Word* invites Christians and Muslims to make their respective holy scriptures the primary locus upon which our dialogue is based. This is wisdom we do well to follow. While Christians and Muslims see the role which the scriptures play in their understanding and worship of God differently, in both of these faith communities scripture is a uniquely normative source of revelation. Placing the focus of our conversations in this context, we ensure that we are ‘keeping the main things the main things’ – i.e. talking to one another about the core elements of our faith rather than secondary or tertiary matters that can detract from the ‘main thing’.

However – and this is certainly a critical point for Christians – the dialogue between us is by no means exhausted by scriptural and theological discussion alone. Indeed, as people who stress the importance of the Incarnation of the Word in Christ, and of visible signs as instruments of truth and grace, it is easily argued that Christians are uniquely called to engage in what is sometimes described as the ‘dialogue of life.’ This means meeting real Muslim people face to face and growing in friendship; experiencing the way that faith informs their lives and decision making; seeing them practice their acts of prayer and devotion; and so on. It also means, where possible, finding ways to respond together to those in need. Not only do these things prevent us from relying on abstract



stereotypes and misrepresentations, they also help to create an environment of greater trust and generosity towards one another. From there, more challenging issues may be faced effectively. These components, therefore, are also built into the *A Common Word* ethos, and into the model of Muslim-Christian dialogue which it proposes.

## **An Invitation to Christians**

It is important to note that the *A Common Word* letter was originally addressed to “Christians” in a broad and ecumenical sense. Although our Muslim friends are well aware of the denominational diversity that exists within the Christian community (and in the Islamic community as well), and seek to respect it in their addressing by name the numerous families of churches and their respective leaders, *A Common Word* is not an invitation that is made to Anglicans or Lutherans or Catholics or Presbyterians, in particular. Rather, the invitation goes out to all who claim to follow Jesus Christ. Our Muslim interlocutors are calling upon us to speak to them as far as possible with one voice – a Christian voice.

It is significant, therefore, that *A Common Word* has seen such considerable endorsement and engagement, much of it jointly, from Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, and ecumenical organizations like the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches in the US, and so on. Thus, while this present resource has its origins in the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, members of these churches should be mindful to take every opportunity to venture into relationships with Islam with their fellow Christians closely at their side. In Canada, this especially includes (though is not limited to) our Roman Catholic, United Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada, and Mennonite Church Canada siblings, each of which have responded to and interacted with the *A Common Word* initiative in positive ways. In this call to us, therefore, our Muslim neighbours are also thereby providing us with an ecumenical learning and growth.

## **A Gift to Be Received**

In a sense, *A Common Word* is not something we have chosen for ourselves, but it has chosen us. This path of dialogue is being offered as a gift to Christians by the generosity of faithful Muslims. In so doing they are offering to play host to a new mode of engagement, one which is much different from the conflict which has so often characterized our history. Learning to be gracious in receiving a gift, and to be a gracious guest, are both important aspects of growing in maturity. This is true on an individual interpersonal level, and in contact between spiritual and religious traditions. For this reason, Christians have a particular responsibility to seek to honour the invitation that has been presented to us.

The urgency of our making our reply is enhanced further by current realities of our time. The growing instances of religiously motivated hate speech and violence, at home and abroad, mean that real lives are at stake. More positively, growing real-life connections and friendships between Christians and Muslims across this land make our shared life and interactions possible in ways that have not been before. The time is now for the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and any other partners who will walk with us on this path, to take up the call, and to do so in a manner entirely consistent with the Gospel of Jesus to which we witness.

May God now show us the way.

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### 3. An Orienting Essay for Canadian Muslims

*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.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him.'* (Qur'an 3:64, translated by M. A. S Abdel Haleem)

Together, Christians and Muslims make up over fifty percent of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> This reality is more than just a contemporary statistic, but a foundation for a hefty moral imperative. Given the size of these faith communities, relations between the two can have global impacts. Likewise, it can be said that – given their size – if there is peace and good will between Muslims and Christians, then there is peace and good will throughout much of the world. In Canada, Islam is the second largest religion after Christianity. Though Muslims in Canada make up only 3.2% of our national population, individual provinces like Ontario (4.6%), Alberta (3.18%), and Quebec (3.15%) have higher percentages with large concentrations of Muslims living in major cities.<sup>3</sup> In some cities, Islam as a whole is larger than any individual Christian denomination other than Catholicism. However, Muslims and Christians have more in common than the global size of their faith community. They share many beliefs and values that motivate adherents to contribute for the betterment of the world and communities across Canada.

Though Muslims and Christians do not share the same faith, they share a faith in God and the same sense of obligation to serve their community, as well as the same sense of empathy that forms the soil from which springs the Golden Rule – to love for others what one loves for oneself. Yet, there remains a great deal of misunderstanding between the two faith communities. Despite the best efforts of those involved in interfaith dialogue and related initiatives, Islamophobia is still on the rise. While some may wish to argue that this is an indication of the failure of interfaith dialogue, it is, rather, a strong indication of the need for more of it. Studies show that individuals who have negative opinions of Islam and/or Muslims have never met a Muslim. Moreover, other studies show that individuals with greater familiarity with Muslims have more positive views about Islam.<sup>4</sup> Thus, one of the easiest ways to combat Islamophobia is simply getting to know one's neighbor.

#### A History of Engagement

Muslim-Christian engagement is not new. In fact, it dates back to the very beginning of Islam. After receiving the tremendous weight of the first verses revealed of the Qur'an (i.e., 96:1-5), the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ<sup>5</sup> sought the comfort of his noble wife, Khadija (may God be well-pleased with her). During that time in Mecca, illiteracy was common, and many were unfamiliar with previous revelations from God. However, Khadija had a cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who was a Christian and was familiar with the previous scriptures—including the Gospel of Jesus ﷺ. Khadija brought the Prophet ﷺ to speak with Waraqah who was impressed with the Prophet's experience and counseled him on what to expect now that he had received revelation from God. As was the case with previous prophets, Waraqah warned, people will treat him and his message with hostility; a warning that ultimately proved true.

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2 Based on statistics from the Pew Research Centre, 2017.

3 According to Statistics Canada data from 2013.

4 See Gardner and Evans, "In Western Europe, familiarity with Muslims is linked to positive views of Muslims and Islam." Pew Research Centre, July 24, 2016.

5 This is a calligraphic rendering in Arabic of the prayer "peace and blessings be upon him;" a commonly stated prayer after mention of any of the prophets and especially the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

As the Prophet ﷺ preached in Mecca, his message—like the message of the prophets before him—was most readily embraced by the poor. However, as Islam spread so too did the growing hostility towards it by those in power; leading to a growing persecution of the most vulnerable believers. To ensure their protection, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sent a group of his followers to seek refuge in Abyssinia, a Christian kingdom in East Africa. Undoubtedly, those migrating to Abyssinia had concerns about their travel. However, the Prophet ﷺ reassured them by informing them that the Christian ruler of Abyssinia, known as Negus,<sup>6</sup> was a just and fair leader. Notably, it was in the Negus' court that the first truly Muslim-Christian dialogue took place. During this exchange, the Negus was so impressed with the faith of the Muslims that he promised to protect them. Moreover, despite the geography separating him and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the two developed a deep respect for each other. This is evidenced not only by the Negus' protection of the Prophet's followers living in his land, but also gifts exchanged between the two. The Negus even officiated the Prophet's marriage to Umm Habiba (may God be well-pleased with her) who, at the time, was among those seeking refuge in his Christian land.

Later in the Prophet's life ﷺ, when the Muslim community had a stronger political standing in Arabia, another major Muslim-Christian dialogue occurred; this time in the Prophet's city (Medina). A delegation of Christians from Najran arrived in Medina to meet with the Prophet ﷺ. Najran was then, as it is now, a historically significant city for Christians in Arabia. During the reign of Dhu Nawas (*circa* 517–527CE)—half a century before the Prophet ﷺ was born—Christians of Najran were persecuted and killed for their faith. God speaks of their sacrifice in *Surah al-Buruj*<sup>7</sup> and the Prophet ﷺ, as well, spoke about this incident to his Companions with much respect; as evidenced in various hadiths. When the Christians arrived to speak with the Prophet ﷺ, he invited them to Islam. However, he never coerced them. Moreover, when they sought a place in his city to offer their Christian prayers, the Prophet ﷺ offered them the use of his own mosque, marking the first time in history that a Christian congregation prayed in a mosque.

## After the Prophet ﷺ

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Muslim engagement with Christians continued and even flourished at various points in their shared history. As Islam spread to the borders of the Byzantine Empire, Christian scholars were invited to debate in the Caliph's court. It is reported that the earliest debates took place between the Caliph al-Mahdi (reigned 755–785CE) and Timothy I (728–823CE), a Nestorian Christian. Later, a second series of debates occurred between the Caliph al-Ma'mun (reigned 813–833CE) and Theodore Abu Qurra (755–830CE), the Bishop of Harran. Though one may not think of debates as a form of dialogue, in the context of the time such debates allowed both Muslims and Christians to better understand the beliefs and practices of the other. It is even reported that the Caliph al-Ma'mun made it a point to treat their Christian interlocutor with respect and to never speak to him except, as the Qur'an commands, "in a way that is best." (16:125)

Such engagement with Christian scholars, particularly those influenced by the Greek philosophical tradition, pushed Muslim theologians to articulate their faith in more sophisticated ways. It was even a Christian, Hunayn ibn Ishaq (809-873CE), who translated some of the most significant Greek philosophical works into Arabic; contributing to the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement (*circa* 750–975CE) and the Golden Age of Islamic Civilization. Centuries later, many of the Arabic contributions to philosophy, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, and other fields were taught in al-Andulus (Islamic Spain) and were translated into Latin; contributing to the European

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6 His name was Ashama ibn Abjar. However, he is more commonly referred to by his title Negus (meaning "ruler").

7 The Qur'an draws attention to the faith of the Christians of Najran and the sinfulness of those who persecuted them in the following powerful verses: "By the sky with its towering constellations, by the promised Day, by the Witness and that which is witnessed, damned were the makers of the trench, the makers of the fuel-stoked fire! They sat down to watch what they were doing to the believers. Their only grievance against them was their faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy, to whom all control over the heavens and earth belongs: God is witness over all things" (85:1–9, translated by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem).



Renaissance. Of those who had works translated into Latin is Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), an Islamic scholar familiar with the New Testament who notably cites statements attributed to Jesus ﷺ throughout his most famous work, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya 'Ulum al-Din)*.

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Such engagement, of course, has not always been the norm. There are various events, statements, and persons throughout history that have contributed to negative impressions of one another's faith. In our time, heightened tensions between Christian and Muslim-majority nations and increased anti-Muslim rhetoric in North America and European nations has made dialogue between Muslims and Christians ever more relevant. It is for this reason that 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals came together to invite Christian leaders across the world to dialogue by declaring a foundational ethos that is shared between these two Abrahamic faiths: the love God and neighbor. Since its declaration in 2007, the *Common Word* (whose name is inspired by the above Qur'anic verse) has received increased endorsements from Muslim scholars, thinkers, and activists, as well as numerous Christian and Jewish responses.

## **An Invitation**

I am very pleased that the Anglican and Lutheran Churches in Canada are joining other Christian churches as endorsees of this initiative and have, thus, made a commitment to greater Christian-Muslim dialogue throughout Canada and abroad. In light of this demonstration of commitment, I encourage my fellow Canadian Muslims to welcome, and be welcomed, in greater dialogue with our Christian neighbors.

May God enable us to engage with others in a manner "that is best" (16:125) and support each other in all that is good within our local and global communities.

**Ibrahim J. Long, MA, GC**  
*Islamic Studies Teacher*  
*Community Chaplain*

## 4. Goals, Principles, and Rules for Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is not a simple thing. It takes careful effort, and often requires that certain personal and group commitments are in place in order to work well. The following represent some useful goals, skills, and rules, summarized from a wide variety of sources.<sup>8</sup> Reviewing these yourself, and with others in your group, will be of great benefit. They can also be referenced for participants at the beginning of any local dialogue gathering.

### Goals

Before establishing principles and rules for dialogue, it is important to be clear about what the goals of such engagement are:

- To increase self-awareness, understanding, and participation in your own faith tradition
- To build bridges across differences and form sustainable friendships based on mutual trust and respect
- To advocate for more inclusive communities by learning about and interacting with other faith traditions
- To pursue peace and justice between Muslims and Christians, speaking out against all forms of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and hate
- To establish a greater basis for making common cause in service to the needs of others

### Principles

The following represent some basic convictions which must be held as the foundation of any fruitful interfaith engagement.

- **Humility:** Accept that you do not have a complete grasp on the truth, and that others have knowledge and experience that you need to receive.
- **Honesty:** Represent your own tradition, and that of the other, accurately. Do not be afraid to admit if there is something you do not know or cannot understand
- **Respect:** All people have inherent dignity and worth, and their personhood and core beliefs must be honored as such. Observing cultural and religious etiquette and manners is also an expression of this.
- **Trust:** Assume that your conversation partners have come with sincerity and good faith. Cultivate a sense of mutual cooperation towards a common purpose, rather than seeing yourselves as opposing 'sides'.
- **Dialogue:** A monologue has one voice, while a dialogue has two. Interfaith conversations are not about one person convincing another about which of their viewpoints is right or wrong, nor do they seek to arrive at an agreement. The aim is to allow all parties to share their perspective and gifts with the others.

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8 Links to other such resources can be found online at [acommonword.ca](http://acommonword.ca)

## Rules

The principles above can be translated into some concrete commitments that help to facilitate positive relationship and healthy exchange.

- As far as possible set aside prior assumptions, beliefs, and/or judgments which deter from listening and learning. Come with an open mind.
- Listen in order to understand rather than to respond. Listen compassionately, trying to place yourself in the place of the other. Do not dominate a discussion, and give everyone a chance to be heard.
- Allow the same right of self-expression to the other as you expect for yourself.
- Always begin by identifying common ground and points of connection, and on that basis, and in that spirit, go on to discuss areas of difference.
- Speak as an individual, based on your personal experience. Avoid sweeping statements like 'all Christians know' or 'all Muslims believe'
- Refrain from confrontational and emotionally charged speech, body language, and facial expressions.
- Do not derail conversation by obsessing over a single historical injustice or point of political tension.
- If someone is not observing these principles and rules, speak to them about it and remind them of the expectations around their participation.

The nature and context of your particular group may call for other norms and guidelines. You should feel free to add, subtract, or adapt as necessary.

## 5. A Common Word 'Day of Dialogue' Program Overview and Outline

The *A Common Word* initiative has been embraced in many different places in order to encourage interpersonal dialogue and engagement between Christians and Muslims. This has of course taken a variety of different forms according to the context. Some of the wider resources available online can provide a glimpse of this, and may be useful for your own adaptation.

This specific resource is designed especially for Christians and Muslims in Canada who want to go deeper together in building relationships and growing in understanding at the local level, within their neighbourhoods and congregations.<sup>9</sup> To that end, the Overview and Checklist which follows below sets out a framework that is intended to assist such groups and leaders in the planning and facilitating of an *A Common Word* based gathering in their communities. It leaves lots of room for shaping and tailoring to local needs, but is offered as a basic model that has been found effective, either as a single event, a series of sessions over a period, or as the foundation of an ongoing relationship.

### The Day of Dialogue

The international *A Common Word* movement places an emphasis on dialogue at the level of scripture and theology in the Muslim and Christian traditions, often led by scholars and experts. This sort of focus is important, and remains integral to the numerous local groups and expressions of the movement which have developed in varying places and times since the letter's initial publication. However, at the local level, among your average Christian and Muslim from the grassroots, there is value in complementing this kind of dialogue with other forms of interaction and exchange. The type of local gathering which this guide proposes under the heading 'Common Word Day of Dialogue' aims to do just that.

### Key Components

A Day of Dialogue event stands on four main pillars: Spiritual experience, Scripture based listening and learning, Small group dialogue and sharing, and Meal/Refreshment. While adjustments to the order and timing of these components is certainly possible, ideally any gathering you plan which tries to follow the local *A Common Word* framework should seek to ensure that all of them are represented in some way.

#### i) Spiritual Experience

Interreligious dialogue can never simply be about the engagement of beliefs and ideals, at the level of intellectual sharing only. Indeed, it is equally important for Christians and Muslims to encounter the spiritual traditions of each other's faith communities, and to see how these are expressed and lived out. For that reason, an *A Common Word* Day of Dialogue is generally bookended at beginning and end by some form of spiritual expression from both the Christian and Muslim traditions. By way of some examples, this could include prayers, readings and/or recitations of the bible and the Qur'an, Islamic poetry, Christian hymnody, etc. The section of this resource which provides Suggested Prayers and Readings may be a good place to start, but the people and the gifts which you have in your local setting will also help to determine what sorts of sharing is possible for you in this respect.

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<sup>9</sup> It is built in part on the format and experience which was first developed by the Christian and Muslim led organization known as *A Common Word Alberta* in 2013. *A Common Word Alberta* has been running annual day of dialogue gatherings every year since.

## ii) Scripture Based Listening and Learning

The heart of *A Common Word* has always been its orientation to the scriptural texts of the Christian and Muslim traditions, and to attending to both the diversities and commonalities which are found there. This is a real strength of this model of dialogue, and one which helps to keep such gatherings focused within shared parameters. The basic conviction is that the shared commitment to “love of God and love of neighbour”, which is at the centre of both the bible and the Qur’an, provides the overarching starting point from which pursue greater friendship and understanding between Christianity and Islam.

To this end, a local Day of Dialogue will commonly invite two primary speakers (one Muslim and one Christian) who will take the lead in offering initial reflections on a key theme and some corresponding scriptures which address it.<sup>10</sup> More detail on the length and nature of these presentations follows in the Sample Schedule below. Some suitable themes to engage are listed in the Suggested Topics and Themes for Dialogue section of this guide.

## iii) Small Group Dialogue and Sharing

Each and every person has something to bring to the table in the work of interreligious dialogue. This is not a task which requires that one be a trained expert or an official representative of a faith tradition in order to participate. Local groups, which engage the members of congregations and communities as well as their leadership, are essential to the work of growing in understanding and peace. For this reason, a premium is placed within the Day of Dialogue agenda on smaller groups of Christians and Muslims – often around tables of 6 or 8 people – having a chance to interact and share between themselves about the ways in which the more formal presentations intersect with issues of faith at the level of daily life. These are called Table Talk sessions, and they are described Sample Schedule which follows below, as well as the sections on Suggested Topics and Themes for Dialogue and Suggested Table Discussion Questions.

In order to assist in making these smaller group conversations more effective, it is ideal if one person can be designated as a facilitator ahead of time to help move things forward and ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and to be heard. The role of the Table Facilitator is described below under the Leaders/Volunteers heading.

## iv) Meal/Refreshment

When people sit down and eat together, good things can often happen. There is something very leveling that can take place; it is a way of very tangibly being reminded of our common creaturehood and our common humanity. That is why, if possible, an *A Common Word* local gathering should try to incorporate a time for people to partake in food and drink together. In some settings this may mean a full meal. In others it might be coffee and tea with very simple canape or baked goods. Whatever fits best in your context, be sure to emphasize that the point is not about getting fed so much as it is the unifying character of enjoying one another as we enjoy food and refreshment. When done well, and in connection with the other components of the day, it is itself a form of dialogue and exchange.

So that it can be most easily assured that all will be able to partake in the meal that is on offer, a vegetarian/vegan menu is best. While Muslims can eat meat and dairy products that are halal, this can sometimes be difficult to verify. No alcohol should be served in the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of these talks can be found online at [acommonword.ca](http://acommonword.ca)



In order to help defer the costs of food and refreshment, you may wish to collect a suggested donation or even to charge a small price for registration as a participant. This is not at all inappropriate, and may make it easier for your community to offer this as part of your gathering without it being an undue financial and logistical challenge.

## Timing

Because the Day of Dialogue format tries to pack in many different components, it requires allowing sufficient time for the program to unfold. However, the realities of our busy lives are simply such that it may not always be possible or realistic to ask people to commit to investing a substantial portion of their day into this kind of event. For that reason, there is a 'short form' and a 'long form' program which can be used as a template to suit the goals and expectations of your local group. You will see these in outline form in the Sample Schedule below.

Choosing a suitable day of the week is an important consideration. Fridays and Sundays are best avoided due to other communal religious obligations in the Muslim and Christian traditions on these days. The 'long form' of the program is uniquely fitted to be held during the daytime hours on a Saturday, which the 'short form' could be run on a weekday evening.

Other factors around timing include being sure not to schedule something on or near an Islamic or Christian holy day, as well as trying to avoid significant interference with the daily times of prayer for Muslims. The Manners and Etiquette section of this guide explains this in some greater detail. The online resources at [acommonword.ca](http://acommonword.ca) also contain links to an interfaith holy day calendar, as well as the projected daily times of prayer in the Islamic tradition.

## Venue

There are two ways you can go with things in terms of deciding on a venue to hold your *A Common Word* dialogue. Both have their merits, and you will want to decide what makes the most sense given your particular context and the people and groups involved.

One option is to plan your gathering to be hosted in a house of worship, either a church or mosque/masjid. The positive in this is that it is an opportunity for people who may have never visited the sacred space of another religious tradition to have this experience as a guest, which can be helpful for dispelling stereotypes and assumptions and humanizing or making real a place that might otherwise be viewed abstractly or disconnected from tangible reality. For those who act as host, it is also valuable to learn how to help others feel comfortable and welcome in your house of worship. For those coming as guests, it is an opportunity to learn through listening and observing and letting the other take the lead. Both being a good guest and being a good host in one another's spaces can help to lay the groundwork for being good guests and hosts in an intellectual and spiritual sense as well, which is critical for a healthy dialogue.

If this is the direction your group chooses to go, it is a good idea to make sure that each faith community has a chance to reciprocate (i.e. if you meet the first time in a church make sure you have another event which meets at the mosque, and vice versa).

Alternatively, a case can be made for holding your dialogue in a neutral third-party space such as a community centre, school lecture theatre, etc. For some Christians, and for some Muslims, meeting in a place of worship of another tradition might seem too unfamiliar – especially if someone has had minimal experience of these kinds of relationships and interactions. If your setting suggests that this might be the case, and that attendance might be higher if you planned your event for a more 'neutral' location, then it may be in your best interest to explore this option instead.

## Leaders/Volunteers

Hosting a Day of Dialogue does require a team of leaders and volunteers in order to assist in all the various components coming together smoothly and running well. For this reason, it is good to cooperate in partnerships so that the workload can be carried together. Share these roles between the Christian and Muslim contingents. If you are a smaller Anglican parish, link up with your nearest Lutheran congregation (or Mennonite, or Presbyterian, or Roman Catholic, etc.) and take the tasks on together. The need for some leaders and volunteers to facilitate your gathering need not be an insurmountable barrier to reaching out.

The following are some of the roles which are important to fill as you plan for a Day of Dialogue:

### **i) Greeters**

A friendly face or two at the door of your venue can help people feel at ease as they arrive. For most gatherings two Greeters, though larger groups may call for more.

### **ii) Registration Volunteers**

Registration volunteers are needed to manage two main things: nametag distribution, and seating arrangements that ensure a relative balance between Muslims and Christians at each of the table groups. Again, depending on the number of participants you are expecting, two such volunteers are probably sufficient, but more may be needed if your group gathering is large.

### **iii) MC**

The MC acts as the host of the event. They welcome people, review the expectations and ground rules for dialogue, introduce different speakers and leaders, transition the program between its various components, and generally direct people about what and when things are happening next. One MC is sufficient, but it can make for a nice sign of commonality to have a pair of MCs – one from the Christian tradition and another from the Muslim tradition.

### **iv) Table group leaders**

Each small table group should have someone assigned to it who has prepared in advance to help lead their participants through the three rounds of discussion. Providing each table group leader with their discussion questions in advance makes this easier. The key skillsets for such a facilitator are that they work to keep the discussion on topic, do not allow any one person to dominate, and encourage all participants to contribute.

### **v) Keynote speakers**

A lead speaker from both the Muslim and the Christian traditions is needed. It is a best practice to invite people who have a reasonable degree of familiarity and comfort with the process of interfaith dialogue, and who are committed to discourse according to the Goals, Principles, and Rules contained in this guide. This may mean experienced lay people, it may mean scholars, it may mean clergy; the offices and titles which such people may hold are less important than their willingness and ability to embody a genuine spirit of dialogue, appreciative listening, and genuine learning, in addition to all that they might have to teach others.

## **vi) Meal/refreshments team**

If you are serving refreshments and food, a generous team of four or five volunteers to manage these details will be indispensable towards supporting this important sharing of hospitality.

## **vii) Setup/takedown team**

As with any event, there is extra work involved for setup and takedown. Asking for a team of three or four people who can take the lead in organizing this will go a long way towards the success of your event.

## **Sample Schedule (Long Form)**

In its long form, a Day of Dialogue calls for setting aside 5 hours on a Saturday. This is a long time, but the program is sufficiently varied in style and rich in content that it moves along well and does not drag.<sup>11</sup>

This is simply one example. The timings can be moved ahead an hour or two, or back an hour or two, as deemed necessary by your group.

*9:30am – Doors open for registration and arrivals*

Guests should be greeted at the door if possible, and led to the registration check-in table. At the registration table guests should be welcomed and invited to share which community they are coming from. Registration volunteers will ask guests for their first names, and provide them with a hand-written nametag. Nametags will also have a number written on them in order to assign guests to a table. Insofar as is possible, registration volunteers should try to ensure a reasonable balance between Muslims and Christians at each table.

In the meeting area, round tables should be set up with seating for roughly 8-10 people at a table. Tables will be numbered to match nametags for ease of seating.

Simple refreshments, such as tea, coffee, cookies, etc., could be made available for people to enjoy as they arrive and settle in.

*10:00am – Welcome, opening remarks, and review principles and rules of dialogue*

An MC (or two) will call the group to gather and will offer initial words of welcome and explanation of the program that lies ahead. The MC will also facilitate transitions between speakers, group discussion time, breaks, etc.

The MC should also review some basic principles and rules of engagement, emphasizing that the basic purposes of the gathering are for learning and building relationship rather than debate and argumentation. This resource includes a list of Goals, Principles, and Rules for dialogue, many or all of which can be used effectively for this purpose.

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<sup>11</sup> Remember to consult your Muslim partners in this endeavor around how best to accommodate their need for a break to offer prayers should the program overlap with these times. In the long form Saturday format, it will likely be the mid-day Dhuhr prayers that will need to be accounted for. Although the timing of these prayers varies depending on the part of the world you are in, as well as the month and day, they generally fall between 12:00pm and 1:30pm. Some degree of flexibility exists in terms of how long after these times the prayers may be made. Some suggested options for a Dhuhr prayer break are given in the sample schedule. During the prayer break Christian participants could also gather together for brief midday prayers.

### *10:10am – Opening spiritual sharing*

At this point, one Christian participant and one Muslim participant, arranged beforehand, will open the dialogue with some form of spiritual gift exchange. This can be a scriptural reading/recitation, a prayer, a piece of religious poetry, a musical offering, etc., as appropriate in each tradition. Each offering should take approximately 2-3 minutes.

### *10:15am – Table talk round 1*

People generally need to ease into speaking to people they do not know, especially when it comes to deeply held beliefs such as the matters of religious faith. Early in the program an opportunity is given to simply 'break the ice' by reflecting on one or two questions that are more casual and open ended in nature. The idea is to help people get used to talking with and listening to one another. A wide-ranging list is given in the Suggested Table Discussion Questions section of this resource, and different ones of these could be used over the course of several meetings.

If possible, each table should have someone designated in advance who can serve as a table group discussion facilitator. The role of this person is simply to guide the group through the questions, keep the conversation on topic, ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, etc.

### *10:30am – Speaker talks round 1*

The program includes dedicated time for a keynote speaker from both the Christian and Muslim traditions. The speakers are there to unpack the overall theme of the day's dialogue, and to stimulate discussion, but the real dialogue will involve everyone and will happen in smaller groups around tables.

The two speakers will each be given two rounds of 15 minutes each. The speakers should be invited to bring a relevant piece of their holy scripture, or other commentary from within their tradition, which offers some insight on the chosen topic. A list of Suggested Topics and Themes for Dialogue is included in this toolkit. In the online resources available at [acommonword.ca](http://acommonword.ca) you will also find video recordings of examples of these sorts of presentations.

The two speakers present one after another. There is not time provided for questions of the speakers. Discussion and comments are meant to happen with other participants at the table groups.

### *11:00am – Table talk round 2*

Following a round of talks from the speakers, each small table group is given 30 minutes to reflect on what they heard, share their own perspectives on the themes introduced, and respond to a series of pre-prepared discussion questions. This guide includes some examples of suggested Table Group Discussion Questions, which can be modified to fit various themes as appropriate.

### *11:30am – Break*

A fifteen-minute stretch and comfort break is provided roughly half way through the program.

*11:45pm – Speaker talks round 2*

After the break a second round of 15-minute talks follow, where the two speakers expand on their initial presentations. This second round might be encouraged to move more towards the direction of the application of scriptural and theological insight to considerations of what this can look like in terms of concrete practice and action in each respective faith community.

*12:15pm – Table talk round 3*

A third round of facilitated table group discussion follows, with questions similar in form to those in the Suggested Table Discussion Questions.

*\*Approximately 12:40pm – Possible Dhuhr Prayer Break\**

*1:00pm – Closing spiritual sharing*

A second occasion for spiritual gift exchange is included near the end of the program. Again, this may be a reading/recitation, prayer, artistic expression, or some combination thereof, from both the Muslim and the Christian traditions.

*1:10pm – Gifts and thanks*

Words of thanks and a gift of appreciation for the two speakers is a nice touch, and provides an occasion to underscore the message about dialogue being a form of gift exchange.

*\*Approximately 1:15pm – Possible Dhuhr Prayer Break\**

*1:30pm – Lunch and visiting at tables*

As indicated about, eating together is important in both the Christian and Muslim traditions, and has a way of building trust and eliciting further open conversation. As your group is able, organize a common meal is a wonderful way to conclude the day of dialogue. A potluck where those participating in the dialogue bring a favourite dish can be a lovely way of doing this. Vegetarian dishes are recommended in order to make it easier to avoid dietary restrictions. Alcohol should not be served.

If having something catered is possible for you this can simplify some aspects of preparation for the event, but of course adds additional financial costs.

*2:00pm – Conclusion*

As people are finishing eating, they are thanked by the MC for their willingness to step out and meet their neighbours in the interests of seeking peace, and then sent on their way with well wishes until next time.

*2:30pm – Cleanup*



## Sample Schedule (Short Form)

In its short form, a Day of Dialogue can be run over two hours on a weekday evening. The largest changes are that there is only one round of talks from the speakers, and only two opportunities for table talk discussions. Again, this is just one example.<sup>12</sup>

*7:00pm – Doors open for registration and arrivals*

Guests should be greeted at the door if possible, and led to the registration check-in table.

At the registration table guests should be welcomed and invited to share which community they are coming from. Registration volunteers will ask guests for their first names, and provide them with a hand-written nametag. Nametags will also have a number written on them in order to assign guests to a table. Insofar as is possible, registration volunteers should try to ensure a reasonable balance between Muslims and Christians at each table.

In the meeting area, round tables should be set up with seating for roughly 8-10 people at a table. Tables will be numbered to match nametags for ease of seating.

Simple refreshments, such as tea, coffee, cookies, etc., could be made available for people to enjoy as they arrive and settle in.

*7:15pm – Welcome, opening remarks, and review principles and rules of dialogue*

An MC (or two) will call the group to gather and will offer initial words of welcome and explanation of the program that lies ahead. The MC will also facilitate transitions between speakers, group discussion time, breaks, etc.

The MC should also review some basic principles and rules of engagement, emphasizing that the basic purposes of the gathering are for learning and building relationship rather than debate and argumentation. This resource includes a list of Goals, Principles, and Rules for dialogue, many or all of which can be used effectively for this purpose.

*7:25pm – Opening spiritual sharing*

At this point, one Christian participant and one Muslim participant, arranged beforehand, will open the dialogue with some form of spiritual gift exchange. This can be a scriptural reading/recitation, a prayer, a piece of religious poetry, a musical offering, etc., as appropriate in each tradition. Each offering should take approximately 2-3 minutes.

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<sup>12</sup> Remember to consult your Muslim partners in this endeavor around how best to accommodate their need for a break to offer prayers should the program overlap with these times. In the short evening format, it will likely be either the evening Isha prayers that will need to be accounted for (though the Maghrib prayers may also conflict during the spring months). The timing of these prayers varies depending on the part of the world you are in, as well as the month and day. A suggested option for an Isha prayer break is given in the sample schedule. During the prayer break Christian participants could also gather together for brief evening prayers.

### *7:30pm – Table talk round 1*

People generally need to ease into speaking to people they do not know, especially when it comes to deeply held beliefs such as the matters of religious faith. Early in the program an opportunity is given to simply 'break the ice' by reflecting on one or two questions that are more casual and open ended in nature. The idea is to help people get used to talking with and listening to one another. A wide-ranging list is given in the Suggested Table Discussion Questions section of this resource, and different ones of these could be used over the course of several meetings.

If possible, each table should have someone designated in advance who can serve as a table group discussion facilitator. The role of this person is simply to guide the group through the questions, keep the conversation on topic, ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, etc.

### *7:45pm – Speaker talks*

The program includes dedicated time for a keynote speaker from both the Christian and Muslim traditions. The speakers are there to unpack the overall theme of the day's dialogue, and to stimulate discussion. The real dialogue will involve everyone and will happen in smaller groups around tables.

The two speakers will be given 15 minutes each. The speakers should be invited to bring a relevant piece of their holy scripture, or other commentary from within their tradition, which offers some insight on the chosen topic. A list of Suggested Topics and Themes for Dialogue is included in this toolkit. In the online resources available at [acommonword.ca](http://acommonword.ca) you will also find video recordings of examples of these sorts of presentations.

The two speakers present one after another. Discussion and comments are meant to happen with other participants at the table groups.

### *8:15pm – Table talk round 2*

Following a round of talks from the speakers, each small table group is given 20-25 minutes to reflect on what they heard, share their own perspectives on the themes introduced, and respond to a series of pre-prepared discussion questions. This guide includes some examples of suggested Table Discussion Questions, which can be modified to fit various themes as appropriate.

*\*Approximately 8:35pm – Possible Isha Prayer Break\**

### *8:45pm – Closing spiritual sharing*

A second occasion for spiritual gift exchange is included near the end of the program. Again, this may be a reading/recitation, prayer, artistic expression, or some combination thereof, from both the Muslim and the Christian traditions.

### *8:50pm – Gifts and thanks*

Words of thanks and a gift of appreciation for the two speakers is a nice touch, and provides an occasion to underscore the message about dialogue being a form of gift exchange.

### *9:00pm – Conclusion*

Participants are thanked by the MC for their willingness to step out and meet their neighbours in the interests of seeking peace, and then sent on their way with well wishes until next time.

## 6. Suggested Readings/Recitations and Prayers/Supplications

As indicated in the Day of Dialogue Program Overview and Outline, an *A Common Word* local gathering is often fittingly begun and concluded with a reading/recitation and/or supplication/prayer from the Christian and Islamic faiths, as appropriate. In so doing, the riches of our spiritual traditions can be observed and shared, complimenting other forms of dialogue which center on scripture or doctrines or matters of daily life.

The following are some suitable readings from the respective scriptures and wider religious literature of both traditions, as well as some potential opening and closing prayers. These are only examples, and each group will want to make selections based on its own context and needs.

### Muslim Readings/Recitations<sup>13</sup>

*We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.* (The Qur'an, Surah al-Ma'ida 5:48)

*[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God is one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him.* (The Qur'an, Surah al-Ankabut 29:46)

*People, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.* (The Qur'an, Surah al-Hujurat 49:13)

*You will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I show you something that, if you did, you would love each other? Spread peace among yourselves.* (Hadith, Sahih Muslim)

*Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day (i.e, Day of Judgment) should not harm his neighbor. Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should entertain his guest generously. And anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should say what is good or keep quiet.* (Hadith, Sahih Al-Bukhari)

*Shall I inform you of something that holds a higher status than fasting, praying, and giving charity? Making peace between people, for verily sowing dissension between people is indeed calamitous.* (Hadith, Kenzel Ummal)

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<sup>13</sup> The act of recitation of the Qur'an in its original language (Arabic) is of particular importance for Muslims. The word Qur'an itself means "the Recitation" and act of reciting it is seen as sacred and a form of blessing. Following the recitation, a translation and word of interpretation may often follow. In addition to the Qur'an, Muslims also draw wisdom and guidance from a second scriptural source known as "hadiths." Unlike the Qur'an, which is believed by Muslims to be the Word of God, hadiths are reported sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammed. Rather than one book, the hadiths have been collected in various texts within the Sunni and Shi'a traditions.

## Muslim Supplications/Prayers<sup>14</sup>

*O Lord, grant us mercy from You, and provide a right course for us in our affair. (The Qur'an, Surah al-Kahf, 18:10).*

*O my Lord! Open for me my chest. And ease my task for me. And make loose the knot from my tongue, that they understand my speech. (The Qur'an, Surah Ta'ha, 20:25-28)*

*O Allah! Put affection in our hearts, set right the matters between us, guide us to the ways of peace, save us from the darkness [and turn us] towards the light; save us from all kinds of indecency, the apparent as well as the hidden; and bless our hearing, our seeing, our hearts, our spouses, and our children; and turn in mercy upon us. Indeed, You are the One who greatly accepts repentance, One who is repeatedly Merciful. (Hadith, Al-Hakim)*

*There is none worthy of worship except Allah, The fore-bearing, the all wise. There is none worthy of worship except Allah, the Lord of the Exalted Throne. There is none worthy of worship except Allah, the Lord of the skies and the Lord of the earth, and the Lord of the Distinguished Throne. (Hadith, al-Tirmidhi)*

*O Allah, You are pure, I praise You and testify that there is none worthy of worship besides You. I seek forgiveness and pardon from You. If there was good talk in the gathering, this dua will seal it and if there was futile and vain talk, then this dua will recompense for it. (Hadith, al-Tirmidhi, Tagrib)*

*O Allah, I ask You for pardon and well-being in this life and the next. O Allah, I ask You for pardon and well-being in my religious and worldly affairs, and my family and my wealth. O Allah, veil my weaknesses and set at ease my dismay. O Allah, preserve me from the front and from behind and on my right and on my left and from above, and I take refuge with You lest I be swallowed up by the earth. (Hadith, Ibn Majah)*

## Christian Readings<sup>15</sup>

*A lawyer asked (Jesus) a question to test him: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:35–40)*

*(Jesus said): "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34–35)*

*An argument arose among (the disciples) as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:46–50)*

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14 The daily ritual prayer performed by Muslims is known as "salah" and consist of physical actions and verbal statements. However, in addition to these required prayers Muslims are also highly encouraged to render personal supplications known as "dua." These can be offered either extemporaneously or according to an established form derived from the Qur'an, a hadith of the Prophet Muhammed, or composed by scholars and sages from later generations. Like other faith traditions, Muslim have unique etiquettes pertaining to how they make du'a, and care should be taken to ensure this is appropriately respected in the interreligious context.

15 The "New Testament" refers to a collection of Christian scriptures which refer either to the life and ministry of Jesus (Gospels), or to the communities which were formed by the earliest followers of Jesus (Epistles).

*Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25–37)*

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (1 Corinthians 15:16–20)*

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about[f] these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8–9)*

## **Christian Prayers**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is discord, union;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
(A prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi)*



*God be in my head, and in my understanding.  
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking.  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking.  
God be in my heart, and in my thinking.  
God be in my end, and in my departing.  
(Sarum/Salisbury prayer)*

*Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.  
(Prayer from A New Zealand Prayer Book)*

*O God,  
you love justice and you establish peace on earth.  
We bring before you the disunity of today's world:  
the absurd violence, and the many wars,  
which are breaking the courage of the peoples of the world;  
militarism and the armaments race,  
which are threatening life on the planet;  
human greed and injustice,  
which breed hatred and strife.  
Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth;  
teach us to be compassionate toward the whole human family;  
strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and for peace;  
lead all nations into the path of peace,  
and give us that peace which the world cannot give.  
(A prayer from Zaire)*

*From the cowardice that dare not face new truth.  
From the laziness that is contented with half truth,  
from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,  
good Lord deliver us.  
(A prayer from Kenya)*

*Lord Christ,  
at times we are like strangers on this earth,  
taken aback by all the violence, the harsh oppositions.  
Like a gentle breeze, you breathe upon us the Spirit of peace.  
Transfigure the deserts of our doubts,  
and so prepare us to be bearers of reconciliation wherever you place us,  
until the day when a hope of peace dawns in our world.  
(A prayer of Brother Roger of Taizé)*

## 7. Suggested Dialogue Themes

As indicated in the Program Overview and Outline, a typical *A Common Word* local gathering is organized around one particular theme. Muslim and Christian speakers can be invited to focus their sharing around what their experience of their faith teaches them on this topic, with particular reference to scriptural texts and commentaries which address these issues. Theoretically the list of possible topics could be nearly endless. The ones suggested below have been tested in practice and found to work well in generating mutual learning and promoting the exchange of insights and gifts.

- **God:** What are the most important attributes of God according to your faith? What do these tell you about how we ought to relate to God and to others?
- **Creation:** What is the 'creation story' in your religious tradition, and what lessons does this have for how you relate to the environment?
- **Meaning and purpose:** What is the meaning and purpose of human life according to your religious tradition? The role of religious faith in daily life: How do our scriptures, practices, and religious beliefs influence our daily decisions and interactions?
- **The role of faith in public society:** Does your faith call you into public action? Are there limits on this? What if there is conflict between the two?
- **Justice:** What does your faith tell you about confronting injustice and standing up for others, especially the vulnerable and oppressed?
- **Revelation:** What is the role of revelation in your religious tradition? Are there intermediaries for revelation and for the interpretation of revelation? Who are they? How are they tested and accountable?
- **Sacred Scriptures:** What are the main scriptures spoken in your religious tradition? What kind of importance do they have?
- **Prophets/saints:** Do influential and memorable persons within the history of your religious tradition offer important inspiration and example for living life and caring for the world?
- **Sin, repentance, and forgiveness:** How do you see wrongdoing or sin in relation to yourself or others or God? How is one forgiven in light of sin or evil for which one is responsible?
- **Hope and trust:** What in your religious tradition gives and sustains your hope in the face of trials and tribulations? To whom or what do you turn when you are overwhelmed with hardships?
- **Prayer:** What is the purpose of prayer? Where and how does it happen? Who leads?
- **Religious Community:** Is the whole community of believers an important part of your faith tradition? What is it for? What differences or splits exist in your community? Do you see your community as separate from the world or as part of it?
- **Structure and leadership in the faith community:** How is your community of believers organized? Who exercises power? What kind of power do they have?
- **Stewardship, Tithing, and Charity:** What does your faith tradition say about giving to others and helping the less fortunate?
- **Family:** What role does the family play in your religious tradition? How are we to understand relationships with parents, siblings, children, spouses, etc.?
- **Children and youth:** How are children understood in your religious community? What are challenges involved in handing on faith to younger generations in a diverse society?
- **Death:** How does your faith respond to death? What kinds of rituals and practices are involved?
- **The life to come:** What happens to people after death? Where do they go? What is their existence like?

## 8. Suggested Table Group Discussion Questions

An essential component of the *Common Word* model of dialogue is opportunities for everyone to reflect and share together. Several rounds of 'table talk' are typically built into the program, with a progressive focusing from the general to the more specific.

### Table Talk Round 1

These questions are designed to be more general and open ended, to help people get used to talking with and listening to one another. Obviously, participants will likely only be able to address one or two of them in a given session, but a wide-ranging list is given for use over the course of several meetings:

- What does your name mean? How did you get your name?
- Where do you consider home, and what do you love most about it?
- What is the story of your journey that brought you here today?
- What expectations do you have for this dialogue? What concerns do you have?
- What is the most beautiful aspect of your religious heritage?
- What is the most challenging aspect of your religious heritage?
- What item represents your religion for you and how does this item capture the meaning of your religion to you?
- What religious values are most important to you?
- How, if at all, were you taught to understand religious differences?
- Why are you interested in Christian-Muslim dialogue specifically?
- What are your individual goals and motives for participating in this dialogue?
- What is your greatest hope and fear about interfaith relations?
- What is the cruelest thing someone from a different religion did to you? What is the most kind and generous thing?
- What do you hope the benefits to your community will be in participating in this dialogue?
- What is the story that most represents when you felt like the "other"? What impact did this have?
- What is the story that most represents when you felt that someone else was the "other"?
- What role does your faith play in your life?
- What rituals and practices are central to the way you live the teachings of your tradition?
- What do you do to ensure that you continue to be guided by your faith?

### Table Talk Round 2

After having heard first presentations from the two primary dialogue leaders, those in attendance are invited to share their initial reactions with their fellow participants around smaller tables. These questions are focused specifically on the content of the talks and are designed to help people go a bit deeper:

- Was there one phrase or idea which you heard in the presentations that really stood out for you, and if so why?
- Based on what was shared by the leader from your own faith community, was there something you would have wanted to add or say differently?
- Based on what was shared by the leader from the faith community other than your own, was there anything that was new or surprising or difficult to understand?

## Table Talk Round 3

A third round of table group discussions follows the second presentations from the dialogue leaders. Here the questions begin to move in the direction of potential conclusions, outcomes, and actions:

- Does the dialogue on this topic so far suggest any major points of commonality?
- Where do the most significant areas of difference remain?
- If the dialogue on this theme were to continue, what would be the central question to pursue?
- Is there anything that your respective Christian and Muslim communities could do together on the basis of the common ground identified?

## 9. Day of Dialogue Task Checklist

Here is a quick a step-by-step checklist which can be used as your guide for planning a Day of Dialogue for your own group.

TASK	✓
Review this guide yourself and with any others on your planning team	
Review other links and resources available on <a href="http://acommonword.ca">acommonword.ca</a>	
Assemble a team from your church or community who would be interested in planning an event like this. Review the materials with them and talk about what makes sense in your context	
Contact your local Mosque/Masjid or Muslim Association and ask to meet with them to discuss planning a Muslim-Christian dialogue event. Refer them to the <a href="http://acommonword.ca">acommonword.ca</a> website and the Introduction and Orienting Essay for Muslims if they would like more information on <i>A Common Word</i>	
Choose a mutually agreeable date and timing	
Chose a mutually agreeable venue	
Choose a dialogue theme	
Invite a Muslim and a Christian keynote speaker to share presentations on the theme according to the outlined parameters	
Identify people willing to serve in the various volunteer roles	
Choose readings/recitations/prayers/etc. for the opening and closing, and invite people who will lead these	
Decide about food and refreshments and make the necessary arrangements	
Invite people and advertise widely your event in the churches and in your community	
Hold your Day of Dialogue	
Meet with your planning team to debrief	
Do it again!	



## Appendix 1:

# Common Expressions and Key Terms in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Interacting well with our interfaith neighbours is a bit like working at communicating across a language barrier. This can be true in both literal linguistic and in wider metaphorical senses. What follows here are some definitions and explanations of certain common expressions and important terms and ideas for both Muslims and Christians.<sup>16</sup>

## Common Islamic Expressions and Phrases

- **Alhamdulillah** (*Praise/Thanks be to God*) – Used to express satisfaction and gratitude.
- **Allahu Akbar** (*God is great*) – Often used to express delight.
- **Asalamu Alaikum** (*Peace be upon you*) – The standard Islamic way of greeting or sending someone on their way.
- **Bismillah** (*In the name of God*) – Said at the beginning of any action: eating, drinking, starting a task, etc.
- **Eid Mubarak** (*Happy Eid*) – An expression wishing the blessings of a particular holiday or observance.
- **Insha Allah** (*If God wills*) – Used when referring to future plans for which one asks God's blessing.
- **Masha Allah** (*God has willed*) – Also used to express appreciation for good news, or to acknowledge something as God's doing.
- **Peace be upon him** – Following the verbal or written mention of the names of recognized prophets, Islamic custom calls for the speaker to utter this blessing. It is a sign of submission and honour of their message and its origins with God.
- **Ramadan Kareem** (*Blessed Ramadan*) – Used at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Subhana Allah** (*Glory be to God*) – Used to express amazement and delight.
- **Ya Allah!** (*Oh God*) – This is shorthand expression used when asking God for something, expressing sincerity, sadness, surprise, etc.

## Key Islamic Terms and Ideas

- **Allah:** Allah is simply the Arabic word for God. God is understood according to a strictly defined monotheism, and as a being who is eternal, all powerful, all knowing, all seeing, all hearing, merciful and beneficent. Islam holds that there are 99 special names for Allah, each which express an aspect of the God's beautiful and majestic character.
- **Shirk:** This is to posit any other being or aspect of creation as equal to or in partnership with God. This is, in fact, the most serious sin from an Islamic perspective. This includes any form of polytheism, as well as making any created thing an idol by giving it the honour which is only due to God.
- **Prophet:** The Qur'an teaches that every group of people that has ever been has been sent a messenger from God. Twenty-five of these are referred to by name in the Qur'an itself, with special emphasis upon Moses, Jesus, and others. There are believed to have been many more whose names are no longer known. Each prophet was sent by God to teach the same overall message of faith in God and concern for others, though some of their specific practices differed. The authentic messages of all of these prophets are understood as anticipations of what would be fully revealed in the Qur'an, and Muslims are expected to honor them and their revelations. Muhammed is the final prophet, and his message completes humanity's knowledge of God.

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, both Christians and Muslims speak a myriad of different languages and come from many diverse cultural backgrounds. In both traditions, cultural and denominational distinctives lead to slightly different interpretations or points of emphasis on certain ideas or practices. Therefore, this list should not be taken as anywhere near comprehensive.

- **Qur'an:** The Qur'an is the revelation of God as dictated to the Prophet Muhammed through the angel Jibril over the course of 23 years. It is divided into 114 chapters, or surahs, each with numerous verses varying in length. Recitation of the Qur'an is a very delicate and precise art.
- **Hadith:** The Hadith's are collections of teachings, sayings, stories either directly from the Prophet Muhammed himself or from those who knew him. Although they are not equivalent to the Qur'an, which is God's own revelation, they carry an important weight as a secondary foundation after the Qur'an for Islamic theology and practice.
- **Mecca:** Mecca is a city in present day Saudi Arabia where Muhammed first began to preach. It is a place of spiritual significance for it has been the location of the Ka'bah, which Muslims believe was the first house of worship devoted to God. Muslims believe it was built by the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael, though later it was filled by idols as their message became forgotten. The Prophet Muhammed called for a return to the monotheism of Abraham (from whom he is a descendent) and the removal of the idols in the temple. Mecca is also the direction towards which Muslim face when they pray and visiting Mecca on a pilgrimage known as the "hajj" is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.
- **Imam:** An Imam is the leader of a local community of Muslims. Islam does not have a formal process for the ordination of clergy as is found in certain Christian denominations. Rather, individuals become recognized as Imams by the community on the basis of their knowledge and devotion. The term "imam" is traditionally limited to men. However, there are other terms of respect for Islamic spiritual leaders and scholars that are inclusive of men and women, such as Shaykh (elder), Mufti (consultant in religious law), and Ustadh (religious teacher). In the Shia tradition Imam has an added connotation, referring to the first 12 successors of Muhammed.
- **Shahada:** Shahada refers to bearing witness to the unity and uniqueness of the nature of God, and to the pre-eminence of Muhammed as the definitive Prophet of God. All Muslims are required to recite this formula in order to be considered a follower of Islam: "I testify that there is no god but God, and Muhammed is the Messenger of God."
- **Salah:** Salah (sometimes written "salat") means prayer, but prayer of a specific kind. Islam requires daily prayer at five intervals throughout the day according to a particular form. Other forms of prayer in both personal and communal forms are also possible and encouraged but are not requirements in the same way.
- **Hajj:** Making pilgrimage to the city of Mecca during the twelfth month on the Muslim calendar is another requirement which all Muslims with the health and means to do so must perform.
- **Zakat:** Zakat refers to the obligation each Muslim has to return 2.5% of their annual wealth to support the poor and those in other kinds of need. Further acts of generosity and charity are also encouraged, but paying zakat is understood to be a duty that one owes to God directly.
- **Mosque/Masjid:** The word mosque literally translates to "a place of prostration", referring to the action of bowing down for prayer. Masjid is simply the Arabic word for the anglicized mosque.
- **Ummah:** The Ummah is the collective community of all those who follow the way of Islam. While it literally means "nation", its religious connotations are transnational and multicultural, and carries with it a sense of interconnected relationship and common purpose in the cause of Islam.
- **Sharia:** Sharia is commonly translated as law however it refers more comprehensively to all of the teachings of Islam (belief, ethics, and manners). In its original Arabic usage, it meant the "path to water" which – given the arid desert origins of the faith – gives a sense of it being the path to life and salvation. As Islam is a religion rooted in scripture, the interpretation of God's word falls upon the responsibility of scholars who sometimes differ in their approach and interpretation of Islam's scriptural tradition. Different scholarly approaches to scriptural interpretation have developed within Sunni and Shi'a Islam.

## Common Christian Expressions and Phrases

- **Peace be with you** – Based on the greeting Jesus was believed to have given to his first followers in his appearances after being raised from death. It is used as both a greeting and farewell in general conversation, and as an expression in the context of Christian worship.
- **Merry Christmas** – This is standard salutation on the day of and through the whole of the twelve-day season which commemorates the birth of Jesus.
- **Happy Easter** – Used to wish on another the blessings of the resurrection of Jesus from death to new life.
- **Christ is risen** – Both a greeting and a term of celebration which used during the forty-day season of Easter. The traditional reply is “He is risen indeed!”.
- **Lord have mercy** – A phrase which is used to indicate an intention of prayer being expressed to God.
- **Maranatha** (*Come Lord*) – An expression of hope for the second coming of Jesus at the end of history.
- **Amen** (*So be it*) – An exclamation indicating a sense of agreement and consistency between the will of God and something that has just been said or done.

## Key Christian Terms and Ideas

- **Trinity:** Christians believe that God is one and that God’s Divine nature is a unified whole. Christians have also come to believe that the nature of God is complex, expressing as an interrelated and community of “persons” in inseparable relationship. These persons are commonly referred to by the relational descriptors of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, it is important to recognize that these names do not refer to separate beings, but one and the same God.
- **Incarnation:** Literally meaning ‘the taking of flesh,’ Christians believe that God’s eternal Word, which has been revealed in part in creation and the Holy Scriptures, was also revealed in person in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth.
- **Christ:** A Greek word meaning ‘anointed one,’ Christians apply this title to Jesus as a way of expressing their belief that he is the promised Messiah of the ancient Hebrews. As the Christ Jesus is understood to have opened a path for non-Jewish peoples (Gentiles) to become grafted into to People of Israel and the lineage of Abraham, and thereby to receive the salvation God has promised.
- **Crucifixion:** Jesus lived a life of prophetic holiness which consequently brought him into conflict with the powers that be in his time. Knowing the likely costs, he did not back away from his mission in obedience to the will of God. He willingly gave himself over to his fate, which was a cruel execution in the form of a Roman torture device known as a cross. This death is understood by Christians as having various layers of meaning, including an example of faithfulness, an expression of God’s love, and an atoning sacrifice for sin and redemption.
- **Resurrection:** Although he was truly descended to the dead and placed in the tomb following his death on the Cross, death was not able to fully hold Jesus for long. The third day after his crucifixion, Jesus was raised to new life. He possessed a body, but not a body entirely alike to the one he had in his earthly life. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation for the promise of resurrection and eternal life for all who place their trust in him and are joined to him.
- **Church:** The New Testament scriptures speak of those who would be gathered together as disciples of Jesus as the ‘ecclesia’ of God – i.e. ‘the gathered ones’. The English word Church carries the meaning of this scriptural term, and therefore refers to the those who have been gathered together by their common desire to follow Jesus. The Church also participates in carrying on the teaching and work of Jesus, and for this reason is sometimes called ‘the Body of Christ’.
- **Bible:** The Bible is a collection of writings from various authors over many centuries in a variety of genres. A portion of these writings are the Hebrew Scriptures of the people of Israel, including the Torah, the Wisdom Writings, and the Prophets. The New Testament is a record of the earliest Christians remembrances of their experience of the life and teachings of Jesus, his disciples, and the earliest churches. Christians believe that

the Spirit of God inspired the authors of these writings such that what they wrote can be trusted as an authentic vehicle for revealing the nature of God and God's will for humanity and the world. Because of this, the Bible represents the most foundational source for directing Christian doctrine and discernment in every generation.

- **Baptism:** Baptism is a ceremony that is meant to convey the washing away of evil, sin, and fallen human nature, and is also symbolic of a death to the old way of life and rebirth into a new way. It involves the pouring, sprinkling, or submersion of children or adults in a font of water, and marks the beginning of a person's commitment to be disciple of Jesus. Although the manner and timing of baptism is a point of difference for Christians, it is a key ritual in virtually every form of the Christian community.
- **Communion/Eucharist/Mass/Lord's Supper:** Jesus summed up the giving of his life as a sacrifice for others through the act of giving bread and wine to his first disciples in the context of the Jewish Passover meal. According to the Scriptures and Tradition, Jesus said that whenever his followers repeated this meal, they would receive his presence and all the benefits his sacrifice by eating and drinking these elements of bread (the Body of Christ) and wine (the Blood of Christ). Though it has different names in different Christian expressions, the celebration of this meal is central across the Christian tradition.
- **Minister/Clergy:** Although Christians believe that all disciples of Jesus are equally meant to lead the Church in living out its mission, there are also specific roles which some are called to instead of others. Certain kinds of spiritual authority and leadership in the Christian community are given to individuals who the community affirms as uniquely called and gifted by God. Those who are set aside for these specific roles are called 'ordained' ministers. Within the orders of Christian ministry there are further specific roles and areas of responsibility, and different names exist for these in different Christian communities. Some of the most common titles are pastor, elder, priest, deacon, and bishop.
- **Saint:** All Christians see value in remembering heroic faithfulness in the followers of Jesus in earlier generations. Many Christian traditions formally recognize these figures and refer to them as saints. Varying degrees of devotion are expressed towards the lives and virtues of the saints across the denominational spectrum of the churches.
- **Second Coming/Parousia:** Jesus promised that, in the fulness of time he would return to bring conclusion to God's promises, to usher in the reign of God, and to establish the re-creation of all things. No one knows the day or the hour, and it will come as a surprise to all.

## **Appendix 2:**

# **Important Muslim and Christian Holy Days and Observances**

Learning about one another's significant festivals, fasts, and other commemorations throughout the year is another critical window into our faith traditions. Knowing these dates, and wishing one another well in our observance of them can be a very meaningful gesture of interreligious friendship.

### **Islamic Holy Days and Observances<sup>17</sup>**

- **Al-Hijra/Muharram:** Although there are no explicitly prescribed religious actions or practices associated with it, the first day of the month of Muharram is the Islamic 'New Year'. Muharram is the month in which the emigration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina took place in the year 622 CE, a journey known as the Hijra. Most Muslims regard the day as a time for reflection on the Hijra, and on the year to come. In modern times, some Muslims will use the occasion to offer one another blessings for the new year ahead.
- **Ashura:** Ashura is another observance which takes place in the month of Muharram in the Islamic Calendar, in this case on the 9th and 10th days. A memorial is made at this time of God's salvation of the Prophet Moses and the Israelites from Pharaoh in Egypt. Ashura also marks the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussain ibn Ali, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala by the armies of a corrupt governor. The 10th of Muharram is a significant day of remembrance for both Sunni and Shia Muslims, and is observed with profound acts of mourning especially in Shia communities because of the special recognition given to Ali.
- **Eid ul-Adha:** Eid ul-Adha is a commemoration of the obedient willingness of the Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismail in response to the command of Allah. Over the course of three days, sacrifices of domestic animals are made in remembrance of God's provision of an animal in Ismail's place. Following these sacrifices, the meat which is produced is divided up and traditionally given to those who are hungry and in need. Families and friends will also cook meat for their own celebrations, and special emphasis on giving and sharing with others during these days.
- **Eid ul-Fitr:** This occasion, observed on the first day of the month of Shawwal, serves as the conclusion of the period of fasting observed during the previous month of Ramadan. The word Fitr literally means "to break the fast". Many Muslims will make their way to special congregational prayers early in the morning, commonly followed by a sermon (Khutba). At the conclusion, feasting and celebration in the homes of relatives and friends follows into the daytime.
- **Lailat ul Bara'ah/Shab e Barat:** Muslims differ in their recognition of this Holy Day, which is observed at night. However, those who observe it believe that it is a special evening time when Muslims may seek forgiveness for their sins. It occurs two weeks prior to the beginning of Ramadan, on the 15th of the month of Shaban.
- **Lailat ul Qadr:** Translated as the Night of Power, Muslims consider Lailat ul Qadr to be the most holy night of the year. The final 10 days of the month of Ramadan are generally understood to have special spiritual significance, and Lailat ul Qadr is observed near the end of that month on the 27th day. It is on this night that the Prophet Muhammad first received the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. It is typical for Muslims to mark this event through special observances of prayer, devotional reading, and study, as such acts undertaken on Lailat ul Qadr are held to have a heightened importance because of the holiness of the night.
- **Lailat ul Miraj:** Lailat ul Miraj, which means the Night of Ascension, remembers the nighttime journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, the Prophet is believed to have ascended to heaven and into the Divine presence. It was during this journey that he received the instruction to direct the Muslims regarding the five daily prayers. The place of this ascension is marked today by Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock.

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<sup>17</sup> The descriptions that follow here have consulted and drawn upon resources available on the website of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, which can be found at [sosspeace.org](http://sosspeace.org)



- **Milad an-Nabi:** This occasion marks the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Because it was not celebrated in the early times of Islam, it is another commemoration around which Muslims differ with their recognition of its observance. In some Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey, it is celebrated with elaborate festivals. Other countries, like Saudi Arabia, outright forbid it. One common feature of Milad an-Nabi festivities in those places that have them is the reading and singing of poetry and songs in praise of God and the Prophet.
- **Ramadan:** The month of Ramadan is the ninth month on the Islamic calendar, and it receives its prominence because of its association with the Prophet Mohammed's revelation of the Qur'an. Because the Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar, the dates for the observance of Ramadan alter by roughly 10 days each year according to the Gregorian Calendar most common in the West. One of the five pillars of Islam is the obligation to fast during the month of Ramadan, which means refraining from both food and drink and from sexual intimacy. The fasting period begins at dawn, and after sunset is broken in a meal known as 'Iftar, often held together with family and friends. Muslims are also highly encouraged to focus even more deeply on their religious devotion during Ramadan, including such things as community worship, spiritual life, Qur'anic reading and study, volunteering, and expressions of charity.
- **Yaum al-'Arafah:** Each year, during the month of Dhul Hijjah, millions of Muslims make an annual pilgrimage to Mecca known as the Hajj. Participation in this pilgrimage, which involves specific rituals performed over three days, is also one of the five pillars of Islam. Yaum al-'Arafah is observed on the second day of pilgrimage, and begins at dawn. Pilgrims travel from Mecca to nearby Mount Arafat and the Plain of Arafat, and, from morning until evening, do nothing but call together upon God in a spirit of repentance, seeking mercy and forgiveness.

## Christian Holy Days and Observances

The Christian year is divided into liturgical seasons focused around important moments in the life of Jesus and the Church. The dates and ways of celebrating these festivals vary between the different churches, so this is only a partial and generalized introduction.

- **Advent:** From the Latin word *adventus*, which means 'arrival' or 'coming', Advent is the first season of the Church year. It begins four Sundays before Christmas day (the Sunday falling on or nearest to November 30), and ends on Christmas Eve, December 24. Advent focuses on preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ – both as a memorial of his first birth, as well as his coming again. It is a period intended for both sincere self-examination and joyful anticipation. In some Christian traditions the season is marked by the lighting of four candles are fixed to a garland made of evergreen boughs as a way of marking the progression of these four preparatory weeks before Christmas. Other popular devotions, especially among children, include the use of an Advent calendar to count down the days to Christmas.
- **Christmas:** Christmas is one of major annual festivals, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that with the birth of Jesus, the Word of God became flesh (Incarnation). The majority of Christians celebrate on December 25 according to the widely used dating system known as the Gregorian calendar. However, some Eastern Christian Churches follow an older calendar and therefore mark the celebration on a day which corresponds with early January according to the Gregorian use. There are various customs to celebrate Christmas, which include gift giving, singing Christmas music (caroling), acting out the events of Jesus' birth through a Nativity Play, the exchange of Christmas cards, attending special church services, a festive meal, and the display of various Christmas decorations including Christmas lights, nativity scenes, etc. The twelve days between December 25 and January 6 is a time for the whole Church to celebrate and give thanks for coming of the Word of God in human form.
- **Epiphany:** The word Epiphany comes from the Greek language and means appearance or manifestation. It refers to a Christian feast day which celebrates the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ to the world. The feast commemorates primarily the visit of the three Magi from the East. According to a narrative recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, three Magi, who are also sometimes referred to as Wise Men



or Kings, traveled from faraway lands to find Jesus after his birth, bringing with them gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In this event is expressed the conviction that Jesus' physical manifestation extended beyond the Jewish context in which he lived to include all the nations of the world. The traditional date to begin remembrance of the Epiphany is January 6.

- **Lent:** The season of Lent is a solemn time of prayer, fasting, self-examination, and charity, all in preparation for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ at Easter. Lent begins 40 days before Easter on a day called Ash Wednesday, an occasion when Christians are reminded that their lives do not last forever by receiving a mark of dust/ashes on their foreheads. Lent is a 40-day season in part as a commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and enduring temptation by Satan. During Lent, many churches will cover up or remove things like statues, art, flowers, and so on, from their churches and altars. This is done in order to emphasize the solemn character of the season. Depending on the Christian denomination and local custom, Lent ends either the day before Good Friday, known as Maundy Thursday, or at sundown on the Saturday prior to Easter Sunday. On this Holy Saturday evening/night, a vigil of prayer is held to mark the profound time between the death of Jesus and his Easter resurrection.
- **Good Friday:** The final week of Lent is known as Holy Week, which reaches a high point on the Friday of that week. Good Friday is the day on which Christians remember Jesus' crucifixion. Prayer and worship services held on this day draw people into the story of his betrayal, arrest, judgment, torture suffering, and death. The day is not 'good' by any normal measure, and yet is understood as a source of blessing and grace for Christians precisely because of what it reveals of God's great love, compassion, and mercy towards us, even in our evil and sinful state.
- **Easter:** The three days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday represent the high point of Holy Week, known in Latin as the Triduum. The festival of the Resurrection of the Lord, Easter Sunday, is the pinnacle of the Christian year. It is on this day that the Church joyfully proclaims the good news Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In this event, Christians see also a promise that, in Christ, a new way of living has become possible for us all. Easter has always been a time of celebration and feasting and many traditional Easter games and customs developed, such as egg decorating, enjoying sweets such as chocolate, as well as other Easter foods. The date of Easter varies year to year, according to the first Sunday after the full moon on or before March 21st. Because of different calendars being used, it is also often celebrated on different days entirely by Christian communities in the East and the West. The Easter season carries on for 50 days following the Sunday.
- **Ascension:** During the 50 days following his resurrection, Jesus is believed to have appeared to his disciples and many large groups of people. During this time, he commissioned them to tell the good news of his life, death, and resurrection, and to carry on his ministry in his name. The Ascension marks the close of the earthly journey of Jesus and refers to his return from this world into the communion of God in the heavenly realm. Ascension Day is observed 40 days after Easter.
- **Pentecost:** Jesus promised his disciples that, upon his departure and return to God, those who believed in him and sought to follow in his way would not be left alone. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, would come upon them and fill them with power to carry on in the mission of Christ. The day of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit, as well as the inauguration of the Church of Christ – the community of all those who are gathered together by God to hand on and live out the healing and reconciling acts of Jesus to the rest of the world. For this reason, Pentecost is sometimes called the 'birthday' of the Church.
- **All Saints:** Those who have been baptized into the salvation of Jesus are understood as having been made holy, i.e. been made saints. In some cases, some Christian traditions will formally recognize certain figures in the history of the Church as having displayed particularly heroic and inspirational virtues. These individuals are remembered as Saints in a special way and are often commemorated with minor celebrations throughout the seasons of the Christian liturgical year. All of our forebears who have died in the faith and hope of Christ are not gone forever but remain members of the communion of the Church, awaiting the resurrection and eternal life that is God's will for all. The feast of All Saints, marked on November 1st each year, celebrates exactly this.

## **Appendix 3:**

### **Manners and Etiquette for Muslim-Christian Relations**

In the same way that it is important to understand each others' words, beliefs, and practices, interreligious dialogue also involves navigating various interpersonal and intercultural dynamics and expectations. Some of these expectations vary not only in connection with religious customs but also cultural ones. There is not single Christian nor Muslim culture, and therefore every community may have different elements to be aware of. It is almost inevitable that we are going to make mistakes. This should not dissuade us from trying, and is itself part of the dialogue process. What is most important is not getting everything right, but rather showing humility and a willingness to learn.

- Some Muslims refrain from exchanging handshakes or other forms of physical greeting with members of the opposite gender. This may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for some Christians, but is not in any way intended to be rude or unwelcoming. Placing a hand over your heart and offering a friendly bow of the head to the other is a common substitute gesture.
- Muslim clerics will most commonly go by the titles of "Sheikh" or "Imam". There is no expected honorific address by which a non-Muslim should address a Sheikh or Imam. However, they can be respectfully greeted with these titles, followed by first name, either in written or spoken speech. Christian clergy may be referred to variously by the titles of "Reverend" or "Pastor," or, more frequently in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions (where clergy are only men), "Father." People of both traditions will generally introduce themselves as they wish to be addressed, with first name being typical in social settings. When in doubt about how to address someone, feel free to politely ask.
- It is always wise to check a religious holiday calendar to learn which Muslim and Christian holidays should be avoided for your meeting or event.
- Try to schedule gatherings in a way that does not interfere with the required daily times of prayer for Muslim participants. If there is overlap with one of the set times of prayer, be sure to speak to your Muslim friends about how best to accommodate their needs in this regard. It may be necessary to allow for a break, and to set aside appropriate space so that the Muslims can fulfill these duties of prayer.
- It is appropriate to take off your shoes as you enter into a Muslim home or a mosque. Typically, there will be a place set aside near the door for you to place them for the duration of your visit. This is done both out of respect for the space, and for general cleanliness. It is fine to enter wearing socks.
- Clothing is always an important consideration, and it is best to dress conservatively in religious institutions. For all genders, try to avoid anything that is tight-fitting or revealing, and covered arms and legs is a good general guideline. Some mosques or masjids will ask female guests to wear a head-covering, and will likely have extras on hand for this purpose.
- Be sure to ask about any dietary restrictions on bringing food to a home or place of worship. Avoid bringing a bottle or wine or other alcohol to a Muslim home. Ensure that no food products are made with alcohol, lard, gelatin or any other pork product.
- Check with your guests regarding animals and pets. Some Muslims regard the saliva of dogs unclean, especially near prayer areas or clothing. In addition, some people may be frightened or allergic to animals.
- Bringing a small thank you card and/or gift to your Muslim or Christian host is a generous expression that will undoubtedly be appreciated.