

Loving Our Muslim Neighbours

Insights into how best to respond to the needs of people God is sending us

BY A CANADIAN FRIEND OF MUSLIMS

You are the friend I can share most openly with, because I trust you more than I trust friends from my own country. . . Thank you for all you have done for my children. . . I know you are a kind person who cares about other people. . . Wherever I am in the world, I will always remember what you have done. . . I feel so much strength coming into me when you pray. . . These are comments from Muslims whose lives have been touched by a Canadian Christian friend.

God's Initiative

As we watch the number of Muslim immigrants to Canada grow past 750,000, we are compelled to ask, "Regardless of the reasons motivating Muslims, what is God up to in all of this?" His motive is spelled out, "...so that [they] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (see Acts 17:26-27).

God is bringing Muslims from countries where they would be persecuted or even killed if they became followers of Jesus. Here we have freedom to share the Good News of Jesus, and they have more freedom to respond. What a new challenge for the Body of Christ across Canada.

Our Response

Many Canadians feel unsettled, unsure of how to respond. For those of us who love Jesus, the response he is asking of us is clear, "Do not exploit the foreigners who live in your land. They should be treated like everyone else, and you must love them as you love yourself" (see Leviticus 19:33-34).

When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, he demonstrated that the neighbour God calls us to love is NOT just the person next door who may be similar to us in race, religion or culture. The

neighbour in Jesus' story was from an ethnic group hated and looked down on by the man he sacrificially loved. The neighbour God calls us to love is anyone, from any race or religion, who comes across our path with a need God will empower us to meet.

God is sending us a lot of new Muslim neighbours who need to 'taste' Jesus' love through us. How can we begin to respond, both individually and as a church?

Lord, Open Our Hearts

Put very simply, we honestly tell God how empty we are, how unable we are to respond to his commission to love our Muslim neighbours. He already knows, but we need to agree with him. Then we can give him permission to give us HIS love for Muslim people. We invite him to open up our hearts to these new neighbours.

Lord, Open Our Eyes

We can also ask God to open our eyes: to see the specific



Ask God what he has given you that he is calling you to share

individuals he is asking us to love and to see how they need to be loved.

When we moved to an area with a significant Muslim population, we asked God to give us *divine appointments*—to lead us to people he wanted us to meet. He did, in his usual creative ways. I met one Muslim woman through a hair appointment; another was walking in my neighbourhood.

One family we met by taking the initiative to phone them and introduce ourselves after we heard about their need. We had no idea we would immediately bond because of factors we had in common. But God knew. Recently we have reconnected with Muslim friends we had not been in touch with for quite a while.

You may meet Muslims at work, in school, through your children's activities, in your neighbourhood or through programs. Not all contacts turn out to be long term relationships. We are just called to seek to love wherever Jesus sends us

and to leave the results with him.

As Jesus leads us to Muslim acquaintances, we need him to open our eyes to see how best to meaningfully love them. Sometimes it is obvious, sometimes not.

Many Muslim immigrants need help with their English. Children often need help with their homework.

Immigrants and especially refugees often need an advocate—someone to go to government or legal or medical offices with them or to help them fill out forms. They may need help in finding agencies for job assessments or job hunting, or in writing their resumé.

Many women are lonely and would love to have a trustworthy woman friend who is willing to get to know and enjoy them and who can help them understand Canadian life. They place a high value on relationships and hospitality.

Men often need help in finding work. They may come with education and professional experience but become frustrated or depressed when they can only find menial jobs.

Parents become concerned for their children when they see the low morals among Canadian youth. They look for help in parenting their children who are caught between two cultures.

Spiritual needs are pervasive. Even

if they are devoted to performing all the rituals required in Islam, Muslims live in an atmosphere of fear—fear God will make something bad happen to them, fear of the spirit world, fear of curses and the evil eye, fear of the time of death.

Lord, Open our Hands

Allowing God to open our hearts and our eyes, we are ready to take action—to open our hands as we ask God how he wants to use us as a loving neighbour. Ask God what he has given you that he is calling you to share.

Is it coming alongside as a friend? An ability to teach or tutor? The gift of prayer? Advocacy? Support and encouragement? Providing furniture for newcomers? Giving funds for ministries? Job search help? Showing appreciation for their culture? Offering hospitality?

Working with a team of other believers to provide services? Inviting them to participate in special celebrations such as Christmas? Praying with them when they share a concern? Helping with income tax returns? Of course the deepest act of love is sharing the Good News of Jesus through both actions and words as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Love will be sensitive to the culture and lifestyle of the Muslims we befriend. Muslims vary in their adherence to Islamic rules and traditions. You can ask your friend about his practices. It is important not to offend their sense of morality.

In my experience, women need not wear a hijab, but must dress with extra modesty. Many Muslims will only eat *halal* meat products. Women need to build friendships only with women, and men with men.

In fact, it is best to never greet someone of the opposite sex by extending a hand for a handshake.



MUSLIMS IN CANADA

Many Canadians think Muslims are all Arabs, when in fact, the majority is not. They come to Canada from many countries including Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Middle Eastern countries, Egypt, Somalia and Sudan.

This offends some. Wait and shake hands only if they extend their hand first. These are a few basic guidelines. You can easily learn more specifics by reading Christian literature available on relating to our Muslim neighbours.

Lord, lead us together

Teaming up with other believers brings the gifts of the Body together. Small groups can become prayer partners for individuals who have a Muslim friend. **Prayer is foundational for every step!**

It's been neat to see how a Muslim friend has been loved by different Christians in different ways. I met Sara through English as a Second Language (ESL). She left ESL for full-time studies, but our relationship continued. She often asks me to pray for her.

Her son was loved by volunteers from two different churches at a five day camp. Others loved by giving financially so camp could

MUSLIM NUMBERS

- Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world
- Approx. 1.3 billion Muslims around the world
- Approx. 750,000-800,000 Muslims in Canada
- 6-7 million Muslims in the United States
- Arab Muslims make up 15 percent of total
- Islam is one of the world's three monotheistic religions (believing in one God); Christianity and Judaism are the other two

Source: *Journalist's Guide to Islam*, Council of American-Islamic Relations Canada

be highly subsidized. A man is tutoring this son. Another man took her husband's resumé to support him in finding a job. A number of individuals bring Jesus' love and light to this family by praying for them.

Imagine this being repeated thousands of times across Canada! Imagine the light of Jesus shining brighter and brighter in their communities!

Someday, individuals from every Muslim background ethnic group of earth will be found in

heaven, shouting praises for their salvation to God and to Jesus, the Lamb (see Revelation 7:9, 10). Won't it be exciting to see some of the Muslim neighbours we have loved standing among us?



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Fellowship of Faith for the Muslims
www3.sympatico.ca/ffm.toronto/mfm.html

Answering Islam
www.answering-islam.org

Muslim Canada
www.muslim-canada.org

Call (306) 949-0183

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INTERNATIONAL WORK PROJECTS

- **Atizapan, Mexico (January 2009)** Teams of 10-12 to build the Short Term Mission Centre.
- **Guatemala (January 2009)** Teams of 10-12 to continue work on the campsite.
- **Nicaragua (February 23 - March 1, 2009)** Teams of 10-12 to complete construction on 2nd floor of Christian Education wing.
- **Rio Chico (April 2009)** Teams of 10-12 to continue to build the retreat centre.
- **Waveland, Mississippi (2009-2010)** The need for volunteers continues as the victims of Hurricane Katrina seek to rebuild their homes and lives.

Costs for short term mission trips are approximately \$2,000.00 to \$2,500.00 per person.

Other opportunities to assist our international worker teams will become available. For more information contact: **Art Wiens - International Work Project Coordinator**
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