



Reaching Muslims in America

By Tommy Hodum

Three comments I recently read refocused my attention on Muslims in America. The first was made by a presidential candidate. “Assimilation has been very hard [for Muslims in America]. It’s almost – I won’t say nonexistent, but it gets to be pretty close. And I’m talking about second and third-generation. They come – they don’t – for some reasons, there’s no real assimilation.”ⁱ The second was made by the current prime minister of Turkey. “Yes, integrate yourselves into German society, but don’t assimilate yourselves. No one has the right to deprive us of our culture and our identity.”ⁱⁱ The third comment was made by Winston Churchill. “Individual Moslems may show splendid qualities. Thousands become the brave and loyal soldiers of the Queen: all know how to die: but the influence of the religion paralyzes the social development of those who follow it. No stronger retrograde force exists in the world.”ⁱⁱⁱ The assimilation of Muslims into one’s country, specifically in America, raises many questions:

1. Who are the Muslims in America?
2. What problems do Muslims identify if they attempt assimilation?

3. What major challenges do Christians encounter in engaging Muslims in America?
4. What approaches will assist Christians in witnessing to both first and second-generation Muslims in America?

Muslims in America are an integral part of the 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide. An estimated 4.5 million Muslims live in America with that number increasing at least 100,000 a year.^{iv} They have come, the 65% who are foreign-born, from around the world.^v However, they are not first or foremost known for their ethnicity. They are known for their religious affiliation – Islamic. Their identity or current or past citizenship is not nearly as important as being a member of and continuing in the Islamic faith.^{vi} They keep and carry the past to affect the present as well as the future. Muslims in America are like Muslims around the globe. They “are deeply committed to their faith and want its [Islamic] teachings to shape not only their personal lives, but their societies and politics.”^{vii}

Foreign-born as well as second-generation Muslims in America believe they face many societal problems. The fol-



Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



Recently while in a large U.S. city in the Midwest I had to travel by taxi from my hotel to an event venue. I soon determined by the accent of the young driver that English was not his mother tongue. I asked him where he was from and he responded “Ethiopia”. He shared that there were many Ethiopian immigrants in the city and that he was attending one of the four Ethiopian churches in the area. This new American openly spoke of some of the opportunities and struggles that he had experienced over the last few years while adjusting to his new homeland.

At our event luncheon the next day I noticed that the four young men attending our table were speaking a language that was not English. I asked them what language they were speaking. All four of them had immigrated to the United States from Egypt; they were speaking Arabic! One shared how he enjoyed the freedom in the United States to worship as he wished without intimidation. These two encounters displayed to me the importance of the Church readying itself to reach out to new Americans with the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially to unreached Muslims – most of whom have never heard a clear presentation of the gospel.

The reality is that immigrants are coming to our American cities. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that globally there are 60 million people on the move. One out of every 122 persons on the planet today is outside their native-born homeland. Every day 42,500 people are uprooted because of war, strife, disasters or persecution. They are running away from something and racing toward something. Many are coming to America, as they perceive it to be the land of opportunity. America’s population is currently pegged at 320 million and will reach 438 million by 2050. If current birthrates and immigration trends continue, by mid-century an estimated 162 million Americans, or 37% of the population, will be “immigrants and their US-born children.” (www.yourneighbor.us)

With the influx of immigrants the demographics of many churches have already changed. The Director of Research in Assemblies of God World Missions recently reported that Anglo/White adherents in U.S. Assemblies of God churches declined by over 13 percent between 2001 and

2015, while our fellowship as a whole continued to grow. One of the things this tells us is our fellowship’s growth among multicultural Americans is expanding at a rapid pace.

A relevant question for missional churches is “How will we respond to a growing immigrant population, especially newly-arrived Muslims?”

Will the Church seize this great opportunity to share with them the message that Jesus is more than a prophet; that He is the Savior who died for them? Does God use migration and immigration as a tool to advance kingdom purposes? Author Enoch Wan, writing in *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*, describes the global immigration phenomenon as “diaspora mission.” He explains that this mission of God’s redemptive work of migration can occur in at least three ways: “(1) Mission *to* the diaspora: Christians in the host country sharing the hope of the gospel with refugees or other immigrants who are not yet believers, (2) Mission *through* the diaspora: immigrant believers reach out to those in their own ethnic group, both in the host country and sometimes beyond, by returning as missionaries, and (3) Mission *by and beyond* the diaspora: immigrant believers share the gospel cross-culturally, with those in the host country or in other contexts.”

As we consider the future of ministry in our local communities, we should deliberately plan to engage arriving immigrants. We need to recognize the sovereign hand of God in this ‘age of diaspora’ and use this opportunity to introduce new arrivals, especially Muslims, to Jesus Christ. It is important to continue to support and send missionaries to reach Muslims around the world with the gospel. It is equally important to walk across the street to meet unreached Muslim peoples in our own neighborhoods.

I pray that as you read the lead article about reaching Muslims in America you will sense the opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission right in your own neighborhood. The Apostle Paul tells us “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to *everyone* who believes...” (Romans 1:16) Our vision at Global Initiative is “That every Muslim must know the truth about Jesus.”



ISLAMIC WAY

Muslim World News

Christian Convert Released After Six Years

Uzbekistan

Uzbek authorities have released a Christian convert six years into his 10-year jail sentence. On Nov. 8, 2016, Tohar Haydarov, 33, was released on parole after serving six years and 10 months of his prison term. Haydarov has returned to his home in Gulistan, eastern Uzbekistan.

“God heard the prayers of many Christians,” his fellow Baptists told the Oslo-based *Forum 18 News Service*. “We are thankful to everybody who prayed for him and sent letters to him while in prison.”

The former Soviet republic is officially secular, but human rights organizations say the state severely restricts religious freedom and freedom of expression, especially of members of religious organisations not affiliated to state-controlled Islamic or Russian Orthodox institutions.

Haydarov was found guilty in March 2010 of drugs charges, which local Baptists insist were fabricated. According to the charity Release International, his arrest followed a request by some of his relatives that local police help them to force Haydarov to return to Islam.

The day after his trial on March 4, 2010, Haydarov’s father was found dead and, according to the official findings, died as a result of accidental electrocution, the EA Foundation reported.

A spokesman for the Council of Baptist Churches told *Forum 18* that Haydarov’s release did not signal a change in government policy towards Protestants. He said the “attitude to Christians in Uzbekistan is as before. Therefore it is possible that Tohar will encounter problems. We continue praying for Tohar.” – *World Watch Monitor*

Terrorist Cell in Minnesota

United States

In sentencing nine young Somali-Minnesotans on terror conspiracy charges in mid-November 2016, U.S. District Judge Michael Davis closed a chapter in the federal government’s long, extraordinary investigation of ISIL recruitment in Minnesota.

But the full story is far from over. In nine hearings over three days before a courtroom packed with the families of the young men who sought to give their lives to ISIL, Davis repeatedly underlined a clear message: There is a terrorist cell in Minneapolis and it is still alive today.

Each day, Davis sought to extract acknowledgment from the young men that they were “terrorists,” and left no doubt as to his thoughts on whether they were simply misguided youths. “Everyone talks about Brussels or Paris having cells,” Davis said one day, then, raising his voice: “We have a cell here in Minneapolis.”

Saying the Minnesota public had “danced around” the issue, Davis described the cell’s size as being between nine to 20, including those sentenced and others killed abroad. Minneapolis has been home to the nation’s largest ongoing FBI investigation into terrorism recruitment for most of a decade, centered on the city’s Somali-American population. The probe began with the departures of roughly two dozen men and women who returned to Somalia to join the terror group Al-Shabab.

It expanded when a group of young Somali-American co-conspirators trained their sights on Syria to join the cause of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) beginning in early 2014. – *Star Tribune*

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lowing percentages reflect what American Muslims believe to be the most important problems they encounter:

- 19% discrimination/racism/prejudice
- 15% being viewed as terrorist
- 14% ignorance about Islam
- 12% stereotyping
- 7% negative media portrayals
- 6% not treated fairly/harassment
- 5% religious cultural problems
- 3% war/U.S. foreign policy
- 3% radical Islam/extremists
- 2% hatred/fear/distrust of Muslims
- 2% jobs/financial problems
- 1% lack of representation/not involved in community^{viii}

Although I believe there is some validity in the concerns Muslims are expressing about their perceptions of societal problems in America, an additional question is merited. “Are some of the difficulties Muslims in America encounter self-inflicted?” Perhaps not by action or lack of action, but solely because of what they believe. For instance, 86% of Muslims in America say the Quran is the word of Allah and 50% believe it should be read literally word for word.^{ix} In addition, 26% of Muslims in America believe they should remain distinct from the larger American society.^x And 8% of Muslims surveyed in America believe suicide bombings of civilian targets to defend Islam to be justified. That number increases to 15% for Muslims younger than 30.^{xi} In addition to these beliefs on terrorism, many Muslims in America desire *sharia* – traditional Islamic law – to be recognized as their official law. Couple this with *dawah*, the proselytizing or preaching of Islam, which sometimes includes radical teachings, and it becomes apparent that many Muslims in America have helped to create their own environment. These beliefs and practices not only hinder integration, but they also promote many of the stigmas that Muslims list as being their problems.

A major challenge encountered by the Christian is to not be part of the problem, but offer the Savior.

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2014 asked Americans to rate members of eight religious groups on a “feeling thermometer” from 0 to 100, where 0 reflects the coldest, most negative possible rating and 100 the warmest, most positive rating.

Overall, Americans rated Muslims rather coolly – an average of 40, which was comparable to the average rating they gave atheists (41).^{xii}

Too often Christians have allowed their “environment” to dictate their response; thus, we may reflect an unbiblical attitude. Our response cannot be one of fear, apathy,



or “coldness.” We must realize and never forget that Muslims have not accepted Jesus as the one and only Savior, and therefore remain spiritually lost!

Most Muslims in America are “born into the faith” of their ancestors. Their religious identity as Muslims has an enormous impact upon their cultural environment. Christians engaging Muslims in America will not only experience those of a different faith, but a culture intertwined with their beliefs. Islam permeates everything: family relationships,

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food, education, business, recreation, and morals/values. Akbar Ahmed states, “The problem of accommodating Muslims in American society poses a challenge to American identity itself. With their different appearance, different religion, different values, Muslims create a complexity for mainstream Americans.”^{xiii} “Yet nearly two-thirds of Americans say they have little or no knowledge of Islam.”^{xiv} The



two identified challenges – attitude and knowledge – are areas that Christians can change.

So where do Christians begin in engaging Muslims, whether first or second-generation? We start with serious intercession for Muslims, especially those whom we want the Lord to impact through our interaction. Second, we pray for Christ-like compassion to fill our lives – *Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said*

to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:36-38 NASB

Being filled with our Lord’s compassion will enable us to effectively love our Muslim neighbors! Remember Jesus’ words, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*” Matthew 5:43-45 NASB

The next step is to educate oneself by using materials specifically designed for Christians to engage Muslims. Learning many of the cultural nuances about Muslims will help you reap benefits in building relationships and increase the effectiveness of the message you share. I encourage you to go to the website <http://reachingmuslimpeoples.com/>. Click on the Resources tab and peruse the publications that are available. Another excellent website is <http://answering-islam.org/>. Click on the *Why They Converted* tab for insights and inspiration.

It should disturb followers of Christ when a 2011 survey revealed only about half (48%) of Muslims in America say all or most of their close friends are Muslims.^{xv} This means a large number of Muslims in America have friends outside of the Islamic faith! Perhaps many of their friends are not Christians. On the other hand, it surely means that many Muslims do have Christian friends. Are we taking these friendship opportunities to be “salt and light”?

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:13-16 NASB

An important step we must take is connecting with them! When we encounter a Muslim, on the street, at work or in a store, we should show ourselves to be friendly.

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Say “Hello.” Don’t treat the Muslim you encounter as a number or statistic, but as someone you genuinely care about. Volunteer to help first-generation Muslims learn English. Encourage Christians within your sphere of influence to become involved in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes or citizenship classes offered to Muslims.

And if you are aware of Christians from a Muslim background in your community, reach out to them by practicing Ephesians 2:19 – “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.*” NASB. If you are attending school, welcome encounters with Muslims in order to develop friendships. As your friendship grows, always be looking for opportunities to share your faith. Over time, with prayer and preparation, invite your Muslim friend to church (youth activities) or in the case of college age, campus ministries such as Chi Alpha.

Finally, with many years of experience among first and second-generation Muslims, including many born-again Muslim background followers of Jesus, I have seen one of the most powerful evangelistic tools repeatedly ignored – that being our personal testimony. It is the story of who we are and what we have become in Christ. It is the story of

our ongoing walk with the Lord. It is what we know best. Sharing your faith is just that – your personal testimony. You have something, share it! Many questions have and will continue to be asked regarding Muslims in America. Fortunately we have the answer... His name is Jesus.

ⁱfoxnews.com/transcript/2016/06/14/trump-what-happened-in-orlando-is-disgrace-time-for-obama-to-face-problem/

ⁱⁱspiegel.de/international/europe/erdogan-urges-turks-not-to-assimilate-you-are-part-of-germany-but-also-part-of-our-great-turkey-a-748070.html

ⁱⁱⁱbreitbart.com/big-government/2015/12/28/century-donald-trump-churchill-warned-no-stronger-retrograde-force-exists-world-islam/

^{iv}americamagazine.org/issue/785/article/americas-muslims

^vpewresearch.org/2007/05/22/muslim-americans-middle-class-and-mostly-mainstream/

^{vi}Ibid.

^{vii}pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/

^{viii}pewresearch.org/2007/05/22/muslim-americans-middle-class-and-mostly-mainstream/

^{ix}Ibid.

^xIbid.

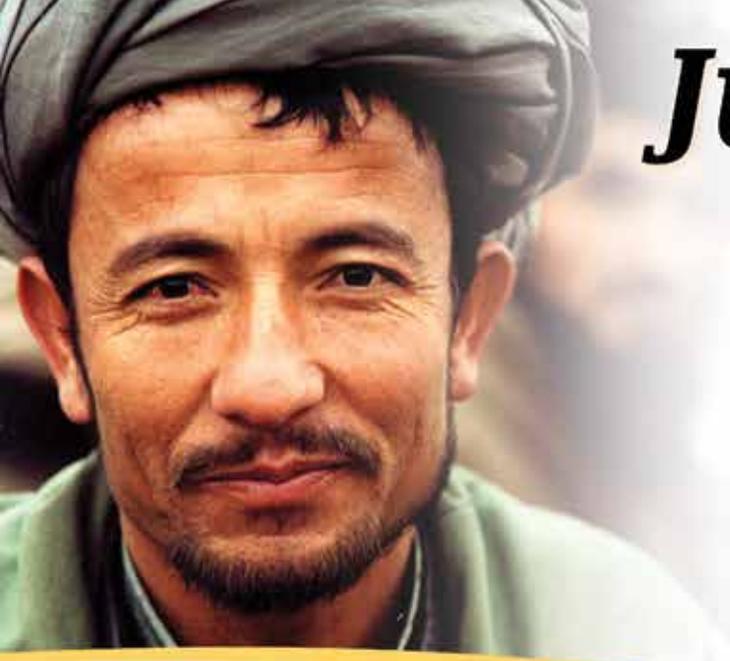
^{xi}Ibid.

^{xii}pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/

^{xiii}Ahmed, Akbar. *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam*, p. 14.

^{xiv}americamagazine.org/issue/785/article/americas-muslims

^{xv}people-press.org/2011/08/30/section-3-identity-assimilation-and-community/



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Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, Jan. 6, 2017. Please pray for

*...Muslims and Christians in the city of Aleppo, once Syria's commercial capital, now damaged beyond recognition.
...more Arabic-speaking Christians in Europe who can minister to recently-arrived Muslim Arab refugees.
...Pastor Rustam (pseudonym), a convert from Islam in a Central Asian country. His church has been closed due to its outreach to Muslims.*

Friday, Jan. 13, 2017. Please pray for

*...the West African state of Gambia. In 2015 it was declared by its president to be an Islamic state. Of its 2 million people, 88% are Muslim.
...Bangladesh, home to the fourth largest Muslim population in the world. Of its 170 million people, 90% are Muslims.
...the distribution of Scripture in Muslim languages. Where the Word of the Lord goes forth, it brings life.*

Friday, Jan. 20, 2017. Please pray for

*...Iranian Farsi-speaking Christian converts from Islam who have offered their gifts of songwriting and poetry composing to Jesus. Their anointed compositions have drawn many Muslim Iranians to Christ.
...the country of Chad. Of its 8 million African people, 62% are Muslims.
...church planting teams in the Middle East, that they will acquire language skills and cultural understanding.*

Friday, Jan. 27, 2017. Please pray for

*...Arabic evangelism websites. Pray that downloadable material will be widely distributed.
...Cameroon, Africa, where Islamist militants are targeting Christians and moderate Muslims. Of its 24 million people, 6 million are Muslims.
...Saudi Christians, who could potentially face execution because of their apostasy from Islam, in line with classical sharia law.*

I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV



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Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, Feb. 3, 2017. Please pray for

...*Khadija (pseudonym)*, a convert from Islam in Uganda. Family persecution has forced her into hiding.

...*the country of Turkey*. Christians feel greater tension following a coup attempt in July 2016. Of its 79 million people, 96.5% are Muslims.

...*senior church leaders in Iran*. Many have had to leave the country in the last few years.

Friday, Feb. 10, 2017. Please pray for

...*Turkmenistan*. Of its 5.4 million people, 95% are Muslim. Life is harsh for the few Christians there, and little news comes to the outside world.

...*ongoing gospel broadcasts in five major Indonesian languages*. Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, has 250 million people; 82% are Muslims.

...*international congregations* in restricted-access Muslim countries to be salt and light to local Muslim communities.

Friday, Feb. 17, 2017. Please pray for

...*the Maldives*. Of its 365,000 people, 90% are Muslim. Radical Islam is gaining a strong influence among youths in the Maldives.

...*ministries in Dearborn, Michigan*, who are teaching English to recently-arrived Syrian and Iraqi Muslims.

...*Aisha (pseudonym)*, in an Arab Gulf country. Since becoming a follower of Jesus, Aisha's family severely restricts her movement outside the home.

Friday, Feb. 24, 2017. Please pray for

...*Equipping classes for sharing the gospel with Muslims* to be conducted in the country of Armenia, Feb. 27-Mar. 3.

...*Saudi and Iraqi students studying in Malaysia*; many have received New Testaments and express interest in Jesus.

...*Algerian believer Yahya (pseudonym)*, who faces a prison sentence for blasphemy against Islam – after posting about Jesus on his Facebook account.