



## URI TOOL KIT

### RESPONSES TO HOSTILITY AGAINST FAITH COMMUNITIES

#### Ideas for Individuals and Interfaith Groups to Act in Solidarity

*While hostility exists against diverse faith groups around the world, this tool kit is provided to counter the current rising hostility against Muslims and to offer ideas for positive change.*

*It was inspired by a tool kit developed by CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) in the US. Some ideas were adapted and new guidance suggested for interfaith audiences. Direct links to the CAIR tool kit are provided. URI is grateful to CAIR for permission to include and adapt their work for this use.*

*Because Eid, the holy day that ends Ramadan, falls on or near September 11 this year, this is an opportune moment to reach out to Muslim communities and make an effort to transform ignorance and tension into understanding and respect.*

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## I. Overview

This tool kit is an offering from the United Religions Initiative. In the spirit of URI, it offers ideas for people at the grassroots to take positive action in the face of current tensions, especially aimed at Islam and Muslim communities. It is addressed to individuals, faith communities, interfaith groups and Cooperation Circles of URI.

It invites your immediate participation.

Eid, the holy day that officially ends the month of Ramadan falls on September 10 or 11 this year – just a few days away. Because of the rise in anti-Muslim feeling, negative media, and misinformation about Islam - this is an opportune time to create outreach, education and positive change – not only to offset the negativity toward Muslims but also to strengthen the fabric of values and practices that call people all over the world to non-violent response to religious conflict and to cooperation and respect.

We've included grassroots style action ideas: to honor this holy time in the Muslim calendar year; to offer support and solidarity; to help educate people about Islam; and, to help ignite simple but concerted actions that "walk the talk" of interfaith cooperation. While this is a particularly appropriate time to take these actions, we hope communities will use these resources for ongoing outreach to build greater understanding and interfaith cooperation.

Please use the Resource section included at the end to develop further your own programs and ideas. Please feel free to send in your successes to URI and additional resources you would like to see included in this toolkit to [newsdesk@uri.org](mailto:newsdesk@uri.org).

## II. Ideas for Responses by Individuals

- ❖ Reach out to your local Muslim community and find out if it is possible to make a visit. To find your local Muslim mosque or community center in the USA, go to: <http://www.islamicfinder.org/>
- ❖ Send a card with a message of support and friendship to your local Muslim leader or Muslim community center.
- ❖ Fast in solidarity with Muslims during the month of Ramadan. Here is an article written by a non-Muslim who celebrated Ramadan for 30 days: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-baranskiwalker/30-days-before-dawn-a-non\\_b\\_678377.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/donna-baranskiwalker/30-days-before-dawn-a-non_b_678377.html) Write your own blog or op-ed piece based on this experience.
- ❖ Attend a public event hosted by the local Muslim community, such as an Iftar.

- ❖ Submit an opinion editorial to your local newspaper that holds up the shared values of peace, hospitality and service of all the faiths. (See Sample Opinion Editorials, pg. 12, and Wisdom of the Faiths, pg. 18, for passages to share).
- ❖ Contact your local interfaith council to find out what events they are planning that involve the Muslim community so that you can get involved.
- ❖ Ask your local religious leader to speak out against Islamophobia. (See Sample Letter to Religious Leader, pg. 8).
- ❖ Write a hand written note to challenge your local political representatives to speak out against Islamophobia and to hold up the value of religious freedom upon which this nation was founded (See Tips for Writing to Public Officials in Media Resources section, pg. 17).
- ❖ Learn more about Islam. Contact local mosques and ask for suitable source information. Investigate what Muslim education organizations are available locally: [www.islamicfinder.org](http://www.islamicfinder.org). In San Francisco, CA, USA, ING (Islamic Networks Group) provides well-qualified speakers: [www.ing.org](http://www.ing.org).
- ❖ Locate videos to educate yourself and others about Islam. Here is a link to the following Unity Production Films that are recommended by the Council on American-Islamic Relations: <http://www.20000dialogues.org/films.aspx>
  - Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet
  - Cities of Light: The Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain
  - Talking Through Walls
  - On a Wing and a Prayer
  - Allah Made Me Funny

Sign up to host a discussion party for these videos through 20,000 Dialogues at <http://www.20000dialogues.org>. 20,000 Dialogues is a nationwide grassroots interfaith dialogue project using Unity Production Films to spark dialogue and discussion amongst people of different faiths with the goal of building peace through greater understanding. For any questions and to help with organizing your dialogue, please contact Project Director Daniel Tutt at 202.262.1304 or at [Daniel@upf.tv](mailto:Daniel@upf.tv)

In addition, here is an uplifting, succinct one-minute video from a diverse section of American society with several people describing some of the basic tenets of Islam. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dlmb7jvSbaw>

And here is a video about a young American named Muhammed who humorously sets the record straight on a number of counts, dispelling popular myths about Islam, and sharing his exuberance for life and for his faith. <http://bit.ly/bz9yfW>

- ❖ Include the need for mutual respect among religions in the world in your prayers and meditations and create vision of a positive future of harmony among religions and spiritual communities.
- ❖ Use your social media networks, e.g. Facebook and Twitter, to share your perspectives on why it is important to speak up against ignorance and hostility against Muslims and/or other minorities in your country. You can also share links to insightful editorials and blog posts on the subject to initiate a respectful discussion.

### III. Ideas for Responses by Faith Communities, Interfaith Councils and Cooperation Circles

#### PRAYER – REFLECTION:

In your own manner and using your own form of prayer, bring attention to these current tensions and seek the highest good to arise. Locate prayers or poems by Muslim writers and prayers that call for acceptance among people of all faith backgrounds – include these writings in group or congregational prayers as opportunities arise.

#### REACH OUT TO MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY:

- ❖ **Joint Letter:** Write a joint letter of respect and support to Muslim communities in your area. Locate the mosques and names of Imams. Request that your letter be posted at the mosque. Letter might include: your introduction, words of appreciation for Ramadan which brings more prayer and service and charity to the world; sorrow for the rise of hostility and misunderstanding against Muslims; and a statement of support and commitment to stand in solidarity with the Muslim community should the need arise.
- ❖ **Send Flowers:** A bouquet of flowers might be sent with a simple message. We honor and celebrate EID with your community. We are grateful for your presence in our community.
- ❖ **Neighborly visit:** Organize a small group from your congregation or council to visit one or two mosques. Contact the Imam and inquire if your group might visit and spend an hour learning about the mosque and meeting with the Imam and other community leaders. Of course, offer a reciprocal invitation to invite the Imam and leaders to your place of worship to meeting place.
- ❖ **Solidarity Fasting:** A group might decide to observe one day of Ramadan Fast. People who fast would plan to come together at sunset to share a meal together. They can

discuss their experiences and write a joint letter to Muslim leaders and neighbors and share meaningful insights they learned from their Ramadan Fast experience.

## HOST A GATHERING:

❖ Hospitality Dinners: Host dinners that celebrate religious and ethnic diversity. Ask your group (faith community or interfaith group) to offer names of friends from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Invite several friends (or families) to host a table for 8-10. Each family is responsible to prepare a simple meal (one of their cultural favorites). Prepare a guest list...perhaps from different sectors of the community: faith leaders, legislators, police officers, firefighters, teachers or school administrators. Each host table can invite a few of their friends. When guests arrive, establish a maximum mix of diversity at the tables. People who don't know each other are encouraged to sit together. Simple conversation starters: self-introductions; sharing a story or a phrase from your faith tradition that each person finds meaningful; sharing interests in the food – how it is a source of meaning and celebration in this culture; sharing stories when each person first moved to this community and why you like it, etc.

❖ Dialogue and Discussion: Call special meditation and dialogue meetings or replace an existing agenda in a Bible study, Torah study or other meeting with a special interfaith opportunity. Ideas for these gatherings include:

1. Meditation and Discussion: Choose three quotations from different scriptures or selected writings that speak eloquently of tolerance and acceptance among faith traditions. Sit in circle, go around the circle asking persons to read – repeat each reading twice. After each selection, hold a period (perhaps a few minutes) of silent meditation. Invite conversation and reflection on these passages.

2. Speaker or Panel: Locate a well-informed speaker on Islam to educate your group or congregation about the basic tenets of Islam. Leave lots of time for questions and answers.

Invite a diverse panel of perhaps a man and a woman, younger and older, native-born and immigrant persons to provide a short presentation of their experience of being Muslim. Leave lots of time for questions and answers.

3. Video and Discussion: Locate exceptional videos about Islam or current perspectives and issues involving Muslims. Suggested list of films can be found on pg. 4 of this toolkit.

Facilitate a discussion – what parts of the video(s) moved you? What parts taught you something you didn't know? What parts raised questions for you? What parts inspired you to change something in your life?

4. Appreciative Interviews: Create paired conversations in your gathering to focus attention on the positive achievements and experiences of Islam, interfaith cooperation and relationship. Set up interviews asking each pair to interview one another. Questions might be:

*As the world gets smaller most of us experience encounters with people from different faith backgrounds. Can you share a story of an interfaith encounter that was especially memorable or meaningful? Where there was a genuine feeling of respect and friendship?*

*As an outsider to Islam, what actions or practices or holy words from this religion are meaningful for you? Share your story about how you came to learn about this. For followers of Islam, what practices or beliefs of another religion have particular meaning for you?*

*Imagine ways that interfaith cooperation can create a better world. Describe a few experiences of interfaith cooperation that impressed you. Imagine what might happen in your own community when people of different faith traditions worked together – embracing and celebrating their diversity... Share your visions.*

For more detailed information about the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry, please see: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

## ORGANIZE AN INTERFAITH PROJECT:

URI interfaith groups around the world build bridges of understanding daily –these bridges are often built by doing projects that meet needs in the community or give support. Some ideas for projects include:

- ❖ Give a donation: Muslims are required to offer a financial donation during Ramadan to alleviate poverty, need and hardship. Take up a collection in your community or group. Identify organizations and services that receive Ramadan donations from Muslim communities. Choose one of these groups and send your donation in support of the charitable giving practice in Ramadan.
- ❖ Letters of Support: Contact CAIR ([www.cair.com](http://www.cair.com))- Council on American-Islamic Relations) or a similar organization in your city or country. Explain that your group would like to write notes of support and sympathy to families and individuals who have been victims of religiously motivated violence. Ask CAIR (or similar organization) if they could serve as liaison and deliver your notes to these individuals or communities.
- ❖ Letter writing to media and public officials: mobilize a letter writing campaign to media companies who, in your group's judgment, are part of the problem because they stir up misinformation and hostility against Muslims and other minorities. Work with other

faith communities to write joint letters urging cessation of broadcasting hate over radio, television and internet. Or focus your campaign on a local elected representative who could amplify the need for unity and healing rather than division and fear. (See Media Resources for sample letters).

- ❖ Integrate actions with the International Day of Peace, Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>: If your group is already participating in the UN International Day of Peace, consider integrating words and actions that bring positive attention to Islam and Muslim members of your community.

## RELIGIOUS LEADERS – CREATE AWARENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

If you are a leader of a congregation or of a religious or spiritual organization of any kind, reach out to your membership to encourage their participation and attention to upholding respect among religions and religious freedom.

Here is a sample letter for addressing these issues within your faith community, written by Episcopal priest Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs, Executive Director of United Religions Initiative:

Dear ... ,

We are blessed to live in a country founded on the value of freedom of religion.

At the same time we benefit from the freedom to worship as we please, we must not turn a blind eye when others find their freedom to worship placed in jeopardy.

Sadly, in the United States today many of our Muslim neighbors find their freedom to worship threatened and themselves the targets of hate speech and violence.

Many times since the tragedy of September 11, 2001 there has been an outcry: Where are the voices of moderate Muslims? One answer to that question is that these voices are speaking out but not heard over the daily news of violence around the world and the thinly veiled hatred of Islamophobia.

In these turbulent times, when the freedom and security of our Muslim neighbors is threatened, it is appropriate to ask: Where are the voices of well meaning people of all faiths speaking out against what is hateful and reaching out the hand of friendship to our neighbors?

In these turbulent times, it is helpful to listen to these words of Martin Luther King from the Birmingham jail written in other turbulent times nearly 50 years ago:

*We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.... We will have to*

*repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.*

These are also times when we might seek to understand what lies beneath these words written by Imam Faisal Rauf in his book What's Right With Islam:

*What's right with America and what's right with Islam have a lot in common. At their highest levels, both worldviews reflect an enlightened recognition that all of humankind shares a common Creator – that we are, indeed, brothers and sisters.... To hold high the lamp of freedom, hope, and friendship is America's greatest gifts to the world – and its sacred responsibility.*

Yes, these are challenging, threatening times. It is up to us to transform challenge and threat into an opportunity to weave a stronger fabric of community. Standing in the best of our faith, I call us to speak out for freedom of religion as a fundamental right of all Americans and to reach out respectfully to our neighbors of other faiths, especially to our Muslim neighbors, and to begin the joyous and challenging work of weaving.

Faithfully,

## IV. National Day of Unity and Healing 9/11

*\*Included with permission from CAIR, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, from their Teachable Moment toolkit: <http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2010Communitytoolkit.pdf>*

NATIONAL DAY OF UNITY AND HEALING (9/11/2010) – Join A National Effort to Bring Positive Focus to September 11<sup>th</sup>

To honor the memory of the thousands of human beings who were murdered on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, CAIR is designating 9/11/2010 as a National Day of Unity and Healing. This will be a day of opportunity to rebuild broken relationships between all people in the U.S., regardless of religion, race, gender or status.

Across the United States, we hope that houses of worship, churches, synagogues, and mosques will open their doors and greet their neighbors with open minds and hearts. On this day, there will be an opportunity for people of faith to learn about one another's traditions.

In the Quran, God explains that as diverse entities within the community of mankind, we can work towards the greater good for all:

"For, every community faces a direction of its own, of which He is the focal point. Vie with one another in doing good works. Wherever you may be, God will gather you all unto Himself: for, verily, God has the power to do anything." [Quran 2:148]

"Unto every one of you We have appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie], then, with one another in doing good works. Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ." [Quran 5:48]

- Host a scripture reading, at which religious leaders will read passages from their sacred texts, focusing on passages that offer spiritual support for mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue. Make sure to invite the media to this event.
- Hold "National Day of Unity and Healing" open house at which public officials and members of the local community may learn more about Islam and Muslims.
- Call on local religious and political leaders to speak out against growing Islamophobia and in support of diversity and equal rights for all citizens.
- Coordinate a food drive with a local food bank.
- Coordinate a blood drive through a local hospital or the American Red Cross.

## V. Media Resources

### A. Model Press Release for a National Day of Unity and Healing, 9/11

*\*Adapted with permission from CAIR, the Council on American Islamic Relations, from their Teachable Moment toolkit: <http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2010Communitytoolkit.pdf>*

Model Press Release Addressing "National Day of Unity and Healing":

You can modify the text below and/or create your own press release using this model to publicize your event. Send it to local media outlets to announce your event. Just fill in the words in [BRACKETS] with your local information.

[Insert Your Local Organization Name and Address Here]

- MEDIA ADVISORY -

[NAME OF AREA] Interfaith Coalition Responds to Hostility toward Muslims with 'National Day of Unity' and an Interfaith Public Meeting

([CITY AND STATE], [DATE]) – On [DATE], the [NAME OF AREA] interfaith community will hold a public meeting as part of a call issued by the Council on American-Islamic Relations for a "National Day of Unity and Healing" as a proactive response to the international outrage over a Florida church's plan to burn Qurans, Islam's revealed text, on September 11, 2010 and other incidences of hostility toward Muslims.

WHAT: National Day of Unity and Healing Interfaith Meeting

WHEN: [TIME AND DATE]

WHERE: LOCATION, ADDRESS]

CONTACT: [CONTACT NAMES, NUMBERS, E-MAILS]

At the interfaith public meeting, public officials and members of the local community will learn more about Islam from local representatives of the Muslim community and hear from other faith leaders about the importance to stand together with the Muslim community at this time.

"[QUOTE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL UNITY, HEALING and mutual understanding],  
said [NAME AND TITLE OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE].

[LAST NAME] said the public meeting is in support of a nationwide effort by the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

There are some [NUMBER] of Muslims in the [LOCATION] area. The interfaith coalition includes members of [NAMES OF FAITHS REPRESENTED] faiths.

- END -

## B. Talking Points for Responding to Points of Controversy – from CAIR, the Council on American-Islamic Relations

### TALKING POINTS

Below are talking points on some current major issues that you or your institution's spokespersons may find helpful when talking about these issues. We encourage people from other countries to seek "talking points" from Muslim educators about pertinent issues in your local communities.

#### Mosque Controversy

- It is our chance as Americans to come together to reject bigotry and the politics of paranoia. The whole world is watching this debate and rooting for the America that they have always admired: The America of freedom and tolerance.
- The organizers of the lower Manhattan Islamic cultural center and all American Muslims are very sensitive to the genuine feeling of many fellow Americans about this project and its location. We know that there is a lot of confusion about Islam and how the terrorists have falsely claimed actions in its name. We know that we have to do more to explain our religion to our neighbors and friends. However, not building a Muslim center near Ground Zero on the basis of not opening the 9-11 wounds would mean that Islam and Muslims were responsible for the terrorist attacks. And that is absolutely wrong.

#### Eid al-Fitr Date Falling Near 9/11

- Islam uses a lunar calendar, which changes approximately 11 days each year in relation to the calendar used here in America.
- In 2000 and 2001, Eid al-Fitr arrived near the Christmas holiday. This was seen as an opportunity to build interfaith relations. In 2003, Eid-al-Fitr was near Thanksgiving and many conversations turned toward things all Americans have to give thanks for. It would be better to follow those examples than give in to the politics of fear.

- It is a shame that some are using the coincidence of Eid-al-Fitr, a yearly Muslim holiday, and the 9/11 anniversary falling near each other as a way to instill division and fear.

#### “Burn a Koran Day”

- While we are saddened by this church’s shock tactics, we plan to meet their hate with good deeds. We support CAIR’s initiative to distribute Quran’s to political leaders and policy makers around the country. Understanding, not book burning, is they way forward.
- We appreciate that Christian groups like the National Association of Evangelicals have opposed this action. NAE cited the Bible as saying: “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

#### National Day of Unity and Healing

- America is not a nation built for one race, ethnic group of faith. It is built on a set of ideals. This day is intended to honor two of them, tolerance and inclusion, which seem to need highlighting given the unusually divisive tone of our recent national conversation. (An example is the angry opposition to the Islamic cultural center in lower Manhattan.)

## C. Sample Opinion Editorials

Please use these sample opinion editorials to write one of your own or as a basis for discussion and dialogue:

1. Op-Ed by Dr. Eboo Patel, Executive Director of Interfaith Youth Core, [www.ifyc.org](http://www.ifyc.org), published in USA Today, re-printed with permission from the author
2. Op-Ed by Dr. William Leshner, Chair emeritus for the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, [www.cpwr.org](http://www.cpwr.org)

### Division vs. Unity

By Eboo Patel

In the late 19th century, the forces of religious division in America targeted Catholics. Josiah Strong's book *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis* referred to Catholics as "the alien Romanist" who swore allegiance to the pope instead of the country and rejected core American values such as freedom of the press and religious liberty. The book remained in print for decades and sold nearly 200,000 copies.

In the early 20th century, the forces of religious division in America targeted Jews. Harvard scholar Diana Eck writes, "In the 1930s and early 1940s, hate organizations grew and conspiracy theories about Jewish influence spread like wildfire." In 1939, Father Charles Coughlin's Christian Front filled Madison Square Garden with 20,000 people at a vitriolic anti-Semitic event complete with banners that read: "Stop Jewish Domination of America."

Today, the forces of religious division demonize Muslims. Tennessee's lieutenant governor, Ron Ramsey, says Islam – a faith of 1.5 billion people founded 1,400 years ago – could well be a cult and not a religion. Therefore, he continues, constitutional religious liberty guarantees might not apply to Muslims.

Mosques and Muslim community centers are being vociferously opposed from New York to Tennessee to California. A church in Florida proudly posts a roadside sign that reads, "Islam is of the Devil," and is planning an event called "International Burn a Quran Day."

### **The view of Islam**

The same arguments marshaled against Jews and Catholics in previous eras are being advanced against Muslims today. You've heard the charges:

- The tenets of Islam are opposed to the values of America.
- Muslims have undue influence with American elites.
- Muslim integration into America is a veiled Islamic invasion.

It is easy to imagine Strong's book written today with "the alien Islamic" replacing "the alien Romanist," or a Father Coughlin-style rally at Madison Square Garden with tens of thousands chanting, "Muslim go home."

The forces of religious division have always been alive in America, but they have never defined America. The core principle of our nation is that a diverse people can live together in unity. Our motto, placed on the seal of the United States in 1776 when we became a country, is E Pluribus Unum: out of many, one.

Our Founding Fathers fought for this ethic. Addressing the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, R.I., as America's first president, George Washington expressed this hope: "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the goodwill of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid."

But unity in America is not to be taken for granted. Every generation must both preserve and protect our nation's core principle, and extend and expand it.

What we need today is a force advancing this value of unity and returning the voices of division to the margins. I think this force is going to come from an interfaith movement.

Here's what that could look like: Civic groups could organize interfaith service projects, such as those fostered by Habitat for Humanity, bringing a community's Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Humanists and others together for an afternoon of volunteering and interfaith dialogue.

Pastors, rabbis and imams could preach about how the teachings of their respective religions inspire cooperation with those of different faiths. These faith leaders could then hold up things they admire about other faith groups.

### **'Any religious persuasion'**

Universities could offer courses that emphasize the history of cooperation between religious groups instead of focusing just on the stories of conflict.

Political leaders could give speeches about shared values such as mercy, compassion and hospitality that serve as common ground between religions.

Ben Franklin— like his fellow Founders Washington, Madison and Jefferson — would recognize such a nation. Franklin helped set in motion our traditions of openness, unity and cooperation. In the 18th century, he helped build a public hall in Philadelphia with the express purpose that it embody the true American spirit. He said that the hall exists "expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people at Philadelphia ... so that even if the mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammadanism (Islam) to us, he would find a pulpit at his service."

The forces of religious division targeting Muslims seek to take America off course. We must not forfeit the territory to them. In America, we don't discriminate against people of any religion. In America, we will not be divided by faith. In America, everyone has a place. In America, we are better together.

*Eboo Patel is the founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core and was a member of President Obama's Inaugural Faith Council.*

### [CPWR Chair Emeritus Rev. Bill Leshner Weighs In on Park 51 Debate](#)

FROM FIRE STORM TO ILLUMINATION:

#### **Interreligious Reflections on the New York Center and Mosque Project**

By William Leshner, Chair Emeritus, Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions

What some in the media have referred to as "a fire storm" over the mosque debate in lower Manhattan is turning out to be a catalyst to launch a much needed national discussion (and tutorial) on Muslims in America.

Since this discussion was intensified by the exaggerated rhetoric and distorted claims of Pamela Geller, a conservative blogger in her post on May 6, a consensus seems to be forming among constitutionally committed citizens across the political spectrum. Fair-minded people are agreeing that the Imam and his wife in charge of the mosque project, Feisal Abdul Rauf, Daisy Khan and their supporters, have every right to expand their center and include a new worship space on the site. They have worked from and worshipped in this place for many years, two blocks from the World Trade Center disaster. Even though current polls claim that 7 out of 10 Americans oppose the project, opponents can hardly argue that the project planners do not have a constitutional right to carry out their vision. As one letter to the NY Times editor put it, "As a legal matter, there is nothing to debate. If a church or synagogue could be constructed on this site, so may a mosque. Period. The first amendment means at least that."

The location of the proposed Islamic Center touches the raw nerve that has elicited often shrill claims ranging from insensitivity to the families of the 9/11 victims and desecration of hallowed ground to an international Islamic conspiracy to subvert the nation. Given the fact that the vast majority of Americans know little of Islam and know almost nothing of the history and intentions of the center planners in lower Manhattan, it is not surprising that the barrage of misinformation that initiated and continues to stoke the current national discussion has filled this vacuum and created the sharp negative and often heated responses.

But now, as the national discussion continues, one might cautiously hope, even anticipate, that the time is right for a nation-wide learning process to unfold. This could become a time for Americans of fairness and goodwill to take the time to listen and to learn from people in the interreligious community and from Muslims themselves about the importance, the variety, and the beauty of this second largest religion in the world. And to hear as well, about the healing potential for having a thoroughly American expression of Islam close to the site of Ground Zero.

The Interreligious Movement in the US and around the world has been building bridges of understanding among religious communities, including Islam, for the last few decades. Many religious people in the US are affiliated with local interreligious councils or with national and international organizations like United Religions Initiative (URI) or Religions for Peace (RFP) or have participated in one of the four modern Parliaments of the World's Religions (PWR) with which I am affiliated. These people have led the way in this historic movement to develop knowledge, understanding, and respect for religious and spiritual communities of the world, many of whom have growing numbers of adherents in our towns and cities, states and nation.

People affiliated with the growing interreligious movement know about the great diversity that exists within Islam, not unlike the wide spectrum of beliefs, traditions and behaviors among different sectors in the Christian and Jewish communities. They know what William Dalrymple wrote about in an illuminating Op-Ed piece in the New York Times entitled, "The Muslims in the Middle," that Islam is not a monolithic religion. Rather it is as complex as Christianity and Judaism, with as many, perhaps more divisions, sects and traditions, some in opposition to others, as is true of every major religious group. Dalrymple helpfully teaches in his article how "Feisal Abdul Rauf...is one of America's leading thinkers of Sufism, the mystical form of Islam which in terms of goals and outlook couldn't be farther from the violent Wahabism of the jihadists. His videos and sermons preach love, the remembrance of God and reconciliation.....But in the eyes of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, he is an infidel-loving, grave-worshipping apostate..."

Members of the interfaith movement are also leading the resistance to the resisters and need to do so more and more. In another New York Times article describing protests against mosques in several communities around the country, Laurie Goodstein focuses on Temecula, Ca. There she writes: "In late June ...members of a local Tea Party group took dogs and picket signs to Friday prayers at a mosque that is seeking to build a new worship center on a vacant lot nearby." She goes on to say that an estimated 20 - 30 people turned out to protest the mosque. But then Ms. Goodstein states what many of us think is the real story in Temecula, "that the protesters were outnumbered by at least 75 supporters" who affirm the right of the Muslim congregation in Temecula to expand their mosque. Something good is happening in Temecula when, less than a decade after 9/11, local citizens know and act on the difference between their mainstream Muslim neighbors and the terrorists whose actions violated the most basic tenants of Islam. It's too bad that the NY Times headlined the Goodstein article, "Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Resistance" and missed the positive thrust of the Temecula story.

Speaking from the experience of the Parliament of the World's Religions, the 2004 Parliament in Barcelona, Spain focused major attention on the issue of Religiously Motivated and Experienced Violence. After several days of intense workshop discussions, participants from across the interreligious spectrum, agreed that the minimum responsibility of religious communities is to come to the aid of any religious community whose house of worship is the target of an attack, vandalism, threat or destruction.

The recent Parliament in Melbourne, Australia in 2009 featured a strong focus on Islam. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf himself was a major presenter leading or participating in six interreligious programs with the following titles: "Applying Islamic Principles for a Just and Sustainable World"; "Sacred Envy Panel:

Exploring What We Love about Our Own Faith, What We Admire in Others and What Challenges Us in Both"; "Purifying the Heart and Soul through Remembrance of Allah"; "Dhikr As An Islamic Devotional Act for Inner Peace"; "How Islam Deals with Social Justice, Gender Justice and Religious Diversity"; and "Islam and the West: Creating an Accord of Civilizations." How much could such a teacher of Islam help to bridge the gulf of misunderstanding about this great faith tradition by continuing his long and much admired ministry in lower Manhattan where he has built an international reputation for promulgating a modern version of Islam?

So, while some call it a "fire storm" and do their best to make it so, there are other voices that seem to be gaining strength. Among the shouting and the uninformed outrage that sometimes seems ubiquitous, I sense that responsible media outlets and people in the interreligious movement are grasping the significance of this moment and are helping to seed the discussion with historical facts, accurate information and a commitment to understanding and respect. If this trend continues we will all learn important things about ourselves and about the most recent global religious tradition to enter the mainstream of American life.

## D. Sample Letter to the Editor in Response to Negative Portrayal of Islam

Date:

Reference: (name of article\program, etc)

Dear (try to include name instead of Sir\Madam),

I am writing you with regards to your coverage of the (recent incident of controversy involving Muslims) issue in your (news paper/program/etc). You appear to be continuously promoting one-sided view of conflicts/problems (involving Muslims).

With regards to the (mosque controversy, Quran burning incident, etc.) you seem to be promoting a one-sided view instead of being critical and questioning the accusers' claims and documents. A large percentage of the general public rely heavily on the press for their opinions, so please consider your public responsibility when examining the truth in a claim instead of promoting (official or sectarian Interest/Agendas, etc.).

Whenever there is a (negative incident involving Muslims) we see a race by local and national media to condemn that action and wide media coverage of the tragic event. On the other hand, there is very little positive media coverage by your (newspaper/program/etc) of Muslims as average citizens who are making a positive contribution in society. We would like to see them portrayed more fairly - as sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, human beings with lives to lead, dreams to realize.

Please honor the trust that we the [your area] public have in your (news paper/program/etc) and give us a balanced and decent coverage of all these affairs concerning and involving Muslim citizens.

A reply giving your response to this comment will be very much appreciated.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

(Your name)

(Your address)

(You may add your daytime phone number. This is not published)

## E. Tips for Writing to Public Officials (for US citizens)

From <http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/uscongress/a/letterscongress.htm>

### **Think Locally**

It's usually best to send letters to the representative from your local Congressional District or the senators from your state. Your vote helps elect them – or not – and that fact alone carries a lot of weight. It also helps personalize your letter. Sending the same "cookie-cutter" message to every member of Congress may grab attention but rarely much consideration.

### **Keep it Simple**

Your letter should address a single topic or issue. Typed, one-page letters are best. Many PACs ([Political Action Committees](#)) recommend a three-paragraph letter structured like this:

1. Say why you are writing and who you are. List your "credentials." (If you want a response, you must include your name and address, even when using email.)
2. Provide more detail. Be factual not emotional. Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others.
3. Close by requesting the action you want taken: a vote for or against a bill, or change in general policy.

The best letters are courteous, to the point, and include specific supporting examples.

### **Addressing Members of Congress**

To Your Senator:

The Honorable (full name)  
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

To Your Representative:

The Honorable (full name)  
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

### **Finding Their Addresses**

[U.S. Senators \(web sites and mailing addresses\)](#)

[Write Your U.S. Representative](#) (A service of the House that will assist you by identifying your Congressperson in the U.S. House of Representatives and providing contact information.)

## VI. Wisdom from the Faiths on Relating to the “Stranger” and the Value of Hospitality

We have compiled quotations from different religious scriptures and wisdom texts that highlight the shared value in these traditions of showing compassion and hospitality to all human beings. Some suggestions are: to use these texts as a conversation-starter in an interfaith gathering; to include passages in an opinion-editorial to a local newspaper; or to highlight these shared values in writing a letter to your faith community, encouraging members to take action.

### Baha’i

“Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancour. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened.” - *Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 138*

### Buddhism

“Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another. Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings: radiating kindness over the entire world spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths; outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will.” - *From The Buddha’s Words on Loving-Kindness, Metta Sutta*

### Christianity

“And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘What commandment is the foremost of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ‘The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.’ (NAS, Mark 12:28-31)

### Hinduism

“Treat thy mother as a God; as a God treat thou thy father; as a God shalt thou treat thy teacher; thy guests as Gods shalt thou treat.” - *The Taittiriya Upanishad, Book 1, Lesson 11, Translated by Alladi Mahadeva Sastry*

### Humanism

“The world is my country, and to do good my religion.” - *Thomas Paine*

“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.” - *Robert F. Kennedy*

## Indigenous Traditions

"Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The Earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it..." - *Chief Joseph, Nez Perces*

## Islam

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." - *Quran - Yusef Ali translation - Surah al-Hujurat (49:13)*

## Jainism

"Jiva-daya means caring for and sharing with all living beings, tending, protecting and serving them. It entails universal friendliness (maitri), universal forgiveness (kshama) and universal fearlessness (abhaya)." - *Jain Teachings, as compiled by Dr. L. M. Singhvi*

## Judaism

"When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow - in order that Adonai your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment." - *Deuteronomy 24:19-22*

## Sikhism

"Hinduism may not be my faith, and I may not believe in various Hindu traditions like idol worship, caste system, pilgrimages and other rituals, but I will fight for the right of all Hindus and all other peoples of the world to live with honour and to practice their faith according to their own beliefs." - *Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs who gave his life to protect the lives of the Kashmiri Pandits who were Hindus*

## Zoroastrianism

"We pray to God to eradicate all the misery in the world: that understanding triumph over ignorance, that generosity triumph over indifference, that trust triumph over contempt, and that truth triumph over falsehood." - *Zoroastrian Prayer for Peace*

## VII. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Statements of Support – Please follow these links below to view statements of support for the Muslim community from different faith communities.

a. Statement of Support from the National Council of Churches:

*As the observance of Ramadan begins, a call for respect for Muslim neighbors*

<http://www.nccusa.org/news/100811ramadanrespect.html>

b. Statement of Support from the National Association of Evangelicals:

*Press Release: NAE Urges Cancellation of Planned Quran Burning*

<http://www.nae.net/news-and-events/469-press-release-nae-urges-cancellation-of-planned-quran-burning>

2. *Teachable Moment Community Response Toolkit – Guidance for Local Communities to Respond to Challenges & Opposition - Ramadan 2010*, by (CAIR) Council on American-Islamic Relations, <http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/2010Communitytoolkit.pdf>

3. [How to Be a Perfect Stranger - The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook](#), ed. Stuart M. Matlins & Arthur J. Magida

[How to Be a Perfect Stranger - A Guide to Etiquette in Other People's Religious Ceremonies](#) – ed. Arthur J. Magida

4. [20,000 Dialogues Project](#): a nationwide grassroots interfaith dialogue project using Unity Production Films to spark dialogue and discussion amongst people of different faiths with the goal of building peace through greater understanding. For any questions and to help with organizing your dialogue, please contact Project Director Daniel Tutt at 202.262.1304 or at [Daniel@upf.tv](mailto:Daniel@upf.tv) . [www.20000dialogues.org](http://www.20000dialogues.org)

5. [Religious Freedom USA](#) – a website featuring blog posts from a number of different faith leaders, journalists and college students about the importance of protecting the fundamental American value of religious freedom in the United States. [www.religiousfreedomusa.org](http://www.religiousfreedomusa.org)