

URI TOOL KIT

# ACTIONS FOR INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY

An interfaith guide to help individuals and groups counter rising hostility toward Muslims and other religious minorities in North America and beyond.



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This tool kit includes links to websites and is intended to be viewed on a computer with Internet connection. For those reading this as a printed document, the full URLs are included on the last page.

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## OVERVIEW

The tenth anniversary of the 9-11 attacks is a critical time to reach out to our Muslim neighbors. In the spirit of URI, this tool kit is aimed at helping people take positive action to promote religious tolerance in an environment of increasing hostility toward Muslims and other religious communities. The grassroots-style action ideas and resources provide ways to offer support and solidarity; help educate people about Islam and its traditions; and ignite simple but concerted actions that “walk the talk” of interfaith cooperation.

### WE INVITE YOUR PARTICIPATION!

By using the resource section included at the end of the tool kit you can develop your own programs and ideas. We encourage you to send your questions, suggestions and success stories to [newsdesk@uri.org](mailto:newsdesk@uri.org).

## Interfaith Commitment - Join URI

United Religions Initiative (URI) is a grassroots, bridge-building organization that unites people of different faiths and traditions to create an enduring global force for good. We are people of passion and initiative joined in local interfaith communities of action called Cooperation Circles (CCs). The name tells the story: Through more than 500 CCs worldwide, half a million people are working together to transform religious tension into positive, peaceful change, addressing urgent human and environmental needs in their communities and building cultures of peace, justice and healing.

URI invites you and your group or organization to consider joining our global community. To learn more about URI or how to become a Cooperation Circle, or to get on the mailing list, please visit [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org).

## IDEAS FOR ACTIONS BY INDIVIDUALS

**LEARN** more about Islam and share the information with your friends to counteract ignorance by offering accurate information or a positive story. For a starting point, visit [www.changethestory.net](http://www.changethestory.net).

**PRAY FOR OR MEDITATE ON** mutual respect among religions in the world, and create a vision of a positive future of cooperation and harmony.

**REACH OUT** to your local Muslim community. Send a card with a message of support and friendship to a local Muslim leader, Mosque or community center. Find out if it is possible to visit or attend an upcoming event.

### PARTICIPATE

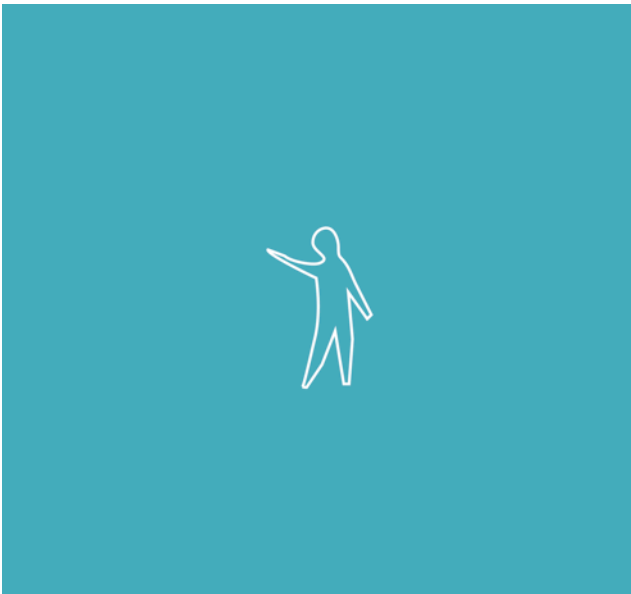
- Attend a public event hosted by your local Muslim community, such as an Iftar.
- Fast in solidarity with Muslims during the month of Ramadan and share your experience with others. Click [here](#) for an article written by a non-Muslim who celebrated Ramadan for 30 days.
- Contact your local interfaith council or [URI Cooperation Circle](#) and get involved in interfaith activities.

### ADVOCATE

- Submit an opinion piece or letter to the editor to your local newspaper highlighting the values of peace, hospitality and service shared by all faiths. (See Resources).
- Ask your local religious leader to speak out for tolerance of other faiths or talk about the religious values of Islam in a sermon or homily.
- Ask your local political representatives to speak out against Islamophobia and to uphold the value of religious freedom. (See Resources for tips).

### SHARE

- Use your social media networks, like Facebook and Twitter, to share your perspectives, activities and links to insightful editorials and blog posts. Initiate respectful online discussions about differences in religious viewpoints.
- Host an interfaith film screening and discussion party through [20,000 Dialogues](#), a grassroots interfaith dialogue project that uses film to spark dialogue and discussion among people of different faiths.
- Organize a film screening about Islam and religious tolerance. For suggestions, visit [Change the Story](#) or [Prepare New York](#).



## IDEAS FOR ACTION BY FAITH COMMUNITIES, INTERFAITH COUNCILS AND URI COOPERATION CIRCLES

### PRAYER/REFLECTION

Bring attention to the issue of intolerance toward Muslims and other religious communities in your group or congregational prayers. Include prayers or poems by Muslim writers, and prayers that call for acceptance of people of all faith backgrounds.

### SERVICES/RITUALS

- Include music or chants from different Islamic traditions in your congregation's worship services or ritual observances. Look for ways in which music from other faiths connects to your religious tradition as well as expands your understanding of your faith.
- Organize an interfaith reading in which clergy from different faiths read from one another's texts. Visit [Faith Shared](#) for ideas and information.

### OUTREACH

- Contact a local Mosque or Islamic center to inquire if your group might visit, and spend time learning about it and meeting with the Imam and other community leaders. Invite the Imam and leaders to visit your place of worship as well. Visit [www.islamicfinder.org](http://www.islamicfinder.org) to find a Mosque near you.
- Send a bouquet of flowers with a simple message, such as "We honor and celebrate Eid Al Fitr with your community."
- Organize a solidarity fast during Ramadan. Invite participants to come together at sunset to share a meal, discuss their experiences and write a joint letter to Muslim leaders and neighbors sharing any meaningful insights they gained.
- Send condolences. Contact the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) or a similar organization in your city or country and ask if they could serve as liaison and deliver your notes.



### ADVOCATE

- If you are a leader of a congregation or of a religious or spiritual organization of any kind, reach out to your membership through your oratory or a letter to promote respect among religions and encourage them to help uphold religious freedom.
- Lobby the media and your elected officials. Organize a letter-writing campaign to media companies that spread misinformation and stir up hostility toward Muslims and other minorities. Work with other faith communities to write joint letters urging cessation of broadcasting hate over radio, television and the internet. (See Resources for a sample letter). Or focus your campaign on a local elected representative who could amplify the need for unity and healing rather than division and fear. (See Resources for tips).
- Write a joint letter or statement of respect of and support for Muslim communities. Post it on your website, send it to your local media, and request that it be circulated at local houses of worship and community centers. Click [here](#) for an example from the National Council of Churches, or [here](#) for an example from the National Association of Evangelicals.

## EDUCATION

- Invite a well-informed speaker on Islam to educate your group or congregation about the basic tenets of Islam. [Islamic Networks Group](#) has a roster of well-qualified speakers.
- Organize a panel discussion with a diverse group from your community, perhaps a man and a woman, younger and older, native-born and immigrant to provide a short presentation of their experience of being Muslim. Leave plenty of time for questions and answers.

## DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSION

- Host a hospitality dinner that celebrates religious and ethnic diversity. Invite people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds and different sectors of the community such as faith leaders, legislators, police officers, firefighters, teachers or school administrators, etc. Seat people of different backgrounds or people that have never met together at tables.

Encourage simple conversation starters like self-introductions; sharing a tradition or phrase from each person's faith that they find meaningful; sharing interests in the food – how it is a source of meaning and celebration in the culture represented, or what is meaningful about its preparation; sharing stories of when each person first moved to this community and why they like it, etc.

- Host special interfaith meditation and dialogue discussions, or replace an existing agenda with a special interfaith opportunity. Ideas for these gatherings include:
  - ▶ 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 each person to read; repeat each reading twice. After each selection, hold a period of silent meditation. Invite conversation and reflection on these passages.
  - ▶ Video discussion: Locate exceptional videos about Islam or current perspectives and issues involving Muslims. Visit [20,000 Dialogues](#), [Change the Story](#) or [Prepare New York](#) for a list of ideas. Initiate a discussion on the film, with questions such as: 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?
  - ▶ Appreciative interviews: Create paired conversations in your gathering to focus attention on the positive achievements and experiences of Islam and other faith traditions, interfaith

cooperation and relationship-building. Set up interviews asking each pair to interview one another.

Sample questions:

- Please share a story of an interfaith encounter that was especially memorable or meaningful? Was there a genuine feeling of respect and friendship?
- What actions or practices or holy words from Islam and other faith traditions are meaningful for you? Share an instance where you learned something about another faith tradition which you appreciated.
- Describe a few experiences of interfaith cooperation that impressed you. What might happen in your own community if people of different faith traditions worked together – embracing and celebrating their diversity?

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

## COMMUNITY ACTION

URI's interfaith groups around the world strive to build bridges of understanding on a daily basis. These bridges are often built by taking cooperative action to meet needs in the community. Some ideas 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.
- Organize an interfaith youth service project. If your congregation's youth regularly do service projects, invite youth from a local Mosque to join you. If your congregation does not have a service project planned, contact a local Mosque or Muslim community center and see if there is a service project your youth might do together. Be sure to involve the youth through planning and implementation. Encourage them to stay in touch and plan future events together.
- Integrate actions with the United Nations International Day of Peace on September 21st. If your group is already participating in the UN International Day of Peace, consider integrating words and actions that promote religious and cultural diversity, and invite your Muslim neighbors to participate in your activities.

## RESOURCES

### MEDIA ADVOCACY

Click [here](#) for a list of contacts for major national news media compiled by FAIR, a national media watch group.

#### Sample editorials:

Use these sample opinion editorials to inspire one of your own and submit to your local paper or favorite news or blog site, or use as a basis for discussion and dialogue.

1. "[Division vs. Unity](#)" by Dr. Eboo Patel, Executive Director of [Interfaith Youth Core](#).
2. "[Media Fan the Flames of Intolerance](#)" by Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs, Executive Director of United Religions Initiative.

#### Sample letter to 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 [name of news paper/program/etc]. I am concerned that your coverage continues to promote a one-sided view of incidents/issues involving Muslims.

Your readers have trusted [name of news paper/program/etc] as a source of unbiased news coverage for years [if applicable], but your slanted coverage of [issue] and your inaccurate portrayal of the Muslim-American community has made me question the accuracy of your reporting.

The media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion, and the barrage of negative coverage of Muslims and Islam in this country only serves to fan the flames of intolerance and bigotry, costing lives and livelihoods both here and abroad. Muslim Americans deserve to be 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 balanced coverage of affairs concerning and involving Muslim citizens.

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

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your address]

[You may add your daytime phone number. This is not published]

**Sample letter from your group urging cessation of discriminatory broadcasts:**

Date:

Reference: [name of article\program, etc.]

Dear [try to include name instead of Sir\Madam],

We write today to urge [name of media company, radio program, DJ, etc.] to stop broadcasting discriminatory messages about Muslims. As [Americans/US resident,] we believe that an attack against any group of people in the United States undermines our cultural value of equality. The media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion, and the barrage of negative coverage of Muslims and Islam in this country only serves to fan the flames of intolerance and bigotry, costing lives and livelihoods both here and abroad.

America is meant to be a nation in which the dignity and freedom of all are respected and protected. It is time [name of outlet] started standing up for true American values.

Sincerely

Yours sincerely,

[Group name]

[Contact name]

[Address]

[Phone]

**GOVERNMENT ADVOCACY**

Congress.org is an up-to-date resource where you can find your representatives' contact information and their voting records. When writing your representatives to ask for their support on a certain issue, it is helpful to let start by thanking them for voting for certain initiatives in the past. This not only serves to establish yourself as a supporter of their office, but also lets them know that you follow their voting record.

Click here for other tips on writing to your representatives.



Sample letter to elected official (from [whatunites.us](http://whatunites.us)):

Dear [Name and title of representative]:

Anti-Muslim rhetoric and hate has become commonplace and increasingly acceptable in political and civic discourse. It has unfortunately fueled a toxic environment in which violence against the Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian American communities is on the rise. That's not America.

That's why Congressman John Conyers (D-Mich.) introduced H.Res. 283, a resolution making it the official position of the United States Congress that the "Federal Government should take steps to counter the growth in anti-Muslim sentiments, targeted rhetorical attacks, and violence against the Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian American communities."

As a proud American, I am disturbed by the recent onslaught of Muslim bigotry in a country that is the cornerstone of freedom and justice for all. We have seen violent acts against Muslims, and those perceived as Muslim, throughout our country—from arson against a mosque in Tennessee to a protest in Orange County at a Muslim fundraiser for women's shelters, in which a local elected official encouraged violence against American Muslims.

Most disturbingly, many of our elected officials are fueling this insidious brand of bigotry and hatred—from Rep. King's hearings targeting Muslims and Rep. West's inflammatory remarks about Muslims, to presidential hopeful Herman Cain stating that he would not appoint Muslims to his administration. Our country has long been a beacon of freedom and equality, and we cannot stand by and let hate-mongers destroy the national legacy our forefathers established.

[This would be a good place to mention their voting record on the issue]

I'm writing today to ask you to take a stand for what unites us as Americans – freedom, truth and justice – and against the type of hate and bigotry that seeks to divide us.

As your constituent, I ask that you please support Rep. Conyers's resolution and other legislation like it. I am monitoring this issue closely and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,  
[Your name]  
[Your address]

## ADVOCACY WITHIN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY

### Sample letter to your congregation, written by Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs, Executive Director of URI:

Dear Congregants,

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 discrimination 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,  
[Your name, Title]

## OTHER EDUCATIONAL AND NETWORKING RESOURCES

1. BeliefNet: a general guide to the spiritual and prayer practices of many of the world's major religions and faith traditions.
2. United States Institute for Peace: An organization that offers a free online certificate program in interfaith conflict resolution.
3. 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.
4. Faith Shared – A joint project of Interfaith Alliance and Human Rights First to encourage houses of worship to host readings by diverse clergy of one another's texts.
5. Change the Story – An interactive site providing educational and other resources to promote greater knowledge of Islam and Muslims in America.
6. Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) – News and information about Islam in America.
7. Islamic Networks Group – Source of speakers and information about Islam.
8. 20,000 Dialogues – An organization promoting dialogue through film. An excellent resource for interfaith films and ideas for screenings.
9. Information and activities related to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9-11
  - Prepare New York
  - 9-11-11: Day of Reconciliation
  - 9/11 Unity Walk

## LINKS

- **Page 3:** <http://www.uri.org>
- **Page 4:** [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) , [http://www.uri.org/cooperation\\_circles/explore\\_cooperation\\_circles](http://www.uri.org/cooperation_circles/explore_cooperation_circles) , <http://www.20000dialogues.org/index.aspx> , <http://www.changethestory.net/?q=content/films-change-story> , <http://prepareny.ning.com/video>
- **Page 5:** <http://www.faiithshared.org/> , <http://www.cair.com> , <http://www.nccusa.org/news/100811ramadanrespect.html> , <http://www.nae.net/news-and-events/469-press-release-nae-urges-cancellation-of-planned-quran-burning>
- **Page 6:** <http://www.ing.org> , <http://www.20000dialogues.org/index.aspx> , <http://www.changethestory.net/?q=content/films-change-story> , <http://prepareny.ning.com/video>
- **Page 7:** <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=111> , [http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-08-30-column30\\_ST\\_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-08-30-column30_ST_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip) , <http://www.ifyc.org> , [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-charles-gibbs/media-fans-the-flames-of\\_b\\_840895.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-charles-gibbs/media-fans-the-flames-of_b_840895.html)
- **Page 8:** <http://www.congress.org> , <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/congdir.tt> , <http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/uscongress/a/letterscongress.htm>
- **Page 11:** <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/index.aspx> , <http://www.usip.org/education-training/courses/certificate-course-in-interfaith-conflict-resolution> , <http://www.religiousfreedomusa.org/> , <http://www.faiithshared.org/> , [www.changethestory.net](http://www.changethestory.net) , <http://www.cair.com/> , <http://www.ING.org> , <http://www.20000dialogues.org/> , <http://prepareny.com/> , <http://www.911-11.org/planned-events/> , <http://www.911unitywalk.org/>

bound for peace uri  [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org)

Through local grassroots interfaith communities around the globe,  
URI transforms religious tension into positive social change.