

Christians Pray for Muslims During Ramadan

When Ramadan begins tomorrow, some Christians will be praying along with the Muslim world for followers of Islam to come to Christ.

"We're praying for Muslims that ... they see Jesus during this time ... that they feel the Spirit move," said Michele Miller, director of ministries for Open Doors USA, an international nonprofit organization that supports persecuted Christians in oppressive countries.

To unite Christians in prayer, Open Doors has developed the 30-day Ramadan Prayer Calendar. Each day is specific to a country on the organization's World Watch List— a ranking of 50 countries where the persecution of Christians is most severe.

"Thirty-five of the countries out of 50 on the list are from countries that either the government is based on Islamic laws and rules or it's a Muslim-dominated country," Miller said.

Wednesday's prayer is specific to the country of Iran, No. 2 on the World Watch List. The calendar can be downloaded online.

During Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims fast from dawn until dusk and spend time in prayer, seeking forgiveness, purification and guidance in commemoration of the time they believe the prophet Mohammed divinely received the Quran.

Miller says she's asking Christians to pray for two things: persecuted Christians in Islamic nations and that Muslims find Jesus.

"It's an encompassing, holistic approach, not just praying for Christians for strength and hope and encouragement, but also for their situation, for the government in their area and ... that there is a greater awareness and a greater coming together, so that ultimately Jesus and the gospel message is proclaimed," she said.

Around the world, millions are estimated to be supporting 30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World, said Paul Filidis, North American coordinator for the prayer campaign. Youth With a Mission (YWAM) launched the initiative in 1993, but it is not specifically a YWAM program.

Participants can purchase special prayer booklets at that include a daily prayer focus as well as information on some aspect of the Islamic faith, culture or history.

It's "informed prayer," Filidis said.

Filidis said between 50,000 and 70,000 of the books are distributed around North America. However, many other countries reproduce the materials in various ways throughout the world.

The goal is to help Christians realize that Muslims are regular people, he said. "We want to encourage Christians not to be afraid of Muslims, not to hate Muslims, not to be angry at Muslims, not to fear them," he said. "There is more to Muslims than what we see through the terrorist-related images."

The 30 Days of Prayer is also not meant to bash Islam. "We are not trying to put down Islam," he said. The purpose is to pray that God "would draw close to [Muslims] and that real opportunities would emerge during this time for Muslims to maybe have a new understanding or an exposure to Christ."

Haytham Abi Haydar, pastor of the Arabic Fellowship Alliance Church in Dearborn, Mich., a heavily Islamic Detroit suburb,

said prayer for Muslims during Ramadan is crucial.

"I've seen a lot of spiritual warfare during this month," Abi Haydar said.

He encourages people to especially pray for believers who've come from a Muslim background.

"Ramadan is like Thanksgiving for 30 days. The community becomes strong, they come together, and the pressure on some of the believers is incredible," said Abi Haydar, who has even seen believers return to Islam because of the pressures during Ramadan. Converts are seen as betrayers to Islam.

Through the years, Abi Haydar has seen Muslims come to Christ, proof that prayer is working. His hope, however, is that the body of Christ will continue to do its part by reaching out to Muslims.

He's been a part of outreach efforts in Michigan that connect with immigrants to help them find clothing, teach English and ultimately introduce them to Christ.

"When immigrants come here and they don't see the church, the only place they go to is the mosque to get help," he said.