

Who Are Muslims: Dispelling the Fear

Because so many **Islamic nations** are hostile to the **gospel**, Ted Vail, associate director for Foursquare Missions International–U.S. Missions, believes God is bringing millions of its followers to the United States so they will have the freedom to hear about Christ.

The numbers are growing, with most estimates of Muslims in the U.S. ranging from 5 to 7 million. Although 63 percent are born outside the U.S., the number of first-generation Muslims is steadily expanding.

The post-9/11 image of most Muslims as would-be terrorists, however, hinders many believers from reaching out to these spiritual seekers.

“When you say ‘Islam,’ there’s a bit of fear with the average American,” Vail tells . “There’s the idea that Muslims are all the same, when they are very diverse.”

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center demonstrates the fallacy of seeing all Muslims as terrorists. The study revealed that eight in 10 American Muslims—81 percent—say that **suicide bombing** and other violence against civilians are never justified. The same percentage has an unfavorable opinion of al-Qaida, compared to just 5 percent with a very favorable, or somewhat favorable, view.

Still, the **growth of Islam** has prompted concern in many quarters. In 2010, voters in Oklahoma passed a law banning that state’s courts from citing or using Muslim-based shariah law. Other states considering similar measures are watching court appeals of the law’s constitutionality.

Vail acknowledges that **Islam is on the rise**, with some

estimating that, by 2030, one in every four people in the world will be Muslim. He points out, however, that approximately 70 percent of Muslims are casual adherents, only following a few of Islam's principles or simultaneously embracing other religions.

Ken (real name withheld for security reasons), a Foursquare minister who has worked among Muslims in the Middle East for many years, says the more loving believers can be, the better their chance of reaching Muslims with the message of Christ's divinity.

He notes that, several years ago, a survey of Muslim-background believers showed the leading reason for their conversion was observing the **love of Christ** in a Christian friend. Equally significant, he adds, is the fact that hardly anyone who converted to Christianity cited theological factors as the reason—namely, someone debating with them and proving that the Quran is wrong and the Bible is right.

“Another thing that helps in reaching Muslims is to understand that often the journey to salvation is more of a process,” Ken explains. “I know ex-Muslims who can't tell you the day they accepted Christ. They just know that, over time, they came to know more about Jesus.”

Because they are seeking to know God in a deeper way, Muslims are easier to approach than the average American, says Syd Doyle, a longtime ordained Foursquare minister and missionary.

“In one sense it's easier to talk to Muslims about Christ than it is to talk to secular Americans,” says Syd Doyle, who—with his wife, Liz—operates Nations Light Ministries. “They are more willing to talk about religion.”

Formerly based in the Northeast, the Doyles recently relocated to southern Michigan to expand their ministry focus on Muslims. They live an hour from Dearborn, home to possibly the largest geographic concentration of Muslims—300,000—outside

the Middle East. The Doyles are on the ministry staff of New Hope Christian Fellowship (Waterford Foursquare Church) in Waterford, Mich.

Liz, who grew up in southern Ohio, is passionate about outreach after observing the mistakes Christians made 35 years ago when the couple lived in England. A combination of **racist attitudes** and apathy allowed Muslims to gradually expand their numbers and political influence there. She says they can easily replicate this pattern in the U.S. if Christians remain indifferent to sharing their faith.

“The devil used 9/11 to expand fear in the hearts of people, even Christians,” Liz asserts. “But we believe one of God’s end-times strategies is moving people around globally. We want to encourage Foursquare people to get engaged with Muslims.”

To fulfill the Lord’s plans, the Doyles believe, Christians must respond with wisdom. One of the most effective **evangelism methods** they have observed in their area is churches from various denominations coming together to sponsor events, such as a Labor Day picnic where both Syd and Liz shared with a predominantly Muslim audience. The couple finds it less threatening to Muslim men and more identifying to Muslim women if a woman **preaches the gospel**.

Other outreaches in which they regularly participate include inter-denominational Christmas caroling in Muslim neighborhoods, hosting an annual Christmas party and a summer multicultural festival. The Doyles also speak at numerous churches and conferences, with Liz maintaining a ministry to women called “Releasing Daughters of the Last Days.” Equipping women to reach other women is significant because of cultural gender barriers—Muslims frown on mixing sexes in spiritual discussions.

Other sensitivities of which Christians trying to witness to Muslims must be aware include not offering them pork or candy;

not rushing the conversion process or insisting they repeat a sinner's prayer; and not overlooking the importance of hospitality.

"We [Americans] can be very casual; but in a traditional Arab culture, when I came to someone's house, they gave me a drink, fruit and something else to eat," says Ken, who still travels to the Middle East several times a year. "Even if you say you're full, they bring you something to eat. A guest is treated like a king."

Hospitality is especially significant when considering the large numbers of Muslim students on campuses in the U.S. While reaching out to students and neighbors from a different background, however, Vail says that Foursquare pastors and members must avoid falling prey to American culture's embrace of "tolerance." Such relativistic views frown on declaring that Christ is the only way to salvation.

If young people, for example, who are not educated about pluralism believe that there are many ways to God, Vail says they start to think, "Is Christianity worth fighting for?" This obviously inhibits evangelism.

"There really is one way to God, and that is through Jesus," Vail asserts. "We have to retrain our churches that the way is love. Muslims revere Jesus, but they avoid the word *Christian* because things like the Crusades ruined the term. [That's why author] Carl Medearis says, 'Let's use the term "follower of Christ."'"

And followers of Christ must know that He is Lord if they expect others—including Muslims—to give their allegiance to Jesus.

To read part 2, "Who Are Muslims: The Power of Love," visit .