

"War, Terrorism, and Peace" in **Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations** (pp. 28-29)  
[www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations.aspx)

### Other resources

"Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-first Century"  
August 2004 | U.S. Institute for Peace Special Report No. 125  
[www.usip.org/publications/ijtihad-reinterpreting-islamic-principles-twenty-first-century](http://www.usip.org/publications/ijtihad-reinterpreting-islamic-principles-twenty-first-century)  
"Debunking the Mythical 'Sharia Threat' to Our Judicial System"  
[www.aclu.org/blog/religion-belief/debunking-mythical-sharia-threat-our-judicial-system](http://www.aclu.org/blog/religion-belief/debunking-mythical-sharia-threat-our-judicial-system)  
"Dispelling myths about Sharia"  
[www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=RS1108-4817](http://www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=RS1108-4817)  
"The sharia myth sweeps America"  
[www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2011-06-12-Sharia-law-in-the-USA\\_n.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2011-06-12-Sharia-law-in-the-USA_n.htm)  
"Top Five Sharia Myths"<http://sharialaws.blogspot.com/2012/01/top-five-sharia-myths.html>  
Defending Religious Freedom: Understanding Shari' a  
[www.icna.org/defending-religious-freedom-understanding-shariah/](http://www.icna.org/defending-religious-freedom-understanding-shariah/)  
"The Diversity of Muslims in the United States: Views as Americans"  
[www.usip.org/publications/diversity-muslims-united-states-views-americans](http://www.usip.org/publications/diversity-muslims-united-states-views-americans)

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Becoming American? The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America*

*The Muslims of America*

Hallaq, Wael B. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*

Smith, Jane I. *Islam in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

Abdul Rauf, Feisal. *What's Right with Islam Is What's Right With America*

"Islam and Democracy," John L. Esposito and John O. Voll. *Humanities*, November/December 2001, Volume 22/Number 6. [www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2001-11/islam.html](http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2001-11/islam.html)

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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.



## Discover Islam DVD Series Study Guide



### #2 Islam: An American Faith

#### Summary of DVD content

This segment opens by describing Islam's diverse population worldwide and notes how the September 2001 attacks have tarnished the image of all Muslims. Scholars and Muslim Americans explain why such terrorist acts are condemned in Islam. Georgetown University professor John Esposito urges Muslims and non-Muslims to interact in their local communities to bring about mutual understanding and respect.

Islamic beliefs and principles begin with submission to God, a submission that frees believers to live a moral life. Islamic ideals are presented as compatible and consistent with the United States Bill of Rights; various Muslim Americans describe how Muslims can be freer to thrive in the United States than in many other countries.

The film traces the presence of Muslims in America back to mapmakers and explorers who may have visited during the early Middle Ages. The slave trade brought millions of Muslims from Africa, slaves who were forced to accept the religion of the white and mainly Christian slave owners. Starting in the early 1900s, such African Americans as Marcus Garvey and Elijah Poole (later Elijah Muhammad) began researching their African roots and combining elements of Islam with a new Black Power movement that became the Nation of Islam. A leading adherent, Malcolm X, eventually embraced orthodox Islam based on the Qur'an and was assassinated soon after. Elijah Muhammad's son W.D. Muhammad was for decades the spiritual leader of African American Muslims following orthodox Islam.

After World War II more immigrants came to the United States to create an ethnically diverse community of Muslims who have made many contributions to American life, including heroic military service.

#### Elaboration on key topics

1. The DVD sites the **global Muslim population at 1.5 billion, and that in the United States at 8 million.** The Pew Research Group estimates that in 2010 there were 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide and about 5.3 million in the combined Americas. Correctly noting that the U.S. census undercounts Muslims, various

Islamic groups estimate 3 to 8 million Muslims in the United States. Of course, it is very important to note that **most of the world's Muslim population is neither American nor Arab, but rather South and Southeast Asian** (from Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, etc.) [[www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx)]

2. Speakers in the DVD describe **terrorism as "a crime against humanity"** and urge all Muslim leaders to speak out against it. As will be explored further in the DVD segment for "#5 Islam: a Faith Hijacked," the history of Christianity also exhibits the tendency for religious traditions to be co-opted with violent results: for example, in the Crusades, for defenses of slavery and racism, and in support of totalitarian regimes, including the Nazis. In today's world many Muslims live in conditions of poverty, displacement, and oppression — conditions that may make Islam particularly vulnerable to being misused as a political weapon. Such factors do not in any way justify terrorism. But American Christians can seek to understand these factors and also to recognize that the huge majority of Muslims experiencing such hardships do not choose the path of violence. They can also add their voices to those of devout Muslims who call for redress and change.

3. Several speakers talk about the **compatibility of Islam and American democratic principles**. Countries with Muslim majorities represent varied political systems on a continuum from a semi-secular republic (Turkey) to an avowed Islamic state (Iran). Islam's central belief in the unity and sovereignty of God means that all of human life, including political life, should acknowledge God's will. That conviction has led some Muslims (e.g., in Iran) to experiment with a theocracy led by a religious leader representing God's authority. But this is the exception in Islamic tradition. Majority Sunni Muslims strongly contend that the principle of God's sovereignty means that no one human can stand in for God. Instead, believers must rule together by consensus, a Qur'anic principle that well-known Muslim scholars assert is compatible with American-style representative democracy.

4. The DVD refers to the **arrival of non-African Muslim immigrants** after World War II. While it is true that such an influx occurred, many Muslims, especially from the Middle East, came to the United States in earlier waves in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The earliest documented mosque and Muslim cemetery was 1929 in Ross, North Dakota. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought large numbers of Muslim professionals to the U.S. Today the top countries of origin for Muslim immigrants to the U.S. are Pakistan and Bangladesh.

[The Future of the Global Muslim Population; Projections for 2010-2030; 27 Jan 2011  
[www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx)]

## Discussion questions

1. Share your own stories of meeting Muslims in your educational experience, workplace or neighborhood. What have these people shared about being Muslims in America? If they are immigrants, what obstacles and opportunities have they faced? If you have never met a Muslim, what accounts for that fact?

2. One speaker says that a problem in the United States is that some Muslim parents equate maintaining one's ethnic identity with being a good Muslim. What do you think he means? Try to think of parallel cases for other religious minorities in the United States.

3. Muslim Americans cite some of the following areas as challenges as they strive to be faithful Muslims and good American citizens:

- Modesty in dress, especially in public schools and hospitals
- Attending midday Friday prayers at a mosque and celebrating feasts, when those may not be recognized in secular work and school calendars
- Availability of "halal" meat, slaughtered according to Islamic ritual
- Interfaith dating and marriage

Discuss ways your congregation might learn more about these challenges and assist in their resolution. What are some ways you struggle to be a faithful Christian in American society? What similarities do you observe with those cited in the video?

4. The topic of Islam and terrorism is covered fully in the study guide for the DVD segment "#5 Islam: a Faith Hijacked." Many non-Muslim Americans also perceive "Shari'ah," Islamic law, as a threat to American secular democracy. In Islam Shari'ah means primarily "the way of God" for human life. More specifically it refers to legislation that is derived from the Qur'an, the lifestyle and sayings of the prophet Muhammad, historic legal consensus, and application of human reason to new situations. Islamic law can vary somewhat by region; and in most majority-Muslim countries the legal systems today are a combination of secular civil law and Shari'ah-based family legislation for marriage, divorce and inheritance.

How do you respond to the assertion by some that American Muslims are seeking to replace our current legal system with Shari'ah? Is this approach substantially different from that of some Christian Americans who want to shape the legal system according to what they believe to be biblical principles?

## Learn More

### ELCA resources

"Law in Islam," **Christian-Muslim Talking Points**

[www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/christianmuslimtalkingpoints)