

## **MY NEIGHBOR IS MUSLIM**

“My Neighbor is Muslim” is a new resource developed by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. Linda Hartke, President and Chief Executive Officer of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service says: *“I think we can all agree that we are living in a precarious moment in which people are increasingly fearful of “the other” and political rhetoric is used to fan the flames.”* And so this publication which they are sharing with other religions and communities is a much needed resource to build dialogue and support.

Several of us on the Women’s Issues committee received this resource and it was decided that through this column I would attempt to help people understand and have authentic knowledge of our Muslim neighbors. I will be featuring excerpts from “My Neighbor is Muslim” for the next several issues.

### **The Five Pillars of Islam**

Islam is a religion with incredible diversity. It has certain core beliefs and practices that unite all Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad stated: “Islam is built upon five fundamentals - **Five Pillars of Islam**.

- **The Declaration of Faith:** The basic profession of faith in Islam states: “There is no god but God’s and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” The declaration affirms both God’s oneness and the privileged role of the Prophet Muhammad as the one through whom the final and decisive revelation was given to humanity. Elements of the declaration are found throughout the Qur’an. To convert to Islam, all one needs to do is recite the declaration in the presence of other Muslims.
- **Prayer:** Muslims pray five times a day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. They can pray at their mosques, in their workplaces, or at home. For the noon Friday prayer, men are required to attend the mosque, women are encouraged. Prayer consist in reciting verses from the Qur’an accompanied by a series of movements – standing, bowing, kneeling, touching the ground with one’s forehead and sitting. During prayer, they face Mecca, the holy city.
- **Almsgiving:** All Muslims with the financial and material means must set aside 2.5% of their networth. This pillar reflects the Muslim conviction that all wealth and material possessions are entrusted to humanity by God. According to the Qur’an, intended recipients include the poor, orphans, widows, travelers, and debtors.
- **Fasting:** occurs during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, or the month of **Ramadan**. It was during this month that God first revealed the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad. Many Muslims refrain from eating, drinking and engaging in sexual activity from dawn to dusk. The purpose of fasting is to generate an awareness of human fragility and dependence on God and to be mindful of the poor. At sunset, they break the fast with the evening meal. One of the most important occasions of the year takes place at the end of Ramadan. It is a series of feasts lasting for several days and involves now only food but exchanging gifts and communal prayer.
- **Pilgrimage:** All Muslims who are physically and financially able to take a pilgrimage to Mecca do so at least once in their lifetime. It takes place after Ramadan, during the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar. The pilgrimage involves a series of rituals that take place over a week’s time.

*These five pillars reflect a religion that does not elevate belief above practice  
But views practice as central to what it means to be a Muslim – the emphasis  
Is on how one’s faith or belief is translated into actions and deeds.*