



# **Law Enforcement's Guide On Policing Muslim Communities**

# About This Document

*This document was created as a collaboration between Huthayfa Usman (Undergraduate Student, University of Dayton, Criminal Justice Studies Program) and the Islamic Center of Centerville. This document intends to serve as a supplementary guide to law enforcement officers and agencies in the United States who are interested in creating a culturally sensitive methodology to policing. Additionally, this document serves as a reminder that a fundamental of community-oriented policing and 21st century policing requires law enforcement to understand the community that they police.*

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*"...Stand firm for justice as witnesses for God even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor..." (Quran 4:135).*

*"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*We begin this document with the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*

# The Need for Understanding Between Law Enforcement and Communities

Law enforcement in the United States has been making progress in building trust with the communities that they police through community-oriented policing. Community-oriented policing (COP) has been defined as a collaborative approach to community problem-solving through a joint approach by communities and the police that serve them (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). The rise of this form of policing came after President Obama initiated the creation of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing led by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). This task force was created in midst of rising tensions between communities and police departments due to falling police perceptions through media coverage of high profile events nationwide (Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015). The United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2010) emphasizes the core and success of COP is redefining and strengthening relationships between police and the community that they serve.

There is a growing Muslim and American-Muslim population in the United States. Muslims in America consist of American-Muslims, immigrant, and second or third-generation Muslims with Arab, Asian, Latino, European, and African backgrounds (Huda, 2006). With this growth in the Muslim population in the United States, law enforcement may be interacting with Muslims at higher frequencies than in the past. A study by Akbar (2015) showed that attempts to use community-oriented policing in communities that are majority Muslim by federal and local law enforcement have received backlash and have not been widely successful. The federal government has cited using community-oriented policing to keep a watchful eye on American Muslims to monitor political and activist movements; citizens do not consider these attempts to connect as genuine (Akbar, 2015). This study indicated that if citizens don't feel a level of understanding or wanting to understand culture and tradition, COP efforts may be negatively impacting relationships with law enforcement (Akbar, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to understand and learn the culture and traditions of the community members in order for law enforcement to gain the trust and respect of citizens.

This document is designed to assist law enforcement officers and administrators in creating an understanding of the community that they serve. Additionally, this document is designed to assist in the creation of policies that are culturally-sensitive and further build cooperative relationships between Muslims and law enforcement in the United States. This document does not provide a detailed description of Muslim life, culture, or creed, and is not a comprehensive understanding of the religion of Islam. An additional goal for this document is to inspire other minority communities in the United States to create similar references to assist in creating understanding and cultural-sensitivity that is required in modern policing.

This guide is also designed to serve as an emergency response reference for law enforcement, emergency medical services, and firefighters.

# Muslims In America

Muslims have been involved in American society since the early days of the United States. Muslims in America can come from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds including Arabic, Asian, European, and Hispanic backgrounds in addition to the rising number of American-Muslims who are born and raised in the United States.

The spread of the religion of Islam means that there may be significant cultural differences between practitioners of Islam and these cultural differences can extend to the languages spoken. Muslims. As of 2020, there are over 3.4 million Muslims in the United States.

# About the Religion of Islam

The religion of Islam can be broken down into six essential beliefs:

1. The One God
2. The Angels
3. Divine Scriptures (Torah, Psalms, the Gospel, and the Quran)
4. Messengers of God (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, others, and Muhammad the last Prophet)
5. The Day of Judgement
6. Supremacy of the Decree of God

In addition to belief in these six elements, Islam also pushes for strong societal justice and morality. Islam stresses that followers should work together to motivate good and discourage evil. Islam demands justice and equity between all people regardless of race, religion, gender, or other beliefs.

The Quran is the holy book in the religion of Islam and is treated with a very a high level of respect as Christians would treat the Bible. Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad by God through the angel Gabriel.

The following sections contain brief explanations of fundamental concepts of Islam.

## Prayer In Islam

Muslims are prescribed five mandatory prayers that must be offered at specific time frames throughout the day.

1. Morning Prayer (Fajr): Break-of-dawn until just before sunrise.
2. Noon Prayer (Zuhr): After midday until mid-afternoon.
3. Afternoon Prayer (Asr): Late afternoon until just before sunset.

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4. Sunset Prayer (Maghrib): Sunset until dark.
5. Night Prayer (Isha): Offered anytime throughout the night hours after darkness

Muslims refer to applications on the internet or their smartphones to get exact times for the location in which they live. Times for prayer change throughout the year with variables in sunrise and sunset times.

Muslims are encouraged to pray at the Mosque for spiritual benefit, but are permitted to pray in their homes, or any clean space free of impurities including public areas such as rest areas, airport prayer rooms, empty classrooms, or outdoors in a secluded area. During prayer, Muslims stand, bow, and prostrate on the ground. Muslims will always face the direction of the city of Mecca during prayer.

In Islam, prayer is considered deeply important and establishes a direct connection to God. During prayer, Muslims are highly concentrated and engaged in having a conversation with God ; they are not permitted to respond to outside stimuli. Muslims may not respond to calls and text messages on cell phones and may not respond to greetings or verbal commands. Officers should not take offense if a Muslim is not responsive during an act of prayer as it is a highly intimate time between a worshiper and their God. Each prayer unit usually takes less than five minutes; upon completion, Muslims go about their daily routine.

### Friday Prayer

In Islam, Friday is the day of congregational prayer similar to Sunday Mass in the Christian faith tradition. On Friday, Muslims will pray at a Mosque and will listen to a sermon (lasting 25-30 minutes) delivered by an Imam (Prayer Leader). This prayer is called Jummuah and occurs in place of the regular daily noontime prayer. This prayer is held at Mosques but may also be held in community centers, hospitals, and college campuses for different populations. After prayer, worshipers may socialize and enjoy snacks and refreshments if provided by the Mosque.

Because of the increased number of Muslim worshipers in the United States, Mosques may be extremely busy and congested during the time of Jummuah. Additionally, children and women are more likely to be present in Mosques on Friday. Fire Departments and City Inspections are encouraged to conduct random inspections on other days due to the concerns for traffic and leadership availability. Police officers and other law enforcement can understand that this is a day of significance for the Muslim community and are encouraged to wait until the prayer service concludes for any non-emergency business such as interviews. These prayers are open to the public and all are welcome to observe.

### The Holy Scripture (Quran)

The Quran is the holy scripture that Muslims consider a direct revelation from God. The Quran is written in the Arabic language but may be translated into other languages based on linguistic needs of worshipers. Should there be a need to seize or inspect the Quran, it should be handled

with as much respect as possible. In order to prevent offense to worshippers, the Quran should not be placed on the floor and should not be placed near any impurities. However, this guide understands that religious and cultural sensitivity is superseded by safety and health concerns in emergency situations.

## Ramadan: The Month of Fasting

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar and involves fasting. During this month, worshipers will fast from sunrise until sunset, abstaining from eating or drinking throughout the day. During this month, a change in the eating schedule of Muslims occurs with the morning meal (called Sehri or Suhoor) being before dawn and the night meal (Iftar) being at the time of sunset.

It is important to understand that Muslims may be more fatigued, engaged in prayer, and sleep-deprived during the month of Ramadan. A fast may be broken in situations of risk to life or health and life saving medication or treatment is required in emergency situations.

When communicating with Muslims during Ramadan, an appropriate and welcomed greeting is "Ramadan Mubarak" or "Ramadan Kareem" which means Blessed/Happy Ramadan. Hearing this greeting from law enforcement or first responders may help Muslims feel more welcomed and may assist in building relationships between Muslims and law enforcement.

During Ramadan, Muslims often spend the majority of their night engaged in prayer at their Mosques or community centers. It should not be a concern to see more traffic at night hours in areas near Mosques during the month of Ramadan. Mosques will be more busy than usual and may have other activities planned such as seminars and classes.

## Muslim Holidays

Muslims mainly celebrate two large holidays called Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha. Eid means day of festivity in Arabic . A typical greeting for these holidays is "Eid Mubarak" which means Blessed Celebration. Eid al Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, and Eid al Adha is celebrated on the tenth day of the twelfth month. Celebrating both Eid holidays may mean that a Muslim will take a day off from work and may not be present at their workplace. Muslims attend a special congregational prayer on the morning of both Eid holidays and may have other festivities planned for the rest of the day.

## Muslim Names

Popular names of Muslims include Muhammad and other prophets mentioned in the Quran. Due to the various cultures that Muslims may come from, there is no pattern or requirement for Muslim names to be Arabic names. Converts to Islam may or may not adopt a Muslim name but this is not a requirement and therefore Muslims may have names that are western or from other cultures and languages.

# Law Enforcement Interactions

The following sections contain information that may be helpful to law enforcement and other public safety workers when interacting with people of the Muslim faith.

## Eye Contact or Physical Spacing

Officers speaking with a Muslim subject who is the opposite gender as the officers may observe an avoidance of eye contact or the presence of physical distancing. This **may not** be a sign of evasion or criminal behavior but rather the individual being uncomfortable due to religious teachings of modesty.

## K9 Officers and K9 Searches

Many Muslims, especially immigrant Muslims, may exhibit great fear or discomfort around dogs for cultural reasons. This is most common with immigrant Muslims originating from Arabic or South Asian countries. Additionally, the saliva of dogs is considered an impurity in the religion of Islam and requires clothing or the body to be washed after contact. K9 officers should take this into consideration when performing their duties. Muslims may be unwilling to allow K9 officers to touch spiritual items such as prayer mats and the Quran. Such items should be hand inspected **if possible**.

## Body Searches

In following religious teachings, Muslims may request an officer of the same gender to perform pat searches, body searches, or any other type of physical search upon one's body. Such requests should be accommodated to the best of an agency's ability.

## Etiquette on Entering Homes or Mosques

Because Muslims prostrate themselves to the ground during prayer, Muslims try to keep their flooring and carpeting free of impurities in their homes and Mosques. Muslims take off their shoes before entering carpeted areas of Mosques and appropriate signage is usually present at Mosques. In non-emergency situations, officers may demonstrate sensitivity and respect by adhering to such etiquette when visiting Muslim places of worship.

## Upon the Death of a Muslim

It is **essential** that family members OR the local Mosque or Islamic Society is notified upon the death or dying of a Muslim. If family members cannot be reached, the local Mosque or Islamic



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Society may be able to assist in finding the next of kin or relatives of the deceased or dying Muslim.

All efforts must be made to ensure that a deceased Muslim is able to be ritually washed according to Islamic tradition and buried within 24 hours of death **if possible**. Muslim tradition prefers the washing and burial of a Muslim without delay. The dead body of a Muslim should **not** be cremated or embalmed unless required by law. Muslims may specify in their wills or last wishes where they would like to be buried and who should handle the funeral and burial. Such requests should be accommodated.

Islam generally prohibits the mutilation of dead bodies; therefore, an autopsy should **not** be performed **unless required in connection with the investigation of a crime**.

## Recruiting Muslims in Law Enforcement

As law enforcement strives to become more diverse and inclusive, many agencies are facing challenges in recruiting Muslim community members. Although Mosques and community centers may encourage young Muslims to join law enforcement, many Muslims are hesitant in doing so. Muslims may believe that law enforcement agencies tolerate anti-Islamic rhetoric. There have been numerous instances in which Muslims have been profiled based on faith or ethnicity and have been questioned or visited by federal agents at their own workplaces. Law enforcement agencies can increase the number of Muslims recruited to agencies by building cooperative relationships and making their communities more comfortable with law enforcement. Offering citizens police academies to Muslim communities is a suggested method of building relationships and educating the community about law enforcement.

## Interacting With Muslim Immigrants and Internationals

Muslim international students on college campuses may not be familiar with the United States law enforcement system and may not be aware that individuals have certain constitutional rights within the United States. Some Muslim students and immigrants may come from countries where the police are viewed as oppressive. This prior negative experience with law enforcement in home countries can cause fear when interacting with American law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies can create positive interactions through community engagement and educational interactions. Additionally, agencies can educate immigrants and international students about the services that law enforcement provides to the community. While it is known that police officers are public servants in the United States, this is not true around the world and significantly influences how comfortable individuals are towards law enforcement.

# Conclusion

By following the guidelines put forth in this document, law enforcement agencies may minimize the negative effects of past experiences and gain a greater level of cooperation from members of the Muslim community. How agencies implement the guidelines and suggestions discussed in this document is a unique and individualized process. Agencies may find different results when following this guide depending on the climate of the community that they serve.

We understand law enforcement officers continue to make countless sacrifices to protect and serve their communities and are eternally grateful for those sacrifices. While law enforcement must adapt to changing circumstances, it is also incumbent upon citizens to make efforts in bridging the gap between police and community members. We hope that this guide can serve as a first step toward improved police and community relations.

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