COMMUNITY DIALOGUE MANUAL SERIES

Connecting Communities

Open Mosque Day

DIALOGUE SOCIETY

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To readers of this manual:

This manual is part of the Dialogue Society's Community Dialogue Manual Series. The PDF version of this and the other manuals in the series can be downloaded from www.dialoguesociety.org/publications

If you have any comments on this, or any of the other manuals in the series, we would be very glad to have your feedback. Please email your comments to manual@dialoguesociety.org

We would like to showcase the valuable work and effort of groups that use the Community Dialogue Manuals to help inspire other groups to take part also. Please get in touch and let us know how this manual helped you and your group with any photographs and testimonials. Please email these to manual@dialoguesociety.org

If you represent a local stakeholder or public body and are interested in Dialogue Society consultancy please email consultancy@dialoguesociety.org

The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities through dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. Through localised community projects, discussion forums and teaching programmes it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences.

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DIALOGUE SOCIETY

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Open Mosque Day

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Overview 01

Preface

The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities through dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. Through localised community projects, discussion forums and teaching programmes it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences. It has done this through a wide range of events including community celebrations, interfaith sharing circles, and open cultural festivals as well as a broad variety of dialogue meetings and seminars.

The manual you hold in your hand is part of a series of ten Community Dialogue Manuals developed by the Dialogue Society to encourage interaction between members of different communities. The primary aim of the series is to help people to bring their communities together through a number of approaches and events that the Dialogue Society has found successful. We have always found that the most successful events have been those with clear objectives and where attention has been paid to detail. Therefore the manuals are full of advice, tips and checklists to help everything go smoothly as you plan, organise and host your own events.

This manual will help you to hold a vibrant and welcoming open day at the mosque or other place of worship that you attend. An open day at a place of worship is an ideal way of helping the wider community to better understand the religious faith and practices of the people who worship there. Misconceptions and suspicions can be dispelled, interest and respect inspired and barriers broken down between different religious and cultural groups. Attitudes and relationships can be transformed when people who are not at ease with the religion of a different group are welcomed by that group into their place of worship and invited to see and learn for themselves.

We hope that this manual and perhaps others will be helpful to you, and that you will enjoy uniting your community through the events you hold.

The Dialogue Society

Introduction

Holding an Open Mosque Day in the spirit of friendship and conversation can be an extremely valuable way of promoting intercultural understanding in an increasingly diverse society.

The world is fast turning into a global village; everything is getting smaller, and closer. Whether we like it or not, we are increasingly exposed to others from different religious and ethnic backgrounds. More cities are becoming cosmopolitan, with a great deal of introduction between cultural and religious groups at school, in the workplace and in the community in general.

However, we are often quite ignorant of the traditions, customs and lifestyles of those we come into contact with every day. Lack of knowledge and understanding leads to prejudices. Media presentations of particular groups often contribute to those prejudices.

Cultural communities and faith groups increasingly have to take responsibility for eradicating others' misconceptions of them and give a more accurate view of themselves. There is an increasing need for initiatives that inform and educate others about differences and diversity.

If you belong to a different minority religion unfamiliar to the majority, opening up your place of worship may help dispel any misunderstandings of your faith and practices. And while the general level of understanding of Christianity, Britain's majority faith, is likely to be higher, Christians too will have plenty of questions to answer and misconceptions to dispel among non-churchgoers, atheists and religious minorities.

An open day in any place of worship promotes understanding, brings people together and gives others an engaging insight into a local religious community and its beliefs, practices and history.

This manual contains an extensive range of practical advice, checklists, hints and tips to help you to run a successful Open Mosque Day. It is quite a long document but is not intended to be read from cover to cover. The overview (which follows the "Aims and Objectives" section) should give you a clearer idea of the information and advice available in the manual, so that you can refer to those sections which you feel will be most helpful. The appendices contain a range of sample materials which you might like to use as starting points as you organise and publicise your own Open Mosque Day.

The PDF version of this and the other Community Dialogue Manuals can be downloaded from www.dialoguesociety.org/publications; you can copy and paste materials from the appendices to adapt for your own use.

Finally, a great deal of the practical advice contained in this manual could apply equally well to preparation for an open day in another place of worship.

Aims and Objectives of This Manual

1. To encourage the opening up of different communities to one another
2. To provide strategies, tips, advice and know-how for organising successful events
3. To allow non-Muslims to see what actually goes on in a mosque and to understand its role in Muslim life
4. To encourage deeper cultural and religious understanding
5. To provide an opportunity for people to learn about the art, architecture and history of a local place of worship through interaction with the people who worship there
6. To get individuals and organisations interested in dialogue
7. To initiate dialogue through a tangible event
8. To promote friendly interaction and community cohesion

We hope that the manual might also be of assistance to those considering holding an open day in another place of worship, such as a synagogue, a temple or a church.

NB. What is important to remember is that the purpose of these events is to interact and engage with people of other cultures or faiths. When you first go to a religious congregation, community group or other organisation to invite them to your event they may be reluctant for a whole range of reasons. The most common reason is suspicion that this is an attempt to proselytise and convert others. It is therefore extremely important that you put them at ease by explaining at the outset that your intention is not to convince the congregation of your own faith but simply to engage and interact with them. On the day of the event, it is important to impress upon your team that they should not engage in theological discussion unless it is prompted and then only to inform rather than convince. Dialogue is interaction with others while respecting them as they are.

Manual Overview

Planning Your Event 10

Guidance on the key elements of planning:

- Informing the Congregation
- Forming a Planning Committee
- Setting Date, Time and Duration
- Identifying Key Speakers or VIP Guests
- Preparing Your Programme of Events (What Will Your Open Mosque Day Consist Of?)
- Drafting Content for Promotional Literature
- Planning Extras (See "Extras" Section Below)
- Assigning Responsibility for Different Areas of Work

Event Publicity 12

Guidance on how to publicise your Open Mosque Day to ensure a well-attended event:

- Planning Ahead
- Designing and Preparing Publicity Materials (Such as Posters, Banners, Leaflets, Invitations, Event Booklets)
- Identifying Who to Invite and Sending Invitations
- Preparing a Press Release and Contacting the Media

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Advice on key parts of your preparation:

- Human Resources (Drafting a Human Resources Plan to Identify Roles and Responsibilities, Rota System etc)
- Preparing for Mosque Tours
- Materials: FAQs Fact Sheets and Feedback Forms

Tours 17

Detailed guidance on the organisation and content of tours and tips for guides:

- Basics
- Tips for Tour Guides
- The 'How To' of Mosque Tours

Extras 23

Advice on a range of possible extras that may enhance your event:

- Recitation of the Holy Qur'an and the Call to Prayer
- Observing Prayers
- Displays – Posters, Artwork, Children's Work, Photos
- Stalls – Books, Magazines, Leaflets, Artefacts
- Refreshments – Traditional Food and Drink
- Music, Nasheeds, Poetry, Rotating Quotes on a Screen
- Speeches
- VIP Lunch/Dinner
- Welcome/Gift Pack
- Children's Area/Children's Activities

Event Essentials 26

Advice on the most indispensable elements of your Open Mosque Day:

- The Mosque
- Health and Safety
- Guests
- Filming and Photography
- To Remember on the Day

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A full list of what you need to do, and when, to ensure success and avoid stress

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Sample materials and extra resources (as listed in "Contents")

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE MANUAL SERIES

Advice For Planning and Running an Open Mosque Day

02

Planning Your Event

Inform the Congregation

Friday prayers

Keep the mosque's congregation fully informed about the planned event so that everybody can feel part of it. Friday prayers are the obvious time to do this. As well as explaining your plans you can appeal for volunteers.

Weekend school

Another opportunity for announcing plans for the event and looking for volunteers is to speak to parents and children at a weekend school used by families involved with the mosque.

Posters in mosque looking for volunteers

Leaving posters in the mosque advertising for volunteers gives people the chance to read the details in their own time and contact you to sign up.

Form a Planning Committee

Form a committee to take responsibility for organising the event.

Set Date, Time and Duration

Set date, time and duration with your target audience in mind. You will probably be looking to target non-Muslim communities and less frequent attendees.

Weekends are preferable because it allows those working during the week to visit also.

Bear in mind that observant Christians go to church on Sunday mornings and many Jews would not be able to attend on the Sabbath (Shabbat), which lasts from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday.

If there are attractions for children more people are likely to attend.

Identify Key Speakers or VIP Guests

The attendance of an important local stakeholder can raise the profile of your event and attract more guests, as well as bringing your mosque community into contact with an influential figure in the local community. You could consider inviting your local MP, the Mayor and other councillors, and asking one or more to make a speech. It may be worth contacting possible VIP guests right at the start of the planning process, and choosing a date that works for them.

See also "Event Publicity" below.

Prepare Your Programme of Events

(What will the Open Mosque Day consist of?)

Things to think about

- How many tours will there be?
- What time will each tour start?
- How long will each tour last?
- Will there be an official welcome at the beginning or any VIP speeches?
- Arrival/departure times
- Will there be time allocated for entertainment or will it be provided throughout the day?

Draft Content for Promotional Literature

You will need to design/prepare posters, an event booklet for people to refer to on the day and letters/emails of invitation for all your potential guests.

See "Event publicity" and Appendices 1-3 below.

Plan Extras

Think about 'extras' that can be included in event (see relevant section below).

Possibilities which may enhance the interest and enjoyment of the event include:

- Recitation of the Holy Qur'an and Call to Prayer
- Observing Prayers
- Displays – posters, artwork, children's work
- Stalls – books, magazines, leaflets, artefacts
- Refreshments – traditional food and drink
- Music, nasheeds and poetry
- Rotating quotes on a screen
- Speeches
- VIP lunch/dinner

For more details see "Extras" section below.

Assign Responsibility for Different Areas of Work

See "Preparing for the Open Mosque Day: Human Resources" below, page 14.

Event Publicity

Planning Ahead

At the outset, prepare a detailed plan of the stages in your event publicity. If you are inviting local VIPs, such as MPs and the Mayor, remember that you will need to give plenty of notice. Try to write to them two months in advance. (See Appendix 4 for a sample letter of invitation.)

Designing and Preparing Publicity Materials

You will need to design posters (including one giving information for potential volunteers), invitations and event booklets for people to refer to on the day. You will also need to prepare letters/emails of invitation. (See Appendices 1, 2 and 4 for sample publicity materials.

Identifying Who to Invite and Sending Invitations

Your main target audience will be those who are not of Muslim faith and background who are less likely to have visited a mosque or to have an understanding of Muslim faith and practice.

Please see the Partnerships manual in this series for advice on finding and contacting a range of community groups, businesses and stakeholders whom you could invite.

Groups/individuals you may like to approach include:

Local stakeholders:

- MPs
- MEPs
- London Assembly Members
- Mayor
- Councillors
- The Council
- NHS health professionals (doctors, nurses, dentists, managers and support staff)
- Schools and teachers
- Universities and academics
- Police or police community liaison officers
- Fire Brigade Officers

Local community groups:

- Faith groups and religious leaders
- Local support and development organisations
- Supplementary schools
- "Friends of" groups
- Tenants and residents organisations
- Older people's groups
- Women's Groups
- Cultural community groups
- Local charities and voluntary organisations
- Local campaign/issue-focused groups
- Sports groups
- Music/art groups

Local businesses

- Local business and shop owners

Local residents

- Local residents and neighbours whether Muslim or non-Muslim

When inviting a community group/religious group consider attending a service/meeting and inviting your guests in person, leaving printed invitations for reference. (On visiting places of worship see the *Celebrating Festivals* manual in this Community Dialogue Manual series.) (See Appendix 1 for a sample email for contacting a local place of worship.)

If you would like to involve local children in the event, it may be worth inviting a class or two to visit on a school day and devoting that day/afternoon to the school visit. You could open the mosque to the public one Sunday and to the school on the following Monday. (See Appendix 2 for a sample email for contacting a local school/college.)

Preparing a Press Release and Contacting the Media

Invite members of the press to attend and to cover the event in their publications. Contact as many local media outlets as possible two weeks in advance. Avoid sending emails with attachments. In your initial email give a brief, clear explanation of what is happening. The journalist will contact you if he/she is interested and you can then send a press release. (See Appendix 3 for a sample press release, and the *Media Engagement* manual in this series for guidance on writing and distributing press releases.) Follow up with a call one week before the event.

Preparing for Your Open Mosque Day

Human Resources

Early in the planning process, make particular people responsible for different areas of work:

- General coordination (finalising programme, chairing meetings and overseeing project in general)
- Publicity coordination
- Liaising with Imam and arranging Qur'an recitation, call to prayer, observation of prayers
- Design
- Non-designed materials (feedback forms, FAQ sheets) and gift packs
- Tours
- VIP guests (including arranging speeches, and lunch)
- Media
- Technical management
- Records of the event - filming, photography, interviews etc
- Displays
- Stalls - books, leaflets, artefacts
- HR planning
- Health and safety/first aid
- Refreshments
- Cleaning and decoration

Draft a Human Resource plan for the day (to identify roles and responsibilities, estimate number of volunteers needed and plan rota system).

Aim to have approximately the same number of male and female volunteers wherever possible. In particular, try to have both male and female volunteers in some of the most visible/prominent roles.

A Human Resource plan template is given below as a guideline. You may not need people to perform all the roles included here - what you need will depend on the size of the mosque, the number of volunteers available and how ambitious your plans are.

Sample Human Resource Plan and Coordination Plan

Role	Responsibility Description	No
EVENT COORDINATOR	Ensure flow of events, resources and material Ensure people are ready for duties Solve problems	1
WELCOMERS	Count number of guests entering the mosque Watch out for any security issues and act on them	1-2
REGISTRATION TABLE	Greet and register guests Hand out the Open Day Pack to each guest Ask guests to fill in feedback forms Say goodbye to guests and give any small gifts	1-3
TOUR SCHEDULE MANAGER	Manage tour roster, ensuring everyone is ready for their tour Limit the tour size to a max of 20 people per tour Introduce the Tour Guide Advise which section of the mosque the TG should take their group to Indicate to TG that 1hr limit is approaching	1
TOURGUIDES	Guide guests through the mosque Explain features of the mosque Explain key beliefs and practices of Islam Answer questions	2-5
BOOKSALES/ OTHER STALLS	Look after the books/magazines and other items for sale Keep a record of books on demand Get contact details for people who interested in obtaining publications in the future	1-2
VIP BUFFET TABLE	Prepare the buffet to be served for the VIP guests Ensure plenty of food on offer Pack up the food at completion if necessary	2-4
FOOD/STALL MANAGER	Manage the food outlay and control the crowd Place signs showing people area where food can be consumed Record names of people who brought cutlery to	1
FOOD AND REFRESHMENTS	Set up the food and beverage stand Maintain the serving of food, drinks and beverages Make sure the food stand is clean at all times	2-5
AMENITIES INSPECTOR	Check toilets for cleanliness & hygiene Empty the rubbish regularly Maintain the clean and tidy environment within the mosque	1
RECITER OF QURAN & ADHAN	Recite the Adhan for the noon prayer Recite the Qur'an after the noon prayer	1-2

Role	Responsibility Description	No
PHOTOGRAPHER	Take photos of the crowd, people working, kids etc	1-2
VIDEO CAMERAMAN	Tape a tour and one of the seminars Interview people before and after they attend the Open Day	1
EVENT JOURNALIST	Interview people, including guests, politicians, media Write an article	1
MEDIA LIAISON OFFICER	Look after media representatives and meet their needs	1
VIP LIAISON OFFICER	Look after VIP and meet their needs	1-2
USHERS	Escort VIP from front of the mosque to the VIP room	1-2

Preparing for Mosque Tours

Plan for tours and inform and train your guides.

You will need to:

- Plan which areas of the mosque to show
- Decide on a route through the mosque
- Plan how the tours will be organized (whether more than one can be in progress at one time; how many guests per tour etc)
- Plan the tour guides will talk about
- Give tour guides all the necessary information, advice and training

For guidance on preparing tours please see the "Tours" section below, p17 which includes "Tips for Tour Guides" and "The How To of Mosque Touring," with a sample script for tours.

Materials

Aside from publicity materials and designed materials, think about and prepare the following:

- A printed sheet/leaflet of FAQ's (see Appendix 9). You can give copies to your tour guides to help them prepare to answer people's questions. You can also give them to guests, in a welcome pack/gift pack, so that they can refer to them later.
- Produce a little event booklet to hand out at the event, giving the programme, organisers' contact details and any forthcoming events.
- Feedback forms so that you can learn from people's experiences (see Appendix 5 for sample form).

Tours[1]

Basics

A key element of preparation for tours is to prepare the content of what your guides will say. Experienced or particularly knowledgeable and confident volunteers may not need written materials, but many will need these at least to help with their own preparation. See the "How To of Mosque Touring" below and the sample material in Appendix 7 for guidance in preparing the content of your tours.

If your guides are not experienced make sure you get together and discuss in detail what they should say and how (see 'How To of Mosque Touring' below). It is also helpful to have a practice session before the actual day to build up the confidence of your tour guides and ensure that timings are kept to and that the programme flows flawlessly.

As well as route and content, think about how the tours will be organized. In a large mosque or other place of worship you may wish to stagger tours, allowing one to get started and then beginning the next perhaps fifteen or thirty minutes later.

In a small or medium-sized mosque there will probably not be room for two tours to be in progress without disturbing each other. In a smaller mosque one method is to ask quite a large group to come in and sit down all together. You can then deliver your talk to the whole group before allowing them to circulate in smaller groups to take a closer look.

Tips for Tour Guides

Personal Presentation

- Make sure you wear a name badge.
- Make sure you are well groomed and dressed appropriately. Bear in mind that people will notice your personal presentation and that even this may affect how they think about Muslims.
- First impressions last. The first thing you display should be a smile.
- Your body language can make people feel welcome or unwelcome. If your face has a pleasant, caring expression when you talk to them they will feel welcome.
- Be courteous and accommodating with regard to the sensitivities of the audience.
- Keep in mind the religious beliefs of the audience and be sensitive.

[1] With special thanks to the Australian Intercultural Society (www.intercultural.org.au) for providing material for this section.

Crowd Control

- Before starting the tour, gather the audience in a designated space for a collective start.
- In your introductory comments include safety information and notify guests that photography and filming will be taking place.
- Allow visitors to sit for most of the talk. If possible, seat your guests next to the *mihrab*. This will make it easier for you to explain the internal features of the mosque. Since the *mihrab* is the most intimate area of the mosque, visitors will feel privileged and at home.
- Organise seating for elderly guests if necessary.
- Identify if people have special needs at the beginning and cater for them.
- Ask guests to remove their shoes at the entrance of the mosque and explain how to do so. Remember, some guests will not be used to this, others might have difficulty in bending over in a crowded place. It is always advisable to have a few chairs nearby for guests to use when removing their shoes. The entrance to the mosque may become congested with so many guests removing their shoes; therefore it is advisable to spread a temporary mat on the floor to extend the area on which shoes can be removed.
- When taking your guests from one place to the next, always move first and invite them to follow you.

Communication

- Speak clearly; do not mumble and do not speak fast.
- Make sure there is eye contact with the whole audience when talking.
- Vary the tone of your voice and do not sound monotonous. Speaking in the same tone of voice constantly will bore people.
- Interact with the audience as much as possible.
- When moving from one area to another make sure you only start talking when the whole group is gathered.
- Use positive language rather than negative language. For example, instead of saying "Jesus is not the Son of God according to Islam" you could say, "In Islam, Jesus is a highly revered prophet and God is the only divine being."
- Speak loudly.
- Do not let yourself be dragged into political or religious debates. If people disagree with you openly, you could say, 'I am here to inform you about Islam's position on this subject matter. I am not here to convince you of any position.'

Content

- Avoid political subject matter.
- Avoid entering into debates with guests over religious matters.
- At the beginning, inform guests of the tour agenda and ask the group leader if they want the full tour or certain parts only. You may want to divide your tours into two parts:
    1. Tour of the mosque, external and internal, with explanation of key beliefs and practices of Islam – (30 to 45 minutes)
    2. Questions and answers session – (30 to 45 minutes)
- Ask how much time they have and stick to the time limit.
- Where possible, question and answer sessions should be done within the mosque in order to maximise guests' experience of the spirituality of the mosque. (If elderly guests cannot be comfortably seated, or if there are problems with congestion you may have to accommodate the Q&A sessions elsewhere.)
- Always repeat the question back to the audience. This has three benefits:
    1. It helps others in the audience who may not have heard the question
    2. It helps you understand the question better and gives you time to think about your answer
    3. It shows the questioner that you have understood the question
- Always answer the question asked even if it's an odd question. If necessary provide further explanation and clarification around the subject matter of the question.
- Clear and concise answers are the best answers. Do not give a lengthy answer. This might bore people and limit the time for others to ask questions.

'How To' of Mosque Touring

When conducting a tour, the tour guide should bear in mind that he or she has a limited time, usually one or one and a half hours. Tour guides should provide clear and concise information making the tour an enjoyable experience for the guests. The following list of information can be presented at different stages of a tour:

- Essentials of belief
- Pillars of Islam – focus on prayer
- Ablution for prayer
- Internal and external features of a mosque
- Congregational prayer
- Muslim community
- Islamic history
- Architecture of the mosque
- Specific information about your mosque
- Similarities between Islam and Christianity.

The tour of the mosque should be structured around the mosque building and features providing opportunities to stop, explain and take questions. Should your mosque have all of the following features, you can stop at these and explain their relevance and related information. Depending on the size and architecture of the mosque, locations could be:

1. Front of the mosque
2. Fountain (if applicable)
3. Main Door
4. Interior of the mosque
5. Gallery level (if applicable)
6. Funeral Parlour (if applicable).

Area-1: Front of the Mosque

It is probably best to start the tour at the front of the mosque. Take the guests to the front of the mosque where you can cover the following subjects:

- Give a brief description of what the tour will entail
- Explain the name of the mosque
- Mosque construction history including size of the site, cost, material used, time taken and communities involved
- Architecture of the mosque
- Funeral ceremony (if the mosque has the facilities)

Area-2: Fountain

If your mosque has a fountain, take the guests to the fountain area external to the mosque and cover the following:

- Fountain and its function
- Ablution and cleanliness in Islam
- Minarets – call to prayer

If, however, your mosque does not have a fountain it may still be worthwhile explaining the function of the fountain. Perhaps you could display pictures/posters of traditional fountains of famous mosques with a power point display at the beginning or end of the tour.

Area-3: Main Door

Take the guests to the main door just before entering the mosque and cover the following subjects:

- Door features
- Inscriptions on the doors
- Focus on compassion in Islam
- Why shoes need to be taken off

Area-4: Centre of the Internal Area

Take the guests into the mosque and gather them around the centre. Allow time for visitors to observe the internal architecture and décor of the mosque. Cover the following subjects:

- Dome and its purpose
- Decorations – time of completion, meanings of motifs
- Carpet, chandeliers and capacity of the mosque - purpose of the gallery level
- Monotheism in Islam – Allahu-akbar and Ikhlas in the core of the dome, no idols
- Concept of God in Islam and names of Allah (perimeter of dome)

- Tell the audience the names displayed around the mosque
- Early history of Islam
- Muslim contribution to civilisation
- *Kursi* and its function
- *Mimber* and Friday congregational prayer
- *Mihrab*, *Ka'bah*, role of Imam and direction of mosque
- Meaning and significance of *salat* and the various movements
- How the congregational prayer is conducted
- Community make-up of the congregation
- The purpose of chairs at the back, little clocks on the walls, beads on the floor

Area-5: Gallery Level (if applicable)

If your mosque has a gallery, take your guests up to the gallery level. Ask people to sit down at a time that is convenient to you and guests. You could cover the following subject matters:

- Explain verses on walls
- Revealed books and the Qur'an, its content and how it was compiled into a book
- Summarise the essentials of faith
- State the five pillars of Islam
- Explain the creed of Islam (*Shahada*) – large panel on top of *mihrab*
- Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), his role and his character
- Touch on *zakat*, fasting and pilgrimage (*salat* covered downstairs)
- Prophethood and Jesus (peace be upon Him) in Islam
- Resurrection and the Will of God

If your mosque doesn't have a gallery level, you could remain in the mosque area and cover the above issues. Ask the audience if they have any questions they want to ask.

Please see Appendix 7 for a sample script for Open Mosque Day tours. It is not ideal to read from a script, as it reduces eye contact and makes the tour less engaging and personal. However, the script may be helpful for preparation of tours and may be a useful resource for less experienced tour guides.

For frequently asked questions on Open Mosque Day tours and brief facts about Islam in Britain please see Appendices 8 and 9.

Extras

You could add interest to your event by organising some additional activities to compliment the mosque tour. No doubt, guests will benefit from this extra dimension to their visit. Possible ideas that can be incorporated into your Open Mosque Day are given below:

Recitation of the Holy Qur'an and Call to Prayer

Exposing your guests to a recitation from the Qur'an or the call to prayer can be a very spiritual experience. If possible, recitations should be repeated so that more people will be able to hear them. It would be beneficial to provide a translation of the verses recited by either reading the translation afterwards or by projecting the verses on a PowerPoint presentation as the recitation is taking place. Another method could be to include the translation of verses recited in the programme booklet distributed to all guests in their welcome packs.

Observing Prayers

Observing prayer will give visitors a valuable insight into the life of the mosque. In a large mosque you may be able to allow visitors to observe from the balcony. Notify visitors of this opportunity and of prayer times when you publicise the event.

In a smaller mosque without a substantial congregation at prayer times it may be worth a little organization to allow your visitors to be present for prayer. Ask a number of your volunteers or other members of the mosque to be present for a particular prayer time, or two, and ask the Imam to lead the prayer at that time. In good time before the prayer starts direct your visitors to somewhere where they can stand or sit and quietly observe. It is worth including in your programme guidelines for observers at prayer times: where they should stand/sit as well as how to behave. If they know how to be respectful observers they will feel more at ease and be able to appreciate the opportunity.

Displays – Posters, Artwork, Children's Work, Photos

Provide displays to give people something extra to look at. For example, a colourful and informative display on the Five Pillars, accessible introduction to Islam and Muslim life. Perhaps children may like to contribute pictures or posters. Photos from events in the life of the mosque are always interesting. If you have held other community events, such as a Noah's pudding event, you could make a display of the photos.

Stalls – Books, Magazines, Leaflets, Artefacts

You may wish to put out a stand of leaflets and publications for sale. People should have the chance to look at these at the end of their visit. You may want to place them near to the refreshments area.

Take care over the choice of publications to include. Your guests should feel that they are being invited, in a spirit of conversation, to explore Islam and understand it better, not that you are trying to convert them. Short introductions and guides to Islam are likely to be of interest. If possible offer some introductory leaflets for free or at a low price.

Traditional Islamic products and artefacts for sale can also add colour to the programme. Guests can purchase memorabilia to remind them of their experience. Such items can include perfumes, jewellery, rosary beads, Islamic art and calligraphy, bookmarks, key rings, fridge magnets etc.

Refreshments – Traditional Food and Drink

Provide refreshments for guests to enjoy after their visit. Traditional dishes which reflect the culture and cuisine of the congregation will enrich the visitor's experience. If enough members of the mosque are happy to make something to contribute, or if you have a budget for the event, you may be able to provide these for free. If you have to charge make sure prices are low; you do not want to put people off staying to share food and chat.

Make sure your refreshments are attractively presented and that the refreshments area is kept clean and tidy throughout the day.

You could also offer guests Noah's Pudding (Ashura pudding). Please see the *Noah's Pudding* manual in this series.

Ensure that some of the food is vegetarian/vegan, and that foods containing ingredients to which guests may be allergic (nuts, sesame) are clearly labeled.

Music, Nasheeds, Poetry, Rotating Quotes on a Screen

A PowerPoint display of quotes from Islamic sources, or indeed from a range of sources, would provide extra interest and inspiration. Use a projector to project it onto a screen or wall of the entrance hall or refreshments area. Including quotes from diverse sources will add to an atmosphere of sharing and mutual respect. You could use quotes from the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), Christian Gospels and the Torah and from inspirational figures such as Rumi, Gandhi and Mother Theresa (see the *Celebrating Festivals* Community Dialogue Manual for possible quotes).

You may want to play some soft instrumental music in the entrance hall or refreshments area (not inside the mosque). Choose something culturally interesting and not too obtrusive. You could, for example, play a recording of nasheeds or Sufi qawwalis. Alternatively, you could organize children from the mosque's congregation to perform live nasheeds or poetry.

Speeches

If you have VIPs coming, you may want to invite them to make a speech. If so you will need to ensure that there is an audience for them to address. Ask them to speak at a time that is likely to be busy, for example, just after a tour for which you already have plenty of bookings. Remember to include the time of the speech in publicity materials for the event.

Guests should be asked to keep speeches succinct.

VIP Lunch/Dinner

You may want to invite special guests to a VIP lunch or dinner with some of the organisers, board of trustees, governing body and the Imam. This will enable the Mosque Committee to talk about activities and projects delivered at the mosque in more detail with attending VIP guests.

Welcome/Gift Packs

Think about giving your guests a little welcome/gift pack. You could include a copy of your event booklet, a short pamphlet/introduction to Islam and a wrapped sweet such as Turkish delight or any other traditional sweets of the mosque's congregation. Alternatively, you could offer the sweets or desserts to guests upon their departure.

Children's Area/Children's Activities

Providing a room where children can play will make a visit easier for parents with young children. If you are offering to look after children while their parents go for a tour make sure that the volunteers in charge have experience working with children and have CRB checks. (See www.direct.gov.uk/crb. Provide some toys, books and healthy snacks.

Try also to provide some mosque-related activities for children to help them to enjoy learning about the mosque and Islam. Pictures to colour in, word searches, cross words and quizzes are good, simple options.

If you are having a day of tours for local schools, discuss learning materials with the schools. They may have appropriate materials already, or they may be keen for you to provide something.

Volunteers on schools' tours days should have experience working with children. If they will be with children for prolonged periods or will be alone with them they should have a CRB check.

Event Essentials

Attention to detail can determine the success of your Open Mosque Day. Below are some essential details worthy of your attention.

The Mosque

Make sure the mosque is very clean and aired. This could be a good opportunity to get those outstanding DIY jobs that need doing around the mosque finally done.

If possible bring in some flowers or plants to make it look at its best.

Health and Safety

Appoint a health and safety coordinator to talk through health and safety with the volunteers and make sure that they know what to do in an emergency.

Appoint a fire warden. Check that your fire alarm is working and that fire exits are fully accessible and clearly signposted.

Make sure that you have a well-equipped first aid kit and that your volunteers know where it is. Make sure you have a qualified First Aider on site in the event of an emergency.[2]

Guides should include safety information in their introductory comments, including the location of fire exits.

Guests

Make sure there are some volunteers whose responsibilities include simply taking time to chat to visitors. They may have another minor role too, but they should talk to their guests.

Make sure that there are people at the door to welcome people in and to thank them for coming as they leave. Don't let people just drift out without feeling that their attendance has been appreciated.

Leave a contact list or visitors' book in the entrance hall and invite guests to add their contact details so that you can keep in touch and inform them of future events. You may wish to include a column that they can tick if they wish to help at future events.

Encourage visitors to complete and return the feedback forms provided in their welcome packs.

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[2] St John's Ambulance (http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/training-courses.aspx) and the British Red Cross (http://www.redcrossfirstaidtraining.co.uk/) provide a range of first aid courses. Local branches can also offer first aid cover for events at competitive rates.

Alternatively, if you know a doctor or nurse personally you could ask him/her to be present at the event and provide First Aid cover.

See http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Accidents-and-first-aid/Pages/Introduction.aspx for a First Aid guide.

Filming and Photography

Try to take as many photographs as possible on the day for use on your website and in future newsletters, articles etc. If possible investing in a professional photographer can be worthwhile if you are likely to use the photos for future publications, brochures etc. Filming of parts or the entire event can also be a useful resource later.

Remember to get some taped interviews from visitors at the end of the tour offering reflections and feedback on their experience.

In their introductory comments, guides should inform guests that there will be some photography and filming during the evening and explain the purpose of this.

To Remember on the Day

Today is the most important part. If you look after your guests well today they will have a great time learning more about the mosque and the people who worship there. All your hard work will be worthwhile. So remember to smile. There is no substitute. It will make people feel welcome.

Talk to your guests. Be friendly; approach people. Resist the temptation just to talk with the other volunteers.

Make sure everyone knows exactly what their job is and is confident doing it.

Keep everything clean throughout the day.

Keep up the momentum and make sure the last visitors are as well looked after as the first. This will be easier if you have enough volunteers to work in shifts.

Checklist

Planning: Why, What, How, When, Where

(At least 2-3 months in advance)

- All elements of your event should tie into the main objective.
- Tell the whole congregation of your mosque [or your university Islamic society, or group of Muslim friends] about the idea and see who is interested in helping to plan the event. Form a planning group to take responsibility for organising the event, but remember to keep the whole congregation updated regularly on how you're doing. Your planning group will need to meet regularly, perhaps once a fortnight, with further discussion as necessary between meetings.
- Have a meeting with the Imam and ask for his suggestions/advice.
- Think of possible partners, such as local stakeholders, businesses or community groups (whether Muslim or not). Working in partnership has many advantages (see *Building Partnerships* Community Dialogue Manual for details and for full advice on finding partners).
- Decide what you want to include in the event and devise your event programme. See "Extras" section.
- In your planning group decide on a target audience. Are you simply aiming to attract as many people as possible from the neighbourhood, or will you contact the local church, synagogue etc?
- Set a date. Make sure that your event is not on the same day as another significant event. If you would like a particular VIP guest to be present to do a speech then it may be worthwhile agreeing the date with them according to their availability. Think of your target audience when setting dates.

Practical Priorities

(At least 2-3 months in advance)

- Work out what the event is likely to cost in total.
- Ensure that your mosque's congregation can meet the cost of the event together. If the mosque doesn't have a budget for this kind of event, ask for donations from the congregation - after Friday prayers might be a good time.
- Write to the council regarding parking or similar permits.

Design

- Design posters.
- Design A5 invitations.
- Design event booklets (giving the programme, organisers' contact details and any forthcoming events).

Marketing and Invitations

(Begin 2-3 months in advance)

- Plan marketing with any partners. If you are organising this in partnership, publicity and attracting guests will be easier. (See *Building Partnerships* Community Dialogue Manual for further information.)
- Send letters to the Mayor, councillors, MPs and other important people in your community inviting them to the event. Give two months' notice if you can.
- Assemble publicity material: invitations, posters, fliers etc.
- Send invitations at least two months in advance if possible.
- Give plenty of invitations to the priest of your local church, or the rabbi of your local synagogue and ask him/her to announce the event after a service. Even better, go along and invite the congregation yourself.
- Put up posters advertising the event in local shops, places of worship, Post Offices etc. Where possible leave piles of fliers/invitations for people to pick up. Or use posters with tear-off strips giving essential details of the event.
- Prepare a big banner to display just outside the mosque on the day to attract people in or prepare boards and large posters. Balloons will also get people's attention; you may wish to buy some of these.
- 4-8 weeks in advance announce the details of the event after Friday prayers and give out invitations to your congregation.
- Prepare a press release (see Appendix 3).
- Identify and contact as many media outlets as possible two weeks in advance.
- Follow up with a phone call the week before.
- 1-2 weeks prior to the event send reminder emails to confirmed guests.

Preparing for the Open Mosque Day - HR, Tours, Materials

- Prepare your Human Resources plan which details all the jobs that need to be done and delegate responsibility for different areas of work: tours, cleaning and decoration etc. See page 17.

- Put together and print items needed for your welcome pack such as the event booklet, feedback form, FAQs sheet. (For a sample feedback form and FAQs see Appendices 5 and 9.)
- Find your volunteers and assign them to the various roles. Make sure you have a balance of male and female volunteers.
- Plan the content of your tours and provide information/sample scripts for guides.
- Arrange training/practice sessions for guides.

Extras

- Fix length and topic of speeches with any VIPs invited to speak.
- Arrange food, timing, volunteers and attendees for VIP meal.
- Decide if there will be displays and a promotional stand with books on Islam (free or for sale). If so, make sure you have all you need or order extra materials in good time.
- If you are going to invite guests to observe prayer, plan timing, space and seating for guests etc.
- If you wish to use a professional photographer or cameraman to capture your events, make sure you book them in advance. Otherwise, find experienced volunteers for your photography and filming needs.
- Find suitable music you want to play in the courtyard, entrance hall or refreshments area (nasheeds, Sufi music or similar).
- Prepare displays, or make sure that volunteers are doing so (PowerPoint quotation displays, children's posters etc).
- Make sure you have the necessary technical equipment for playing music and/or for a PowerPoint display (laptop and projector) or show (microphone(s)), as well as any microphones needed for guides. Test all the equipment in the relevant area.
- Prepare to provide a kids' play area with toys and children's books.
- Buy/prepare items for gift bags and assemble these.
- Decide on the type and quantity of food. The response generated by the promotion material will give you some indication of likely attendance, although you should allow for some guests just turning up on the day.
- Decide to buy or make the food. Consider cost effectiveness as well as effect on the overall quality of the event. If you are buying food from elsewhere check well in advance (at least two weeks) that your chosen supplier can provide it.
- Take allergies into account; for example, be careful to provide information on whether food may contain nuts.
- Cater for vegetarians.

General Practical Preparations

(In the month before the event)

- Decide on dress policy and make sure any requirements are communicated to visitors, for example in the reminder email.
- And make sure that guests have clear information on what to expect on the day: include a provisional programme in the reminder email.
- Buy a visitors' book and/or a clipboard for a contact list.
- Buy plenty of pens for feedback forms, contact lists etc.
- Check health and safety considerations: working fire alarm; accessible, clearly signposted fire exits; limits on numbers; first aid kit; fully informed volunteers.
- Make sure that there are enough black bags for the rubbish.
- Prepare a clear guide of Do's and Don'ts for volunteers on the day of the event (see "Tours: Tips for Tour Guides" above page 17). A rehearsal beforehand can be very useful.
- Decide on a photographer/cameraman for the day if using your own volunteers.

(In the final few days)

- Make a list of all the jobs that need to be done on the day and in the final stages of preparation and assign these to specific people.
- Have a meeting with all the volunteers a day before the event and go through checklists, making sure everyone is clear on what they are doing on the day of the event.
- Prepare the food (the day before) or collect it (the day before the event or the morning of the event).
- Make sure the mosque and any adjacent areas are thoroughly cleaned and decorated the night before the event.
- Put out a visitors' book/contact list and pens for people to leave contact details and brief comments (including a column that they can tick if they wish to help at future events).
- Purchase items for the food stalls such as plates, cups, serving utensils, gloves, bin bags etc.

During the Event

- Volunteers should arrive at least an hour in advance for a briefing.
- Volunteers should engage with visitors, NOT group together themselves.
- Everybody should speak English on the day as far as possible.
- Visitors should be greeted and then shown to a registration desk. In this area there will be volunteers responsible for organising tour groups as well as volunteers to greet them and invite them to sign contact lists.
- When a suitable number of guests have arrived they should be assigned to groups and to a group guide. Limiting groups to around fifteen people will help ensure that everyone can hear. If they need to wait a while for the next tour it is a good idea to direct them towards the refreshments area and take some time to talk with them.
- In their introductory comments guides should include safety information and notify guests that photography and filming will be taking place.
- During the visit guides should be careful not to shout over any other guides or groups.
- Refreshments should be available for each group so that they can sit down and discuss their visit.
- Before visitors leave someone should ensure that they have signed the visitors' book/ contact lists and have filled in their feedback forms and handed them in.
- Remember to record interviews with visitors giving reflections and feedback on the event.
- After the event the volunteers should stay to help clean the mosque and dispose of any rubbish.

Follow-up

- Write thank you letters/emails to all those who helped.
- Put all the photographs from the day on your website, if you have one.
- Within a week, get in touch with all who came on the day and thank them for coming (see Appendix 6).
- Send the link to photographs uploaded onto website in any thank you emails. Also include any memorable comments.
- Process feedback forms/questionnaires.
- Reimburse any expenses.
- Edit video footage and add to website if required.
- Hold a post-event debriefing meeting with the planning group and volunteers. Evaluate the event and discuss improvements for next time. Ensure that everybody's efforts are acknowledged and appreciated.
- And then, keep in touch with your guests and get to know them better. Suggest that they attend/help with other events.

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE MANUAL SERIES

Appendices

03

You can copy materials from appendices via:

www.dialoguesociety.org/publications

Sample Email for Contacting Your Local Church, Synagogue or Other Faith Group

Dear [Title Surname],

My name is [Name Surname] and I am writing to you on behalf of the congregation of [Name of Mosque].

We are organising an Open Mosque Day. In a spirit of friendship and conversation we hope to give members of the local community an engaging insight into the life of the mosque and to promote greater understanding of Islam.

The event will be held on [Date]. We very much hope that members of [Their Organisation] will be able to attend.

If you would be happy to pass on some invitations to your congregation and to display a poster in the [church/synagogue/meeting venue] I can send you these materials. OR Perhaps I could attend a [service/meeting] within the next few weeks and invite the [congregation/group] in person? If that would be possible I will bring some written invitations and posters for your members' future reference.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

[Name Surname]

[Address]

[Telephone]

[Email]

Sample Email for Contacting Your Local School/College

Dear [Title Surname],

My name is [Name Surname]/ I am [Child's Name Surname]'s mother/father] and I am writing to you on behalf of the congregation of [Name of Mosque].

We are organising Open Mosque Days on [Date] and [Date] to give members of the local community an engaging insight into the life of the mosque and to promote greater understanding of Islam. We would very much like to involve local children. We envisage opening the mosque to the public on [Date], and inviting classes from your school to visit on the following Monday, [Date].

A visit to the mosque should contribute to the children's progress in National Curriculum RE. It will provide an encounter with the place of worship of a major religious tradition, with the people who worship there and with their religious practices. We hope that this encounter will help the development of respect and sensitivity towards diverse religious traditions. We note that the National Curriculum suggests that Key Stage 4 students should have the opportunity to visit places of worship and observe worship and feel that this could be an ideal opportunity for them to do so.

We hope that some of your students will be able to attend with their teachers. We could take up to three classes of up to 30 students each over the course of the day. Volunteer guides will be conducting tours on the Sunday and we would select those guides used to working with children to help with the visits of school groups.

We welcome teacher collaboration and I would be very happy to come and discuss the proposed visit with you or your colleagues at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

[Name Surname]

Sample Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Edmonton Mosque Invites Locals to See Islam for Themselves

On [Date] the Mevlana Rumi Mosque will be opening its doors and inviting local residents of all religions and none to explore the architecture and history of the building and the beliefs and practice of those who worship there. The organisers aim to make local people more familiar and comfortable with Islam, a religion constantly associated in the press with a minority radical element. In the spirit of dialogue, volunteers from the mosque are working in partnership with All Saints Church Edmonton to organise the event.

The day will feature tours, free refreshments, children's activities and a chance to observe prayer in the mosque. The Worshipful the Mayor of Edmonton, Cllr [Name Surname], will be present to say a few words, and representatives from religious groups, the local police force, schools and community groups will be attending. Groups from local schools are also being invited to visit on the following day.

[Name], Director of the Rumi Mosque and Dialogue Centre, said: "We at the Mevlana Rumi Mosque, along with our valued partners at All Saints' Edmonton, are delighted at the level of interest in this event. We look forward to giving our guests the chance to see for themselves what goes on in the mosque."

Cllr [Name Surname] of Edmonton Borough Council said: "Having been present at the opening of the Rumi Mosque, and having seen all the good work that it's been doing, I am very excited about this event. I hope it will help people to associate the mosque not with some kind of threat but with the valuable community work and rich spiritual life which it hosts week in, week out."

#Ends#

Notes to editors

1. For further information contact [Name Surname], Director of the Mevlana Rumi Mosque on [Email Address] or on [Number].
2. The Mevlana Rumi Mosque was founded by the Anatolian Muslims Society in 2009. See http://www.rumicentre.org.uk/aboutus.html
3. All Saints' Anglican Church, Edmonton, is a diverse community of Christians with a strong history of commitment to social justice and intercultural relations. It has been collaborating with the Mevlana Rumi Mosque since its foundation. Contact the vicar, Jeremy Mann on jmann@ssaci.org.

Sample Letter of Invitation to a Local VIP

[Your Name]

[Position and Organisation]

[Address] [Postcode]

[Telephone] [Email]

[Date]

[Title Name Surname]

[Position and Organisation]

[Address] [Post Code]

Dear [Title Surname],

RE: Invitation to Open Mosque Day, [Date]

On behalf of the congregation and Events Committee of [Name of Mosque], I would like to invite you to an Open Mosque Day, to be held on [Date] at [Name of Mosque].

We anticipate welcoming local people from all walks of life to visit the mosque and meet with its diverse Muslim congregation.

The [Name of Mosque] has a daily congregation of [Number] people and on Friday prayers it attracts more than [Number] worshippers. Its unusual classical architecture draws visitors from schools and the public throughout the year. The open attitude of the mosque and its people make a major contribution in fostering interfaith and intercultural understanding in the local community.

We would be honoured to have your presence on the day, in particular at the VIP lunch scheduled for 1.30pm. If you are able to arrive by 12.45pm we would like to invite you to observe the midday prayer.

Please contact me by telephone or email to confirm your attendance or for further information. If you are able to attend, please also let me know of any dietary requirements.

Yours sincerely,

[Name Surname]

[Position]

[Organisation]

Sample Feedback Form

Open Mosque Day Feedback

For each question please tick the box closest to what you feel.

Thank You !

Were you made to feel welcome?	☐ *Yes, Very* ☐ *Yes* ☐ *Not Very* ☐ *No*
Did you find the tour interesting?	☐ *Yes, Very* ☐ *Yes* ☐ *Not Very* ☐ *No*
Were your questions on the mosque and on Islam answered during the tour/ by volunteers?	☐ *Yes, all of them* ☐ *Yes, mostly* ☐ *Some* ☐ *No*
Were there issues that you felt were neglected?	☐ *No* ☐ *Yes* *If Yes:, which ones:* _____
Did you enjoy the demonstrations?	☐ *Yes, very much* ☐ *Yes* ☐ *Quite* ☐ *No*
Did you enjoy observing the prayer?	☐ *Yes, very much* ☐ *Yes* ☐ *Quite* ☐ *No*
Did you find the displays interesting?	☐ *Yes, very much* ☐ *Yes* ☐ *Quite* ☐ *No*
Which part of the Open Mosque Day did you find most enjoyable? Please comment	_____ _____ _____
How were the refreshments?	☐ *Very good* ☐ *Good* ☐ *OK* ☐ *Not so good*
Would you want to come to another community event?	_____ _____ _____
Where do you expect to see the people you met today again?	_____ _____ _____
Please add any comments or suggestions:	_____ _____ _____

Sample Thank You Email for Attendees

Dear [Title Surname/First Name (depending on whether you spoke on first name terms at the event)],

I am emailing on behalf of [Name of Organisation(s)] to thank you for attending our Open Mosque Day on [Day]. It was a pleasure to meet you and we really appreciated your support for our event. I hope that we will meet again before long.

We are planning to hold another event to bring the community together. [Brief explanation of what the event is]. If you would like to help in any way with this event, provisionally planned for [Date], I would love to hear from you. We will be having our next planning meeting on [Date].

I will be sending out details of the event nearer the time.

Once again, many thanks for your support.

With best wishes,

[Name Surname]

[Address]

[Telephone]

[Email]

Sample Script for Tours[3]

The following is a sample script for a tour guide to use when conducting the tour. It is intended to provide you with some ideas about some of the information and content that can be provided during the tour. You are welcome to use, change and better the script. The following script was prepared for a tour of Auburn Gallipoli Mosque in Sydney. Remember to replace those parts that relate specifically to the Gallipoli Mosque with similar information for the mosque which you will be touring.

Area-1: Front of the Mosque

Good morning everyone. My name is [Name Surname] and I will be your tour guide today. In the next hour, I will take you on a tour of our mosque and give you some information on the beliefs and practices of Islam. While we will have a question time at the end of the tour when you can ask questions about Islam and the mosque, you are welcome to ask questions relevant to the tour as we go along.

We are standing at the front of the mosque. The name of the mosque is Auburn Gallipoli Mosque. The mosque management committee thought that the name "Gallipoli" would reflect the shared legacy of the Australian society and the main community behind the construction of the mosque, the Australian Turkish Muslim Community.

The first mosque on this site was opened for worship on 3rd November 1979. It was a house with the internal walls removed to provide open space. The construction of the current mosque began in 1986. The construction took a painstaking 13 years. The mosque was officially opened on 28th November 1999. The construction time was prolonged mainly due to the time needed to raise the necessary funds through donations.

The project was initiated and largely funded by the Turkish community. The total cost of building the mosque was approximately 6 million dollars. Many other local Muslim members, irrespective of their ethnic background, greatly contributed towards the construction and building costs of the mosque. 50 per cent of the mosque congregation is of Turkish background, while the remaining is of mixed ethnic origin.

The site on which the mosque stands has a total area of 1 acre or 4,000 square meters. The construction of the mosque was undertaken by Ahmet Erbil.

[Interesting architectural details could be included here.]

The platform you see in the front courtyard is used for the funeral ceremony. In accordance with Islamic tradition, when a Muslim dies, the body is ritually washed and covered with a simple white shroud. It is placed in a coffin and brought to the

[3] With thanks to the Australian Intercultural Society (www.intercultural.org.au) for their kind permission to edit and reproduce this script.

mosque for a special funeral prayer in which the whole congregation participates. In this prayer, the imam stands right in front of the coffin and the congregation stands behind the imam in rows. After the prayer, the body is buried in a cemetery without the coffin. Friends and neighbours comfort and look after the family of the deceased during this process.

Let us now move to the Fountain area.

Area-2: Fountain

One of the characteristics of the Ottomans is that they turned every functional part of a mosque into a work of art. What was a simple set of taps at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) and in his first mosque in Medina, was transformed into a decorative ornate Fountain called Shadirwan by the Ottomans. The Shadirwan is used by Muslims to make ablution (ritual washing) in preparation for prayer.

You will find that the Shadirwan is usually an external feature in mosques built in Ottoman times. However, some modern day constructions feature the Shadirwan inside the mosque building. This is usually due to lack of space and for convenience in colder climates. The marble pieces of the fountain were brought from Turkey and assembled on site. Inside the fountain dome you see a sample of the elaborate decorations you will see inside the mosque. The Arabic calligraphy around the perimeter is a verse from the Qur'an that describes how to make ablution. The verse reads,

"O you who believe! When you intend to offer prayer, wash your faces and your hands (and arms) up to the elbows, rub your heads (by passing wet hands over), and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. If you are in a state of ritual impurity, bathe your whole body…" (Qur'an 5:6)

The verse continues and describes what to do if water cannot be found. This is an example of the inherent flexibility of Islamic practice. Whenever some act genuinely cannot be done, there are always a number of suitable replacements. In the case of ablution, when there is no water one can use clean sand to make ablution.

While ablution cleans a person's limbs, it also prepares a person mentally and spiritually for the prayer.

Islam puts great emphasis on personal hygiene. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) for example used to brush his teeth five times a day before ablution and strongly recommended Muslims to do so as well. This recommendation was made 14 centuries ago.

The external tower is called a minaret. It used to read the *azan*, that is the call to prayer. [Optional: play tape of a good reading of the *azan*]. The *azan* consists of announcing the greatness of God and pronouncing the creed of Islam that there is

only one God and Muhammad is His messenger as well as inviting people to prayer. The shape of the minaret symbolises the unity of God. The pen shape of the minaret symbolises the lofty place of knowledge in Islam. The first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) was a command 'to read'. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said a Muslim is to acquire knowledge from cradle to grave.

The *azan* is the first step to prayer for a Muslim. Like ablution, it prepares a Muslim both mentally and spiritually for standing before God to pray.

Let us now move to the main entry door.

Area-3: Main Door

There are three doors to the mosque. Theses timber doors were again crafted in Turkey. One of the characteristics of the design is that there are no nails on the doors. Small pieces are meticulously glued together to embroider the doors.

The Arabic inscription on the northern entry door is a saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), which reads "Hurry for prayer before its time lapses" while the southern entry door says, "Hurry for repentance before death arrives".

The main door inscription reads "In the name of God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". This phrase is repeated at the beginning of 113 chapters of the Qur'an. All Muslims are encouraged to start their daily activities and chores by reciting this statement. Before eating, sleeping, praying, entering or leaving a Muslim should always begin with by saying "In the name of God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". The significance of this is that a Muslim believes that he is created to act, live and undertake all that he does for the sake of God. That his/her lifelong task and purpose is to please God. What is more, a Muslim believes that everything is under God's power and will. Therefore, Muslims begin with the name of God, end with the name of God and live under the name of God.

The word "forgiveness" appears exactly twice as many times as the word "punishment" in the Qur'an. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) also said that God's forgiveness and mercy comes before his wrath. The grace, mercy and compassion of God are greatly highlighted in Islam.

Because the mosque is a place of worship, we are expected to take our shoes off before entering the mosque, just as Moses was ordered by God to take his shoes off before approaching the burning bush. Also, Muslims prostrate themselves on the ground when they worship God. Hence the area where they pray needs to be kept clean. Therefore, can I now kindly ask you to remove your shoes and place them on the shoe rack before entering the mosque.

Area-4: Middle of the Internal Area

The internal architecture of the mosque is such that a central dome is supported by 8 semi domes and columns. Structurally, the dome gives the maximum open space

without the need to break it with obstructive columns. Domed structures also give very good acoustics and are extremely good for natural ventilation. The dome is a characteristic feature of Muslim religious architecture and has symbolic meanings. It is a towering symbol of spiritual ascent to heaven. The shape of the dome also reflects the perfect balance of tawhid or the unity of God. The dome's exterior, which extends towards the infinity of heaven, is the same shape as the interior.

The internal calligraphy and decorations of the mosque is classical Celi Sulus style. It was designed by the famous calligrapher Huseyin Oksuz and painted manually by a team of five Turkish artists in about six months.

The dome structure, internal decorations and the pure beauty within simplicity gives a very holy and spiritual atmosphere to the whole mosque.

The carpet of the mosque was especially designed for use in this mosque and manufactured in Istanbul. There are 25 various crystal chandeliers of various sizes that were also manufactured in Istanbul.

Auburn Gallipoli Mosque is arguably the largest mosque in NSW if not Australia. The capacity of the mosque is approximately 2000. This capacity includes the gallery level and the covered area in the courtyard. The mosque is filled every Friday to its maximum capacity.

The diameter of the dome is 16.5 m and the height from the base to the peak of the dome is 25 m. The decoration on the dome depicts the sky. The central motif represents the sun, the blue and white motifs represent clouds and the motifs at the base of the dome represent earth and vegetation.

At the centre of the dome the phrase Allah-u Akbar is inscribed. It means, "God is the Greatest". Around this phrase is inscribed one of the shortest Chapters in the Qur'an, Al-Ikhlas (the Purity) meaning "Say, He is God, the One and Only. He is the Self-Sufficient Master. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him." (Qur'an 112:1-4). The concept of God in Islam is summed up well in these verses. While it tells us what God is at the same time it informs us of what God is not. The absolute unity of God underscores the monotheism of Islam and it is the most important tenet in the religion. Therefore you will not find any statues or icons of God in mosques. Muslims believe that the transcendence of God cannot be adequately expressed in human imagery. Muslims believe that such figurative art will not only violate the unity and divinity of God, it will also distract a worshipper from the transcendence of God.

Around the 50m perimeter of the dome, the 99 beautiful names and attributes of God as mentioned in the Qur'an are inscribed in frames with a height of 50cm. Muslims believe that God has an infinite number of names and attributes but that only a select number of these were revealed to man. For example, the name Al-Rahman means the Most-Gracious, Al-Rahim means Most Merciful, Al-Adl means The

Just, Al-Kerim means Most Generous, Al-Alim means All Knowing, Al-Gaffar means All Forgiving and so on. Muslims believe that everything is a manifestation of God's name and attributes.

Just under the dome perimeter in the 8 triangular areas formed by the semi-dome arcs 8 names are inscribed in Arabic letters within circular frames. These are Allah (God), Muhammad, Ebu Bakr, Omar, Othman, Ali, Hasan & Husayin. Allah means 'The God' in Arabic and is used by Muslim and Christian Arabs alike. All Muslims prefer to say 'Allah' when they are referring to God. Muhammad (peace be upon Him) is the Prophet of Islam. Hasan and Husayin are the grandsons of the Prophet.

Ebu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali are the names of the first four Caliphs, the leaders of the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him). They were also among the closest friends of the Prophet. They were elected or selected democratically by the Muslims and altogether their rule lasted for about 30 years. The office of the Caliph represented the unity of the Muslim nation.

Muslims developed a breathtaking civilisation based on commerce, art, culture and science. Humanity's legacy of knowledge was gathered in large centres of learning. When there were only a few libraries in the whole of Europe, there were hundreds of libraries in Baghdad alone, with thousands of manual scripts in each library. Inspired by the Qur'an's emphasis on reason, Muslim scientists developed the scientific methodology and academic research that is at the heart of modern learning today. A range of scientific disciplines such as Algebra, Chemistry, Biology and Geology were started or significantly developed by Muslim scientists. An encyclopedia of Medicine, The Canon, written by Ibn-I Sina (known as Avicenna in the West) was used as a primary text in Europe for about 700 years.

There are three internal features to a mosque. The *mihrab* is the place where the imam leads daily prayers and it indicates the direction of *Ka'bah*, called the *qibla*. The *Ka'bah* is a cube-shaped structure located at the centre of the most sacred mosque in Mecca, the birthplace of Islam. The *Ka'bah* is believed to be the first temple erected by Adam for the purpose of worshipping one God. Prophet Abraham (peace be upon Him) rebuilt it on the same foundations thousands of years later with his son Ishmail (peace be upon Him). Therefore, the ground that *Ka'bah* stands is the most sacred site for Muslims and all Muslims face in the direction of *Ka'bah* when they pray.

The *mimber* is the feature with stairs and is used by the imam to deliver the Festive (Eid) and Friday sermons to the gathered congregation. The imam delivers his sermon at this height to enable congregation and imam to see each other.

Since the *mimber* is considered the lectern of the Prophet (peace be upon Him), Ottoman imams did not want to occupy it for purposes other than worship-related sermons. Hence they have introduced the *kursu*, which is the high chair next to the column. The imam or other speakers use it to deliver pre-prayer sermons or for any other informal speeches.

A person who leads a prayer is called the imam. Islam has no clergy. Therefore an imam is not anointed. Any person who knows how to lead the prayer can hold the position of imam for a given prayer service. For convenience and community-related services we have a full time imam in this mosque. When he is not present, someone is selected democratically from the congregation to lead the prayer. Usually this is the person with the best knowledge of the Qur'an.

A congregational prayer is conducted by the imam standing in from of the *mihrab*, as so [here demonstrate] and people line up in the rows marked on the carpet starting from the middle. People make sure that shoulders are touching one another. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said, "Make sure your shoulders are touching so that devil does not walk between you." What he was referring to was the devil of pride, social status, wealth and any thought of racial superiority. Through congregational prayer, Islam demonstrates the oneness of humanity. Ladies usually stand behind the rows of men when praying in congregation purely for their comfort and to ensure that all can have maximum focus for prayer. For practical reasons ladies usually pray at the gallery level in this mosque.

Let me now demonstrate a unit of prayer and explain the significance of the movements. The word in the Qur'an for the prescribed daily prayer is '*salat*'. *Salat* literally means 'hot connection'. Therefore, for a Muslim prayer is establishing a live and direct connection with God. As part of the prayer a Muslim worshipper goes through a set of movements such as lifting both hands up to shoulder height, standing up with hands tied on the body, bowing down, prostration and sitting down. The physical movements in the prayer glorify, exalt and praise God as well as symbolising the person's submission to God. When the person is upright, making the intention to pray for the sake of God, he or she begins the prayer by saying, "God is the Greatest". At the same time, he or she lifts both hands up to the level of the head meaning to throw the world and worldly affairs behind and to be alone in the court of God. When the worshipper adopts the bowing posture, he or she lowers the self in the court of God and in doing so glorifies God. When the worshipper goes into the position of prostration, he or she lowers the self to the absolutely lowest point in the court of God, displaying the ultimate level of physical glorification of God.

Physical movements in a Muslim prayer also display progressively increasing levels of submission to God. In standing position with hands tied in front, it is as if the worshipper is saying 'my hands are tied, I submit to You and to your will'. The bowing down position is a higher level of submission. Breaking the defence mechanisms of the self, it is as if he is saying "I bow down only to You, I cannot see what's in front of me. My God, I face You defenceless." The prostration is the ultimate level of submission. It is as if he is saying "my God, I am lowering my head to the same level as my feet. With respect to You I am zeroing myself. I am completely defenceless towards Your will. Even myself is not between You and me".

Expressing one's limits and weaknesses and recognising the greatness and glory of God is the essence of worship and the vehicle of attaining spiritual closeness to

God. The one who sees himself above everyone and everything can never develop spiritually. Hence, movements in the prayer break the delusions of self-glory and open to door to spiritual development.

There are some chairs at the back that are used by elderly or disabled persons. The clocks on the walls indicate the times of the five daily prayers. The beads on the floor are used by members of the congregation to say a certain formula of praise, glorification and exaltation after the prayer.

Let us now go up to the Gallery Level.

Area-5: Gallery Level

There are four 6 metre by 2.5 metre panels on the walls, inscribed with key Islamic texts. [Explanation of the texts could be given here.]

Let me now summarise the six essentials of belief and the five pillars of Islam. There are six tenets of Islam.

- Existence and unity of God
- Existence of angels
- Holy books revealed to humanity
- Prophets sent to humanity by God
- Resurrection and life after death and
- Divine Will & determination

I have already touched on the concept of God in Islam. And Islam's emphasis that God is One and Only. No other entity shares his divinity.

Belief in the existence of angels is also important in Islam. According to Islam, angels are created from light. Because of this they can travel at very high speeds. There are countless angels spread throughout the heavens and earth. Angels are neither male nor female. Consequently, they do not reproduce. They do not eat or drink as we do. However, just as we are nourished by air, water and food and derive pleasure from them, so are the angels nourished by the lights of remembrance, glorification, worship, knowledge and love of God and receive pleasure from them.

Angels study in adoration both the material and immaterial dimensions of God's Kingdom and get satisfaction from observing the manifestations of His Grace and Majesty. Essentially all angels obey the commands of God Almighty and worship and praise Him.

Muslims believe in all prophets sent to humanity from the first prophet, Adam (peace be upon Him) to the last prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon Him). In human history, thousands of prophets were sent to all nations at appropriate time intervals. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said that more than one hundred thousand prophets were sent to humanity. Among the 25 mentioned in Qur'an, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are among the most notable. However, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) never saw himself to be above other prophets. He said, "Do not see me above my brother Jonah."

No Muslim can stay a Muslim if he rejects any one of the Prophets. And no Muslim is a Muslim if he rejects Jesus. The Qur'an says about Jesus, "…Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, was an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him. So believe in God and His apostles..." *(Qur'an, An-Nisa, 4:171)*

According to the Qur'an all Scriptures including the Qur'an came to affirm the primary message of God, which is "to believe in one God and to worship Him only". Therefore, Islam does not claim to be a new religion but the same reality that people need to be reminded of whenever the message somehow gets lost or confused. In Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon Him) is only a messenger. He has no divinity and no Muslim worships Muhammad (peace be upon Him) as such. He was born in 570 AD. In his youth and adult life, he was famous for his fidelity, integrity and trustworthiness. His father and mother died when he was a child. He worked in trade. He met Khadija and married her when he was age 25 upon her proposal. She was 40 years old. He led an ordinary life through his adulthood. In his thirties, he started to retreat to a cave at Mt Hira for worship and reflection. At the age of 40 (610), he was appointed as a prophet of God through Archangel Gabriel at Mount Hira. The first people to accept Islam were, in general, slaves, poor people & youth. People were struck by Muhammad's (peace be upon Him) perfect character and the eloquence of the Qur'an and the profound realities it articulated.

As a result of persecution all Muslims migrated to Medina in 622. An eight-year struggle with the Meccans started. Muhammad (peace be upon Him) put together the first 52 article constitution is history. In 23 years, all of the Arabian Peninsula was Muslim. In the process there were conflicts, however at no point in time were people forced into the religion. At the Farewell Pilgrimage Muhammad (peace be upon Him) gave a speech that could be considered to be the first Human Rights declaration in history to more than 100,000 people. Muhammad (peace be upon Him) passed away on 632 AD at the age of 63 as the most successful prophet ever.

Muslims believe that throughout human history, God has spoken to humanity through divine revelation compiled in small or larger holy books. Earlier prophets received smaller books such as 10 pages revealed to Abraham. As humanity matured larger books were revealed. Islam recognises four major revealed books, the Torah to Moses (peace be upon Him), the Psalms to David (peace be upon Him), the Gospel to Jesus (peace be upon Him), and the Qur'an to Muhammad (peace be upon Him).

Revelation occurs through Archangel Gabriel to the respective prophet. In the case of Muhammad (peace be upon Him), when revelation came the prophet would go in a trance. His body would be heavier than it actually was. According to authentic reports, if he were riding a camel, the camel would have to sit under the weight.

The Qur'an is a book of 604 pages, 114 chapters and over 6000 verses. Chapters and verses vary in length. The Qur'an was revealed over 23 years starting from

610 CE. When portions of The Qur'an were revealed, the Prophet (peace be upon Him) himself and most of his companions memorised the passages. He had up to 40 scribes who recorded the revelation according to his direction. Before the decease of the Prophet (peace be upon Him), the whole Qur'an was read twice in front of the large prayer congregation in Ramadan. After Muhammad's (peace be upon Him) decease, the first caliph, Ebu Bakr commissioned a committee, chaired by Zayd-bin-Sabit, which compiled separate written texts together into a book. Each verse had to be witnessed by at least two trustworthy companions.

While the Qur'an touches on a diversity of topics, it essentially covers four main topics: monotheism, prophethood, resurrection and justice. The fourth subject is particularly important in Islamic practice. The Qur'an describes the justice seen in the universe in its balance and equilibrium. Every commandment of God contained in the Qur'an directs us to find Sirat-al Mustakeem, which means the straight & balanced path in our personal and social life. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said, "Moderation is half the religion."

Muslims believe that there will be eternal life after death. When its time is due, the whole system of the universe as a testing ground will be wound up and a new system will be designed appropriate for eternal life. The hereafter is a place where justice is fulfilled. A Supreme Tribunal will be held. Everyone will give an account of their lives and how they have exercised their freedom of choice in their lifetime. Their eternal destination will be decided according to the outcome of this tribunal.

Islam makes a clear distinction between the rights of God and human rights. While God may forgive the transgression and sin done towards Himself, if He wills, as He is Oft-Forgiving, the wrongdoings and transgressions done to others will be settled by God between the parties on the Day of Judgement. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) urged Muslims to repent directly to God for matters between themselves and God and to reconcile all unsettled matters between human individuals between those individuals before death so that they could journey to the hereafter without difficulty.

Islam accepts Divine Determination as a necessary aspect of faith. However, this is far from being a fatalistic perspective. In the human domain, Divine Determination is a name for God's knowledge. God knowing and recording acts in advance does not force a person to commit those acts. We have the freedom of choice and responsibility and accountability comes with the freedom of choice.

The house of Islamic practice is built on the following five pillars in the words of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him).

- To utter the creed of Islam
- Daily prescribed prayers
- Paying alms
- Fasting in Ramadan and
- Pilgrimage to Mecca

I have already explained the creed of Islam and daily prescribed prayers. Let me briefly touch on alms giving, fasting and pilgrimage.

The minimum amount of alms (*zakat*) obligatory for a Muslim is 2.5% of excess personal wealth. Once collected, *zakat* can only be distributed to the poor, the needy and other rightful beneficiaries. Alms in Islam solves the selfish inclinations of the rich by fostering compassion from the rich towards the poor instead of oppression, and love and respect from the poor towards the rich instead of hatred.

The history of Islam shows that there were periods of time when poverty was totally eradicated in Muslim lands through the state administration of alms. The Muslims could not find any poor people to give alms to and ended up giving alms to neighbouring Christian countries. During the Ottoman reign, people would knock door to door trying to find poor people to give their alms to. Alms-boxes were placed in public so that the poor would take the money freely without feeling shame because they were receiving money from someone else.

Fasting is the fourth pillar of Islam. Muslims are required to fast for a whole month in the lunar month of Ramadan. From dawn to sunset the practising Muslim abstains from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse with one's married partner. Fasting enables a Muslim to give true thanksgiving to God. True thanksgiving is to know that all sustenance comes directly from God, to acknowledge its value and to feel our own need and dependence on that sustenance. Fasting is the best way to show this true and sincere thanksgiving. Most people feel the value and need for sustenance when they feel the hunger.

The primary purpose of Fasting is to exercise will power. As it is done every day for one month, effective self-control becomes a habit. Also through fasting, the rich really feel what it means to be hungry and not able to buy the food that they desire. Hence, the rich will be more inclined to give charity when they fast.

Pilgrimage is the fifth pillar of Islam. All Muslims rich and healthy enough to make the journey, are expected to perform Pilgrimage. Pilgrimage consists of visiting a number of sacred places, circumambulating the *Ka'bah*, and being present in the plains of Mt Arafat at a specific time of the year to collectively ask God for forgiveness as Adam and Eve did after their mistake.

Pilgrimage is a complete human experience and has great benefits for a Muslim. It simulates the Day of Judgement when masses gather in one place wearing only a two-pieced white garment without any stitches. There is an expression of absolute equality of human beings. Muslims also realise the universality of Islam when they see Muslims from all races and nationalities worshipping One God. It is this manifestation that changed the thoughts of Malcolm X. After witnessing the equal and peaceful stance of all races and all nationalities gathered before God, he denounced his extreme ideas towards 'the white man'.

Islam in Britain Facts and Figures

- The last census, in 2001, recorded 1.6 million Muslims living in the UK.[1] The Labour Force Survey in 2008 suggested that this number had grown to around 2.4million.[2]
- There are probably around 2,000 mosques in the UK[3]
- At least 96% of Muslims in Britain, and approximately 96% of masjids or mosques, are Sunni, and about 2% are Shi'a, with 67 masjids.[4]
- Every year, around 20,000 British Muslims travel to Makkah for the *Hajj* pilgrimage.[5]
- In 2001, 46% of Muslims in Great Britain had been born here. 70% described their national identity as "British", "English," "Scottish" or "Welsh."
- Islam is the largest non-Christian religion in the UK. In the 2001 census, 52% of non-Christians who stated their religion were Muslims.
- The Office for National Statistics describes the UK's Muslim population as "a young, tightly clustered, but often disadvantaged, community."[6]
- Muslims in Britain are a relatively young group. About a third of Muslims were under 16 years of age in 2001, compared to a quarter of Sikhs and a fifth of Hindus.
- The last census showed that around two fifths of British Muslims lived in London; the biggest concentrations of London's Muslim population were in Tower Hamlets and Newham. Outside London, the regions with the biggest share of the Muslim population were the West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber.[7]
- In the last census, three quarters of Muslims (74%) were from an Asian ethnic background, predominantly Pakistani (43%), Bangladeshi (16%), Indian (8%) and Other Asian (6%).[8]

[1] Source: Office of National Statistics: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=954

[2] http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5621482.ece

[3] Source: ongoing research of Mehmood Naqsbandi http://mosques.muslimsinbritain.org/

[4] Source: Mehmood Naqsbandi: http://guide.muslimsinbritain.org/guide3.html

[5] Source: FCO Advice to British Hajjis, Jan 2002, cited on the Muslim Council of Britain website: http://www.mcb.org.uk/library/statistics.php#10

[6] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion/

[7] Source: Office of National Statistics: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=956

[8] Source: Office of National Statistics: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=957

Sample FAQs and Answers

What is the role of the mosque in Muslim life?

A mosque is, above all, a place of worship where Muslims can carry out Islam's five prescribed daily prayers. The Arabic term. *Masjid*, means "place of prostration", which refers to the fact that Muslims prostrate themselves on the ground in worship during the five daily prayers. The mosque's features facilitate worship. It is a clean space large enough to accommodate congregational prayers and has facilities for pre-prayer ablutions. A prayer niche (*mihrab*) indicates the *qibla*, the direction of prayer, and there is a *mimber* (pulpit) from which the imam gives sermons.

Islam's prescribed daily prayers do not have to be offered in a mosque; a Muslim may pray anywhere, as long as it is clean. The mosque provides a space dedicated to worship where Muslims can conveniently follow the example of the Prophet (peace be upon Him) and offer their prayers as a congregation. The Friday noon prayers must be offered as a congregation in a mosque or a place dedicated to prayer, so the mosque has a particularly important role on Fridays. The same applies for congregational prayers at the two main Muslim festivals: *Eid ul Adha* and *Eid ul Fitr*.

Muslim marriages and funeral prayer services are generally held in mosques, and they also frequently offer educational services.

Why does the Friday prayer have to be performed in a mosque?

The Friday prayer has to be performed in a mosque (or a place dedicated to prayer) to ensure that once a week all Muslims get together to hear a sermon (*khutba*) before the congregational prayer. The preacher usually starts with passages from the Qur'an and gives a short talk addressing the problems and affairs of the community. Friday prayer also gives Muslims the experience of belonging to a worldwide community focusing on God. In addition, being able to perform the Friday prayer as a community is a symbol of religious freedom. One of the first actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) when he migrated to Medina was to establish the Friday prayers.

The significance of Friday lies in that there is an hour on Friday where God is said to accept any prayer. But we are not told when the exact hour is during the 24-hour period. So Muslims are encouraged to spend as much of the day as possible in prayer, worship, meditation and reflection. Friday is also a festive day when Muslims celebrate the week and meet with each other at home or the mosque. The Prophet asked people to wash themselves and put on the finest fragrances and come to the mosque in their best clothes.

How far is a mosque like a church?

Both are places of worship where people of a particular faith meet to pray and praise God. Both places may be used for religious teaching. You may come across a sermon in either place of worship, and there is often religious instruction for children in a mosque and in a church.

Worship services are very different however. Church services vary in style and content. They often include hymns. An important service that takes place regularly in many churches is the Mass or Eucharist, including the ritual in which worshippers share bread and wine which represents Jesus' body and is often believed to become his body. Worship in a mosque is based on the same regular prayer which Muslims are called to perform five times a day, alone or with fellow believers.

A church is consecrated place, specially blessed and dedicated as a holy place, whereas the mosque is not consecrated, it is simply a place set aside for worship.

What is the role of the Imam?

The word imam literally means a person "standing in front". In religious terminology, it denotes the person who leads prayer in a congregation of Muslims. In Western countries, the Imam is appointed by the mosque's own administration and usually delivers the Friday sermons, as well as being involved with education and pastoral support and rites of passage. Since Islam has no sacraments, such as marriage, baptism, confession, etc., that can only be performed under the supervision of an ordained person, an Imam does not need to be ordained to perform religious duties.

Do men and women pray together?

Men and women may pray in the same room. Because of the physical nature of the prayers, where Muslims are required to line up with shoulders touching and to bow down and prostrate themselves, women line up in separate rows behind men for greater concentration and spiritual benefit. Some mosques have a gallery level reserved for women or a separating barrier between men and women. None of these practices existed at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him). In the mosque where he led prayers there was only one internal area where both men and women prayed.

There tend to be fewer women than men praying in the mosque because women with children generally find it preferable to pray at home; prayers can be performed in any clean location.

Why do Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan?

Fasting can be a profound act of worship for Muslims. It can help people to appreciate God's blessings, lead them away from the temptations of the physical world and help them to favour the heart over the body. Ramadan is a time for thankfulness (*shukr*), for self-examination (*muhasaba*), and for reflection (*taffakur);* on life, the world, and the works of God. In addition to fasting some Muslims attend long night prayers called *taraweeh* prayers. Some go into seclusion for the last ten days, focusing on reflection and worship. It is during this time that the day of the Qur'an's initial revelation is said to fall, although the precise day is not known.

Fasting can also be a means of solidarity with those who live with poverty and hunger all year round. Experiencing hunger can help people to understand the sufferings of others and see the importance of supporting those in need. The great Muslim theologian Al-Ghazali noted that "the man sated is liable to forget those people who are hungry and to forget hunger itself."[9]

Ramadan is also a time for fellowship and sharing. People traditionally break their fasts with a whole series of guests over the month.

Why is it important to wash before prayer?

Islam places great emphasis upon keeping oneself in a state of physical and spiritual cleanliness. The Qur'an states, "Surely God loves those who turn to Him again and again, and He loves those who purify themselves…" *(Qur'an, 2:222)*. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) said that, "the key to Paradise is prayer and the key to prayer is purification…" Physical purification of the body and the place of worship is a necessary condition for prayer.

While the primary purpose of ablution is physical cleanliness it has mental and spiritual dimensions as well, focusing the heart and mind on the significance of the worship about to be performed.

[9] Al-Ghazali, The Revival of the Religious Sciences, book 23, trans. T.J. Winter, (Cambridge Islamic Texts Society: 1995)

What are the five pillars of Islam?

According to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), the practice of Islam is summarised in "five pillars", which are as follows:

1. Creed (*Shahada*): The verbal commitment that "there is no deity but the One and Only God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God", which is considered to be the Creed of Islam. A person becomes a Muslim when, having felt the truth of Islam in the heart, he or she openly professes this creed in front of witnesses.
2. Prayers (*Salat*): The performance of the five short daily prayers required of Muslims.
3. Fasting (*Saum*): Fasting is a month-long abstinence from food, liquids and intimate intercourse (between married couples) every day from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan.
4. Purifying Alms (*Zakat*): This is an annual payment of a small percentage (usually 2.5%) of a Muslim's excess wealth, which is distributed among the poor, needy and other rightful beneficiaries.
5. Pilgrimage (*Hajj*): The performance of pilgrimage to Mecca is required once in a lifetime if physical and financial means are available. *Hajj* is partly in memory of the trials and tribulations of Prophet Abraham, his wife Hagar and his eldest son, the Prophet Ishmael.

What is the *Ka'bah*, and why do Muslims face it to pray?

The Arabic word simply means "cube". It is a simple cube-shaped structure of stone bricks, measuring about 10 by 11 metres and covered with a heavy black cloth. It is located in the middle of the Mosque of Sanctuary (*Masjid-al Haram*) in Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him).

The *Ka'bah* is considered to be the first shrine in the history of mankind to be erected for the worship of the one and only God (Qur'an, 3:96). In addition to some reports that the *Ka'bah* was built by the first human and prophet, Adam, the Qur'an (2:127) talks about the *Ka'bah* being erected again by Abraham and his son Ishmail, the first prophet sent to the people of the Arabian Peninsula.

In the early years of Islam, Muslims faced in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (Masjid-al Aqsa) in Jerusalem. In Medina, the direction of worship was changed by a verse of the Qur'an (2:144) to the direction of the *Ka'bah*. Since then, Muslims have always faced in this direction (called *qibla*) to pray. At the level of a mosque congregation, facing in one direction brings order and harmony to the act of worship. At the global level, facing the same direction unites Muslims in the shared act of worshipping one God. Some people have suggested that in every second of the day, there's at least one person facing Mecca and praying.

Glossary of Terms for Tours

You may like to use these on tours or give copies to guests in a welcome/gift pack.

Wudu: (ablution) ritual washing before prayers. It consists of washing the arms up to the elbows, and the face and the feet up to the ankles with clean water, and wiping the top of the head with a wet hand.

Azan: (call to Prayer) a religious invitation recited by the caller (*muazzin*) and composed of special words announcing the beginning of prayer times.

Baitullah: (the house of Allah) another name for the *Ka'bah* which Muslims turn to face for the performance of prayers.

Hadith: a record of the words of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him).

Hajj: pilgrimage, the fifth pillar of Islam. The performance of pilgrimage to Mecca is required once in a lifetime if physical and financial means are available. *Hajj* is partly in memory of the trials and tribulations of Prophet Abraham, his wife Hagar and his eldest son, the Prophet Ishmael.

Ka'bah: a simple cube-shaped structure of stone bricks situated in the Mosque of the Sanctuary in Mecca, the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him). It is believed to be the first shrine erected for the worship of the one and only God (Qur'an, 3:96). Muslims face towards it to pray.

Kursi/kursu: high chair which an Imam/other speaker uses when delivering a pre-prayer sermon or other informal speech. The *mimber* is kept for worship-related sermons because it is considered the lectern of the Prophet (peace be upon Him).

Mihrab: the niche in a mosque which faces towards the *Ka'bah*. The Imam stands in front of the *mihrab* during the performance of prayer.

Mimber: a pulpit in a mosque where the imam reads the sermon during Friday and Eid prayers.

Muazzin: the name given to the person who recites the call to prayer (*azan*) before the five daily prayers.

Qibla: the direction of the *Ka'bah*. Muslims always face this direction to pray, according to an instruction in the Qur'an.

Qur'an: book revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), the final prophet.

Salat: prayer, the second pillar of Islam. The performance of the five short daily prayers required of Muslims.

Saum: fasting, the third pillar of Islam. A month-long abstinence from food, liquids and intercourse, every day from before dawn to sunset, during the month of Ramadan.

Shahada: creed, the first pillar of Islam. The verbal commitment that "there is no deity but the One and Only God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." A person becomes a Muslim when, having felt the truth of Islam in the heart, he or she openly professes this creed.

Sunnah: the practice of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) - the example of his conduct in all areas of life, which is a key guide for Muslim life.

Zakat: purifying alms, the fourth pillar of Islam. Annual payment of a small percentage (2.5%), of a Muslim's excess wealth, which is distributed among the poor, needy and other rightful beneficiaries.

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