

THE ARUSHA CALL

The Arusha Call to Discipleship

How do you cross the religious divide? Start with friendship

The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2018. From this meeting the more than 1,000 participants, who were all regularly engaged in mission and evangelism, issued the Arusha Call to Discipleship.

At our own national church General Synod in 2019, resolution A-129 was passed that we affirm the Arusha Call; encourage bodies within the General Synod to integrate this call into the guiding principles of baptismal living for the shaping of national ministries; and commend the Arusha Call to dioceses for study and inclusion in their considerations of evangelism, witness and discipleship.

For one year, Spiritual Development Team members and others will offer reflections in the New Brunswick Anglican on the 12 points within this call. This is Call # 8, written by Sean Davidson.

It was 5 a.m. on the 5th of March, 2012. I woke in the dark. The air was heavy and still. The call to prayer sounded out from the local mosque.

I swung my legs over the side of the bed and parted the mosquito netting. There was a faint glow in the east. It was going to be a hot one.

For more than nine months, our family had been living at Amani Acre, a mission guesthouse in the suburb community of Likoni, just south of Mombasa city.

I had been serving as the interim manager, while my wife, Mandy, homeschooled our two daughters, Brooklyn and Rosie.

We had come to Kenya for a year — mostly for a new adventure, but also to learn about Christian mission in an entirely different part of the world.

As I wandered down the hallway to the kitchen, I began reflecting on our time thus far. It hadn't been easy. I had been working hard from the day we arrived, tackling one problem

after the next, and Mandy had been trying to keep up with the curriculum for the girls.

Thankfully, this frantic pace was beginning to subside. More and more we were relaxing into our environment and venturing out into the neighborhood.

Standing at the counter, I found myself tuning in to the call to prayer, surprised that it had become so familiar.

In the early days, the resonant cry of the mwadhini had felt so strange and new, but somewhere along the line this had just become part of our daily routine.

Looking out on the compound through the tattered screen, I was suddenly caught by an uncomfortable question: "How is it that we've been here this long, and I haven't met any of my Muslim neighbors?"

This is one of those questions that sets you on a new path.

Fixing myself a coffee, I wondered how someone like me — a mzungu and follower of Isa (Jesus) — reaches out to others in a place like this. It began as a thought experiment. How do you cross the religious and cultural lines without causing offense? And ultimately to what end?

I wasn't sure I knew the answers. But the more I gave myself to the experiment, the more I realized that I was walking myself into a plan of action.

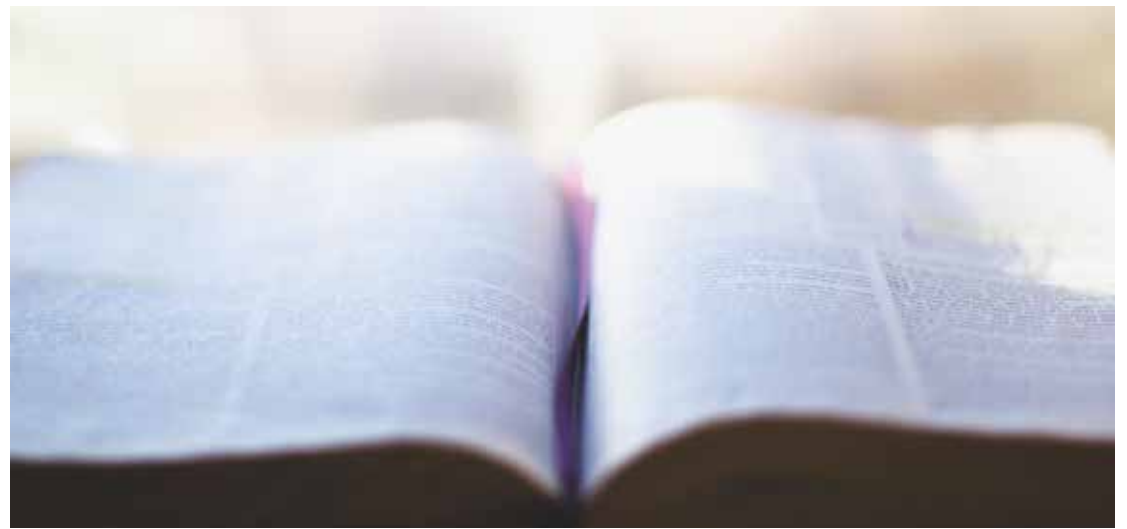
What's preventing me from simply knocking on the door at the mosque? I could request a conversation with the Imam. And maybe ask for some instruction on Islam.

"No harm in that," I thought.

So this is what I decided to do. And I'm so glad I did.

When I showed up the first day, I felt nervous. The mosque was surrounded by high walls, barbed wire and surveillance cameras. I starting having second thoughts. Was this wise?

Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the steel door at the entrance. A little sliding



CAROLYN V ON UNSPLASH

The text of the Arusha Call:

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

- We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.
- We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).
- We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.
- We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).
- We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.
- We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.
- We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.
- We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.
- We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).
- We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6-8).
- We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).
- We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.

This is a call to transforming discipleship. This is not a call that we can answer in our own strength, so the call becomes, in the end, a call to prayer:

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty. Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we praise you that you came to find the lost, to free the oppressed, to heal the sick, and to convert the self-centred. Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world and are poured out into our hearts. As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit. Grant us faith and courage to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus: becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time. For the blessing of your people, the sustaining of the earth, and the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

window opened and I tried to explain why I had come in a stumbling hybrid of English and Swahili.

"I'm a follower of Isa," I said, "but I would like to learn about Islam. Could I speak with the Imam?"

After a brief interrogation, I was welcomed into the outer court and then into an office area where I sat on the floor to wait.

Eventually the Imam came in carrying two ice cold sodas. Offering me one, he sat on the ground across from me. We looked at each other and smiled. I explained a second time why I had come.

"I've read books on Islam and some of the Quran, but I'd like to learn firsthand in a more personal way."

The Imam asked why that was important to me.

"Good question," I thought. "I suppose there are these negative stereotypes of Islam where I'm from... Something tells me they can't be true. Can you share your experience with me?"

We talked for hours, back and forth, as if the day would last forever. The Imam instructed me on all the basics

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8: We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.

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of Islam and he helped me to appreciate the kind of rigorous discipline expected of a Muslim.

He also stressed relationship with Allah, which I found surprising. Not personal relationship exactly, but something more like a marriage. The Imam took his time and spoke gently, though forthrightly.

We laughed together at points, especially when I made mistakes with my wording. When it was time to go, all my nervousness had disappeared.

Over the coming weeks, I returned to visit the Imam a few more times. Each time I was welcomed warmly at the gate, and the Imam would meet me halfway across the outer court. We would walk together to his office and share a soda.

One time I brought brownies that Mandy had made. I wasn't sure if that was breaking the rules, but the Imam seemed genuinely grateful. He had never had a brownie before.

We talked more about Islam in our visits but we also found ourselves on fun rabbit trails, broadening our discussion to life and family. Somewhere along the way we became friends.

Near the end of April, I heard that the Imam would be leaving Mombasa to serve in a mosque north of the city. We decided to get together one last time. It was the same as always. A friendly greeting, cold sodas, good conversation.

We spent the afternoon together going back and forth as always. This time I had a question for the Imam that I had wanted to ask for weeks but wasn't sure how. I finally found the words.

"You've spoken of Allah's mercy many times," I began,

"but it seems that we're always searching after him. Is there any sense in which he comes searching for us?"

The Imam leaned against the wall and looked to the ceiling. He thought for a long time.

"No," he said. "But if he was to come searching for us, it might be something like this."

Suddenly he was off script and imagining his way into an answer to my question.

"You remember the first day you came here?" I nodded. "Let's say you walked across the courtyard and fell, hurting yourself. And I came running to you to help you up, and I gave you a hug ... Maybe it would be like that."

We looked at each other. My friend welled up with tears. I'll never forget that moment.

How are we to witness to God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths?

It might be easier than we think. Of course, as Christians, we want to help people understand the distinctiveness of Christian faith. It's part of our calling.

But we can begin with listening and genuine curiosity. And we can carry on with questions and humble gestures in growing friendship.

Too often we leap ahead to explain or prove or defend, typically in a spirit of fear and anxiety.

And just as often we miss too much of what the Spirit is already doing in people's lives — including our own. These are a few things I learned with my friend in Mombasa.

God help us to be listeners and learners with freedom to explore alongside others and to point to Jesus rather than ourselves. Amen.

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