

# Lent and Ramadan: a time for Catholic-Muslim solidarity amid rising bigotry

by Jordan Denari Duffner

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This week, the Islamic month of Ramadan and the Christian season of Lent commence at the same time. During these holy seasons, both Muslims and Christians focus on prayer, fasting and almsgiving while commemorating key moments in their respective religious histories. As Christians anticipate the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, Muslims will be commemorating the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad.

The confluence of these seasons occurs as bigotry and discrimination against American Muslims are once again surging, and as Catholics continue to reflect on [the 60th anniversary of “Nostra Aetate,”](#) the 1965 document from the Second Vatican Council that revolutionized the church’s relationship with people of other faiths, [including Muslims](#). This unique moment affords Catholics an opportunity to deepen our relationships with Muslims and recommit ourselves to standing together with them in the face of social injustice.

In recent weeks and months, American Muslims have faced a renewed wave of Islamophobia, both in their local communities and at the national level. A recent national [survey](#) by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding found that Americans’ acceptance of anti-Muslim stereotypes has risen sharply in 2025 compared to previous years, with the jump being most pronounced among white evangelicals (15 points) and Catholics (12 points).

Numerous Republican politicians have also leaned into anti-Muslim rhetoric. In Texas, GOP candidates running in the primary Senate race have been stoking fear about Muslims and “Sharia,” [bringing back](#) the anti-Muslim playbook from the mid-2010s. As [reported](#) in Politico, candidates are competing “to raise fears about the spread of Sharia law in the state and portray themselves as the toughest option to stand against it.” As of mid-February, 40 Congressional representatives have also formed the [“Sharia-Free America Caucus.”](#)

In the wake of a deadly attack on Jews celebrating Hanukkah at Bondi Beach near Sydney, Australia, some Republican politicians used it as an opportunity to scapegoat, target and collectively blame American Muslims. Senator Tommy Tuberville of Alabama [wrote](#) on X, “We’ve got to SEND THEM HOME NOW or we’ll become the United Caliphate of America.” Representative Randy Fine of Florida [said](#) he wanted to deport legal immigrants who are Muslim and even revoke the citizenship of American Muslims. “It is time for a Muslim travel ban...,” he wrote on X. “Mainstream Muslims have declared war on us. The least we can do is kick them the hell out of America.”

President Trump followed this up by [expanding](#) his executive travel ban, which includes numerous Muslim-majority countries. He promised to ban Muslim travel to the United

States during both of his presidential campaigns, and the Trump administration's travel restrictions have affected countless American Muslims and their families.

The recent immigration crackdown throughout the country has also affected Muslims, including American citizens.

Nasra Ahmed, a 23-year-old Muslim American citizen, was detained for two days by Immigration and Customs Enforcement; she says ICE agents called her racial slurs and used violence that led to a concussion. The Somali community, which the president has referred to as "garbage," has been particularly affected in recent weeks, as the administration ended Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of Somalis seeking refuge in the United States. These policies and this language are an affront to the human dignity of Muslims.

Late last year, two Republican governors—Greg Abbott of Texas and Ron DeSantis of Florida, both of whom are Catholic—designated a major American Muslim nonprofit and civil rights group, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a "terrorist organization." For years, right-wing, anti-Muslim groups have been smearing CAIR and other Muslim organizations. Smearing groups advocating for unpopular causes is a familiar tool; for example, in the 1950s, Alabama tried to ban the N.A.A.C.P.

The governors' actions seem designed to have a chilling effect specifically on American Muslim civic involvement and free speech, and their ramifications are hard to predict. But actions like this are a threat to us all. They are intended to stifle speech and sow divisions and mistrust among us. They hurt interreligious cooperation by instilling doubt in other faith-based organizations and making them think twice before engaging with Muslim groups. In this context, religious institutions, including Catholic ones, have a responsibility to double down on—rather than shy away from—interreligious solidarity.

There have also been troubling incidents of vandalism and harassment toward Muslims. In January in New York City, a woman allegedly assaulted Muslim women wearing headscarves in a string of attacks on the same day. And in Montgomery County, Md., anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian graffiti was spraypainted on an exterior wall of Walt Whitman High School, using an obscenity before the word *Muslims* and saying, "Nuke Palestine." Part of the surge in anti-Muslim discrimination in recent years has been related to the situation in Israel-Palestine, with some Americans engaging in collective blame by associating Muslims with the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel on Oct. 7. Islamophobic bias (whether latent or overt) also explains why some Americans have supported or at least ignored Israel's assault on Palestinians in Gaza, which many scholars and experts have deemed a genocide.

In reflecting on today's Islamophobia, Catholics should not forget our own history of being scapegoated in America and targeted with similar smears that Muslims face today. In earlier generations, Catholic immigrants to the United States were seen as threatening, disloyal and untrustworthy, too.

Whether committed by individuals or institutionalized at the highest levels of government, Islamophobia stands in stark contrast to the message of "Nostra Aetate," which makes clear that "The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any

discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion.”

Instead, “Nostra Aetate” [declares](#) that the church holds Muslims in high “esteem,” and it encourages collaboration between Catholics and Muslims—and indeed all people of good will—to “promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.” Members of both faith groups are already doing this in countless ways, especially in the face of ICE raids, which have traumatized both communities and led to the detention of both Catholic and Muslim [community leaders](#) and young people. In response, Catholic and Muslim clergy, like [Bishop Michael Pham](#) and Imam Taha Hassane in San Diego, have been gathering at courthouses to [support](#) immigrants threatened with detention.

As we mark Lent and Ramadan, we can redouble these efforts and deepen our solidarity. Within our Catholic communities, we can commit ourselves to learning more about Islamophobia and rooting out stereotypes and bigotry. One resource to aid in that endeavor is a [pamphlet on Islamophobia](#) that I published through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. There are also numerous books, including [my own](#), as well as [resources](#) and [training material](#) from the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, where I serve as the scholar in residence. It is also important that Catholics (especially leaders) push back publicly against unjust policies and dehumanizing rhetoric toward Muslims, especially when our fellow Catholics are responsible for them.

Our faith teaches that all are created in God’s image, and thus we are called to extend our solidarity and support to all those facing injustice, even if they do not share our identity or religion. As our Muslim friends celebrate Ramadan amid our observance of Lent, let us also resolve to address Islamophobia and build interreligious bonds, for the good of us all.

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