

The Book Group will meet Tuesday, June 20th in the Church Library at 10:30 a.m. to discuss
Ayesha at Last by Uzma Jalaluddin.

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In this excellent modern retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, aspiring poet Ayesha Shamsi juggles her dreams and the stifling expectations of Toronto's Indian-Muslim community. She picks a practical career as a high school teacher and watches as her flighty younger cousin, Hafsa, collects marriage proposals like trading cards. After a misunderstanding, Ayesha pretends to be Hafsa while planning a youth conference, where she is required to collaborate with conservative Khalid, a newcomer to the area. Ayesha pegs Khalid as rigid and judgmental on their first meeting because of his white robes and reserved behavior. She doesn't object to arranged marriages, but believes compatibility is important, and she scorns Khalid's complacency with accepting his mother's choice of bride. Family loyalty is a recurring theme, as Ayesha puts her hopes of being a poet on hold while she earns money to repay her wealthy uncle and Khalid refuses to question his overbearing mother. As Ayesha and Khalid work on the conference together, Khalid learns to accommodate different viewpoints. With humor and abundant cultural references, both manifest in the all-seeing all-criticizing aunty brigade, Jalaluddin cleverly illustrates the social pressures facing young Indian-Muslim adults. Jalaluddin stays true to the original Austen while tackling meatier issues like workplace discrimination, alcoholism, and abortion. Even readers unfamiliar with Austen's work will find this a highly entertaining tale of family, community, and romance.

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