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Meetings for Better Understanding





What is a Meeting for Better Understanding or an MBU?

A Meeting for Better Understanding is a cooperative community event between a local church and a mosque. The format sees two speakers addressing an agreed upon topic and presenting what their faith believes concerning it. It is not a debate or confrontation, but instead an effort to accurately inform others of their position. It is followed by a moderated time of questions and answers. It concludes with a light snack and opportunity for informal discussion and contacts. It is a time where the Gospel can be clearly presented to Muslims who have come to hear what Christians believe and for Christians to meet and talk to Muslims in a safe and comfortable environment. We emphasize that this is not an open community event, but a meeting between the Church and the Mosque. This provides a degree of security as outside troublemakers are kept to a minimum.

Why have MBU's?

The main goal of an MBU is to bring people together in a non-confrontational atmosphere that enables them to learn not only through presentations but also through the face to face dialogue that follows. MBU's are an excellent way to move beyond the fear that many people have of engaging with Muslims. Through MBU's we can begin fulfilling the mandate that Jesus gave us to go, proclaim the Gospel, and make disciples. They open doors into the world of your neighbours which might otherwise not get open.

Controls questioners;

Filters questions and only asks ones pertaining to the topic and clarifying what the speaker said. Otherwise the speaker may be asked to address questions which should legitimately be a topic of their own MBU;

One speaker should not always be asked the questions first;

Control the length of answers.

5. There will be ample time after the formal meeting for people to meet personally with members of the other faith. Refreshments may be served either before or after the question-and-answer session.
6. Meetings may be held in meeting rooms at the Church or Mosque, or in a neutral venue. If possible visit the venue before the MBU
7. Discuss the facilities and in particular the expectations for women i.e. entrances, seating on floor or chairs, what is their role, etc.

If you have further questions, or other inquiries, you can contact a member of:



The Bridges Option
info@bridgesoption.org

Or

call John at
484 553 6717

tell the story of your own relationship with God and what he has done for you.

Be prepared for many questions about isolated verses or passages.

It's usually quickly solved by simply looking at the context of the verse. Don't get tricked into isolating a verse. If you're not sure, a good answer is "Give me a week and I'll get back to you."

You can also refer to the website, www.answering-islam.org and click on the "Questions and Answers" tab for help in answering more of these questions.

The booklets mentioned can be found at www.bridgesoption.org, copies for your literature table can be obtained from The Bridges Option info@bridgesoption.org

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Guidelines & Suggestions

1. The purpose of the meetings are to develop better understanding between the Christian and Muslim communities.
2. Each speaker has 20/25 minutes to speak on the topic and will speak only on that topic from the perspective of their faith. They will not address what the other faith believes.
3. A question-and-answer period is held after both speakers have presented their talks. Questions need to be written down and are to be kept on the topic. They must not be statements of the views of the questioners. Questions can be directed to one or both of the speakers. Each speaker may follow up on the answer of the other speaker once. Other questions that are of personal interest but not related to the topic may be dis-cussed in individual conversations after the formal sessions.
- 4 The meetings are moderated to insure that the above guide-lines are followed. The moderator for each meeting is to be chosen by the group that hosts the meeting. Be very clear about the role of the moderator:

What to Expect at an MBU?

Expect to be surprised at how much fun it can be to get together with your Muslim neighbours.

Expect to be encouraged by the response of those in your church who attend the MBU.

Expect to be challenged to pray for your friends and neighbours following the MBU.

Expect that there will be further opportunities to get together following your first MBU.

Expect to learn about Islam and the cultures of those attending.

Expect surprises.

Expect some opposition. This may come from those within your own community or from outside.

Expect to have great conversations with your Muslim friends.

Expect questions. You will be asked some very good questions for which you may not have adequate answers. This is natural and the answers are easily discovered. Also expect to find yourself asking your own good questions.

Goals and Objectives:

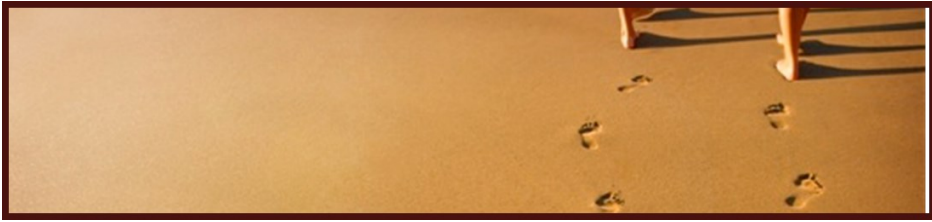
It will serve your church well if you, along with your team, sit down at the very beginning and consider what your goals or objectives are for holding an MBU. What is it that you hope to accomplish through this event? Since



each group may have different motives and ultimately a wide variety of goals, we won't tell you what those should be. However, we do offer some suggestions.

What you can hope to accomplish by hosting an MBU:

This event will encourage your church to become more involved in outreach and evangelism in your community. This applies especially to those of other faiths.



It will help your people get over any fear they might have of talking with people from other faiths.

This event will initiate a desire to learn more about other faiths such as Islam.

This event will allow you to make an initial contact with your local mosque.

Christians can attend MBUs knowing that their Muslim neighbours are there because they want to hear what Christians believe and discuss their faith. There is no difficulty starting conversations which can result in fruitful witnessing opportunities

Following the MBU, your people will be encouraged to build individual relationships with those who attended.

This MBU will actually help each faith group have a better understanding of each other.

You will also show, through the event, that there actually are some major differences between faiths. And though there are differences, we can still learn to respect one another.

Preparing for Your MBU - *this presents the ideal, the reality may see things happening much faster or meeting many delays*

You will need to begin planning for your MBU about two months prior to the desired date. The following is a list of the details that will need to be covered. It's a great opportunity to form a team to work on the details.

What about all the contradictions in the Bible, especially with the resurrection accounts in the gospels?

Don't be taken off guard with how certain contradictions may be pointed out. Many of them can easily be explained. If you're not sure initially, this a good time to say, "give me a week," and then go find the answer. Again, remember to get them to look at the context of a passage, which often sorts out the seeming contradiction.

When it comes to the resurrection accounts in the gospels, the differences of the various accounts actually works in our favour. If every writer told the exact same thing, it would suggest some type of collusion has taken place and imply deceitfulness on the gospel writers. The fact that they all tell of the same event but have some minor differences gives excellent evidence for authenticity of an eye witness account. None of the "discrepancies" takes away from the actual event. The differences are merely minor ones. There is more good material you can easily find regarding the resurrection accounts but this should give you a start.

Why did God have to become human and why did Jesus have to die?

Thank God quietly when they ask this question because it opens the door for you to share about original sin and how all people need a Saviour to make them right with God. God does what we could never do. He deals with the problem of sin and the devil. The incarnation is His plan for defeating Satan once and for all and also restoring humanity to our original relationship with Him. The God of the Bible is not a distant God who does not care about his creation. Compare that with Allah who is so far removed from his creation that he can never be known. In fact, the Quran never tells us what Allah is like, only what he is not like. Surah 112 is a good example of this.

Be sure to discuss the amazing truth that God loves because he is love and he cares so much for us that he became one of us to deal with the problem of sin and the devil. He wants to be known and to have relationship with us. It is a wonderful opportunity to also

then you may suggest that you meet another time to discuss the Trinity at length.

The word was formulated by Tertullian in the 2nd century and was used as a way of explaining the truths that are prevalent in the Bible. We believe in the triune nature of God because that is how he has revealed himself. Do a quick study on those verses pertaining to the trinity for back up.

You might also ask them if “tawhid” is a word found in the Quran. It is not. And the concept of “tawhid” or the oneness of Allah, is not as easily described as they at first project. You will need to learn a bit about tawhid. We suggest the website listed below. See also The Bridges Option booklet What is the Doctrine of the Trinity

Why don't you believe that Muhammad was a prophet?

If we believed that Muhammad was a prophet, then that would make us Muslims. We do not accept him as a prophet based on the Scriptural mandates for prophethood. Deut. 18 is a good place to start, since it states a prophet must be from the Israelite lineage. Muhammad is not since he traces his lineage back to Ishmael and not Isaac. The Deut. passage also gives other requirements which work against Muhammad's claim to prophethood.

How can God be loving when the Old Testament is so full of violence?

You can be sure that passages will be brought up that are quite disturbing, such as Joshua 6. We do have to contend with these verses, but it does help to understand that those were specific instructions for a specific time and place and are not universal commands of slaughter such as what can be found in the Quran, ie. Surah 9. You will need to also point out that Christians have their final paradigm in Christ and his example is one of peace. He taught us to live peaceably and he modelled peace. Matthew 5-7 is a great example of his teaching and then take them to ch. 26:47ff for his actions.

2 months prior to the MBU:

Contact the point person from the Muslim community and present the concept to them. On page 14 is a suggested information sheet which can be reproduced on your church letterhead. You can emphasize such things as understanding, community cohesion, and removing fear that comes from misunderstanding others. Next, agree upon a date and time for the event, the topic, the length of the main presentations, and the overall format of the time together including the order of speaking. You will also need to determine the venue and who will provide the refreshments. You may not be able to accomplish all this in your first contact. The mosque has a process for setting events just like your church does. This booklet suggests a well used format, but be willing to adjust for your needs and circumstances. It is also written with the assumption the church is the initiator of the event and will act as the host and organizer for the first MBU.

Form your team with the following people in place (these people may have others working with them):

Team Leader - oversees the entire event and those on the planning team.

Host - responsible for all the details of the evening including hall set up, refreshments, tech set up, etc.

Moderator - to chair the actual program.

Communications - responsible for promoting event within your church.

Liaison Person - the contact person for the Muslim group; this may or may not be the Team Leader.

1st Prayer night 6 weeks prior to the MBU.

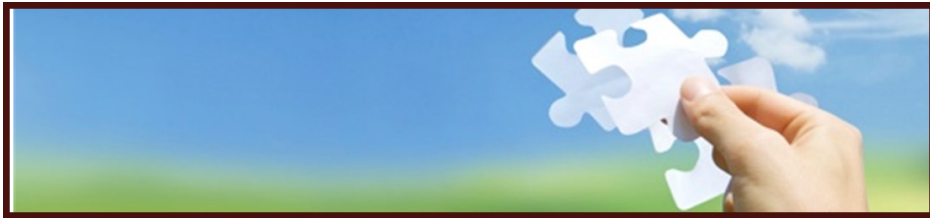
Begin announcing in your local church and to sister churches. We do not recommend making wide spread public announcements as this can present a security issue as troublemakers from outside the local church or mosque may seek to attend.

1 month prior to the MBU:

Meet with your team to ensure that details are getting accomplished.

Note: re: hall and refreshments - don't underestimate how important good food is and be sensitive to the dietary needs of the Islamic community. Good food, drinks, atmosphere is crucial for good mingling at the end of the evening.

Contact the person from the Muslim group to ensure that they are advertising, planning, etc. As much as possible, try to meet in person so



that you are already forming a relationship with them. This will have future benefits.

2nd Prayer night 3 weeks prior to the MBU.

2 weeks prior to the MBU:

Meet with your team to ensure that all details are getting covered.

Try to discern numbers. How many people will be attending? This will impact your seating, food, etc. Remember, it is better to have too much food than too little

Continue advertising the event within your church and trusted Christian contacts. Be creative and enthusiastic.

1 week prior to the MBU:

Final meeting with planning team. Cover all the details.

Try to ascertain final numbers so food and seating can be prepared well.

early disciples who captured the essence of Jesus as revelation from God. God's most complete revelation came in the form of a person, not a book.

Do you know the surnames of the gospel writers?

This is another attempt to put today's expectations on a culture that doesn't share them. Surnames were not important in 1st century Judaism. It was clear to the early church who the authors were, which is why those authors sometimes don't use their "names." They knew that their audience was familiar with them. Luke's gospel is a good example of this. He was writing to his friend Theophilus in a very personal way. He didn't need to use his name. The lack of an identified author does not imply that the account is fabricated or untrue. It must also be remembered that the authorship of the gospels is accepted by the early church.

If God was in Jesus, in human form, when he was on the earth, then who was running the universe at that time?

This question often comes up when you may be presenting the evidence for the deity of Jesus, both from historicity regarding the resurrection, and from the Scriptures. This is a "red-herring" argument. It takes the focus off of the material presented about Jesus and diverts the argument to the characteristics of God in general. Be careful not to get side-tracked. A quick response is, "Why do you want to limit God and tell him what he can and cannot do? Maybe the god of Islam cannot become human, but Yahweh of the Bible can take on human form yet still remain the infinite all powerful ruler of the universe, and indeed has. It seems that the Muslim god is too small because he can't do something as simple as become human." Keep the discussion on the material of history and the Scriptural, eyewitness accounts.

Why do you believe in the "trinity?" Is the word "trinity" even used in the Bible?

We don't discourage you to shy away from discussing the Trinity but it may be useful to find out if they are genuinely interested in trying to understand the trinity. If you only have 10-20 minutes,

Can you show me one place where Jesus ever said, “I am God?”

Refer to the passages above and explain that in the first century context, this was equivalent to saying, “I am God. Worship me.”

This is what the Jews hearing him understood and is why they tried to stone him in the Matt 26 passage and others like it. See also The Bridges Option booklet The Answer is God.

Why did the church choose what books they wanted in the Bible?

This is a reference to the council of Nicea and the assumption that the church chose the books of the Bible at this council. In fact, most of the council had nothing to do with choosing books, but rather with dealing with heresy. From the earliest times, those letters written by the apostles or during the time of the apostles, were naturally accepted as authoritative and used by the early church. When heresies arose, or other “gospels,” which refuted the earliest accounts of Jesus, then the church needed to verify those texts that had always been accepted as their authority. Also, in light of the fact that the early Christians were being killed for their faith, including their books, it was imperative that they know which books had always been accepted by the church. The early church fathers are a great indicator of those books which were always accepted - the 27 we now have in our current New Testament. See also The Bridges Option booklet “Was the Injil Changed at Nicea?”

Why didn't Jesus write his own gospel?

This question could also be asked of Muhammad. Why didn't he write down his own revelations? Another answer to this is to help them understand the culture of the day. It was customary for rabbis or teachers to have a scribe to record their words, (consider Matthew as a scribe for Jesus). We must not place our modern modes of communication on first century culture, nor even on the 7th century culture of Islam. Also, it was more important for Jesus to be preaching and healing, than spending his time writing down messages, which was a tedious task that required vast amounts of time. It is also to be realized that for Christians, Jesus himself was the revelation so he didn't need to write it down as such. It was the

Final prayer meeting before the MBU.

Contact the point person from Muslim community to assure them all is well and ask if all is well with them

Your MBU - Logistics:

Main Presentation:

The Moderator should welcome people, go through the ground rules, and set a good tone.

Each speaker has prepared an initial talk on the agreed upon topic. Have a time keeper with signs to inform them of time remaining - 5min, 1 min, end.

The presentation is not to refute the other's position. That is for debates, which this is not. It is solely to explain the topic from each person's faith perspective.

The main presentations should take about 25-30 minutes.

Q and A:

Either during or after the presentations, people should write down questions concerning the topic that they would like to ask either speaker. These questions will be given to the moderator who will compile them into groups and then begin asking them to the speakers.

People should ask questions and not write statements. Each question should also be clearly marked to who it is for - which speaker.

As much as possible the moderator should alternate to speakers during Q and A.

A speaker has 3 minutes to answer, followed by a 1 minute response from the other speaker.

The moderator should use judgement in assigning questions. Are they regarding the topic of the evening? Are there multiple questions asking the same thing? Are they appropriate?

Q and A should take about 20 minutes.

Summations:

Each speaker should take 3 minutes, after the Q and A allotment, to give a summary of the topic. Remind that these are summations and not rebuttals.

Summation time should take about 10 minutes.

Food, Drink, Conversations:

Be sure to invite and encourage everyone to stay after and mingle with those from the other faith group. Also encourage them to dialogue a bit more about the topic for the evening.

Remember: tepid tea and stale biscuits don't exactly encourage people to stay. Spend some money on good food. It will pay off. Advertise and ensure that food is Halal.

You may want to limit this time to 30 minutes, although don't be surprised if a few people are still talking after that.

Literature:

You might want to consider having some literature about your church and a few brochures that might explain the topic of the night in more detail. It would be a nice gesture to offer a table for Muslim literature as well.

After the MBU:

It will benefit your group if you schedule a follow up meeting within 3 -7 days of the MBU.

Someone from our group will be willing to come and for about 60 minutes lead a time of processing and debriefing. Some questions we will ask the group are likely to be:

What feelings did you experience during the MBU?

What did you enjoy most about the MBU?

What did you not enjoy about the MBU?

What surprised you?

If so, how has the MBU encouraged you to more dialogue with your new friends.

What will you do now?

We will also be willing to field questions from the group and discuss a few other topics to consider. Perhaps this evening will include discussion about the next MBU or similar event?

We encourage you to finish the evening with another time of prayer for your new friends. Pray for their salvation, for opportunities to follow up with them, and for boldness within your own people to share the gospel of Jesus clearly



FAQ's by Muslims, (with brief answers):

Hasn't the Bible been changed or corrupted?

When and where was it corrupted? Was it corrupted before Muhammad? Then why does the Quran seem to give credibility to the OT and NT? Was it corrupted after Muhammad? Then you have to deal with the overwhelming manuscript evidence that verifies the accuracy of the Bible we have today. If we have a corrupted copy, then simply produce the uncorrupted originals and we'll gladly look at them. See also The Bridges Option booklet History of the Quran and Injil

Why do you believe that a man could be God?

We don't believe that a man could be God, but we do believe that God could become a man. Beginning with Genesis 3:8-9, God has taken on human form many times in the Bible. We also look to the claims that Jesus made about himself, equating himself with God, (Jn 8:58; 10:27-30; Matthew 26:62-66; cf Daniel 7:13-14). See also The Bridges Option booklets Is Jesus God? , How Can Jesus be God and Man?, and The Answer is God.