

ISLAM 101 Presentation
August 29, 2012
11:43 a.m. ET

Bonnie Duyf: Wonderful. That was special, and I hope that many of those who have joined the call this evening had the chance to celebrate Eid yesterday with your students or with students that you are liaisoning to or which whomever was in your community. Those of you who are on the call, I'm in St. Louis, so it's 8:02 where I am, two minutes after. And we will give this another minute or so, but we welcome all of you. And this call is being recorded. You may have heard the conference call recording come in a moment to go. It's being recorded so that those of you who would like to listen in again or have other than your teams or other parents or other volunteers learn are welcome to go online. It should be posted quite shortly through the AFS site and certainly available to all the programs who are hosting.

Let's see, it's 8:03. We have so much to talk about. And I think why don't we go ahead and start now. This is an hour call. And if we need to go over a little bit longer, we will. My name is Bonnie Duyf, and I'm a volunteer with AFS, which is one of the programs that is hosting students from the YES program as well as FLEX. And on the call with me is Imam Ararat, who's the president and founder of Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation, who provides a lot of support and a lot of insights and training for all of us who are hosting while working on these programs.

We are also pleased that this conference today is open to all of those of you who are hosting, involved in hosting and includes not only AFS but as well American Cultural Exchange Service; American Council; Council on International Education Exchange; Ayusa; YFU; WordLink; FLAG, which is Foreign Links Around the Globe; IRIS; PAX, Program of Academic Exchange; AIFS, which is the American Institute for Foreign Study; ASSE; CCI, which is Center of Cultural Exchange; North West Services; and STS, which Student Travel School. So we all have something very much in

common and that's certainly working on exchange with this wonderful group of people.

Today, what we are going to do is to – our goals really are several. One is to – just some background, we call them Islam 101. To give you just a little context for Islam, some of you may have good background already and some things you may have a chance to learn for the first time, Imam Arafat will cover that with you.

We want to really say that together, we want to just sort of explore ways that we can learn from our students from the hosting experience and have them learn from us. And I think that context would be provided to you as we give you, share some information on the practice of Islam, which is information that's relevant to host families. And then if I am a host family of students from Yemen and Saudi Arabia and liaison as well, (Sophines) and Kazakhstan had some experience with some of these cultures you might be hosting and have also been working on the sponsored program teams and as a chaperone in Indonesia.

And with that, just a few bits of housekeeping today, the call will go until 9:00, or a little after if we need to extend. The call is being recorded as I mentioned earlier so that it could be available to you later. We ask that right now that you mute the call. To mute the call, use the star six until we get to the question-and-answer period unless there's something that you need to ask right away and then please unmute with a cross-hash six. When you're not muted, please be very careful about the background noise. We will make sure we have time at the end for questioning, about 20 minutes, so jot your questions down and then we will try to answer them.

So with that being the case, shall we start, Imam Arafat.

Mohamad Arafat: Sure. Sure, I just again would like to welcome everyone. And it's an honor and a pleasure to work with the YES program since 2003 and 2004 and with all the other exchanges from the FLEX and CBYX and others through our BUBW conferences throughout the year.

I just would like to say a little bit about Islam 101, that the Quran, the Holy Book in Islam, summarized the messages of all the prophets as the message of submission to the will of Almighty and that what Islam means. To submit your will to God and that's – the word is Islam. And also, the word Islam in addition to submission means peace and to be at peace between you and Almighty and between you and yourself and you and the rest of the society and the family of the Adam and Eve.

So really, Islam is part of the Abrahamic phase since the founding father of the monotheistic religion. Abraham is the grand grand grandfather of Ishmael and Isaac, and Ishmael was the grand grandfather of Prophet Muhammad, and Isaac the grand grandfather of Jesus and Moses. And that's the beauty we see here in the United States when people always emphasize on the Abrahamic tradition as well as the – now we are hearing, you know, the Abrahamic tent and other programs related to Abraham which brings most those questions in Jews. Now that does not mean others are not invited to this tent. I'm talking about the Eastern religions or other religions but I'm talking about the main religions in the world.

But also the pillars of Islam, you will see it shared with other religions when it comes to prayer, fasting or alms-giving or the concept of pilgrimage. And the bedrock of all of that is there is no God but God and Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God as well as Jesus, Moses, Abraham, Noah and all the 25 prophets mentioned in the Quran.

And also, the Quran spoke about the previous prophets and other prophets who were not all mentioned by name. But those who are mentioned by name are 25. But they all – again, the Quran teaches the Muslims really a lot about other prophets as well as Prophet Muhammad. I mean, for example, Jesus was mentioned 25 times in the Quran. Moses weighed more than that. And Prophet Muhammad by name only five times, but you will see mentioned to all of them and the lessons they have left behind for all humanity to follow.

Hello. So I'm talking about religious diversity in Islam. During the time of Prophet Muhammad, there has been of course only one version of Islam, which is to follow the teachings of the Quran and the example of the prophet.

There had been some political issues happened right after the death Prophet Muhammad, which was the beginning of the kind of a split towards the issue who is the successor of the prophet. Does it have to be from the household of the prophet, from the bloodline of the prophet or any highest and righteous follower? And that really was the beginning of the split which we call today as Sunni and Shi'a.

The Shi'a today, which represents almost 10 percent of the Muslims around the world, and the majority are the Sunni. Basically, those who – I mean, a lot of them, they do still hold tight to the descendants of the prophets from his daughter, Fatima, and his cousin, Ali, who was also his son-in-law and the husband of Fatima. But really, you will not see in the Quran anything referring either to Sunni or to Shi'a. But the Quran referred to faith and Iman, which we call in Arabic, and the worship of Almighty and Almighty alone.

The concept of Sunna and Shi'a has been throughout the 1,400 years subject to some disputes but has nothing to do really, the teachings of the Quran per se, but mostly political or cultural. And unfortunately, what we are seeing today, whether it's in Iraq or in Iran and other places, you will see a lot of tension but has nothing to do with religion per se, but mostly interest and other issues, which are not the main focus of the talk today.

But that shows you where the YES students and some of the cultural exchange students are coming. Some of them are Shi'a. Some of them are Sunni. And of course, the Shi'a, they have their own holidays. And some of the Sunnis do not celebrate one of these, for example Ashura. You will see it more emphasized by some of the Shi'a students. But again, the majority of the Muslim world is really who we can call them today as Sunnis. And may I have seen the majority of the students who come to the United States from the cultural exchange students also are Sunni.

Of course, there are religious and cultural differences in terms of where the students are coming from. Some of the students coming from Africa versus the Middle East is a big cultural differences. When you compare that with Southeast Asia or Central Asia, also, you will also see some cultural differences.

From my observation that over the 20th century and the rise of communism and then secularism, you will see those who lived under communism, the adherence to the teachings of Islam, is really not as strong as those who lived either in the Middle East or in South Asia, i.e. Pakistan, Indian Muslims, Afghani or Bangladeshi Muslims. So that's of course referring to FLEX students where they are coming from.

So you will see different practices. All those who are coming from Turkey, who lived mostly through a secular lifestyle. So the issue of scarf is not as prevalent as you see it among students coming from the Middle East or Pakistan or Indonesia. Indonesia today, it's the same thing. I mean, sometimes the scarf is really part of the culture, part of the dress code. But you will see that the Indonesian students very, very liberal, outgoing, compared to maybe the students who have the scarf from Saudi Arabia, for example. Even though I have seen many of the Saudi girls, when they come, they are not covered. Again, that's due to the kind of pressure you will see in Saudi Arabia toward forcing the issue of the scarf.

With other countries, I have seen the students who are coming and they have scarf that's out of their will. And this is really how it should be from the Islamic perspective that the practice, whether it is the scarf or the prayer or fasting or anything related to worship, has to come from the heart of the student himself or herself and cannot be pressured. And that's where also I would like to mention here that my role as an Imam with the exchange program, whether it is the YES or other program, is really just to answer questions when the students ask. And that's different than my role in different mosques here in America.

So I just wanted to make this clear that I do not call the students unless they call us and if they request a follow-up unless there is an issue and there is a problem. And that's very sensitive topic. And I just wanted to make that clear that we do not initiate calls unless we receive a request by email or by a phone call.

So back to the issue of Islam 101, you will see also in addition to the main holidays, again, there are different holidays for different sects. Sometimes, you might have, under the Shi'a, some offshoots from the Shi'a, whether you know Ismaili or I don't want to go too much into detail. But some of the students might have their own holidays back home, but the main holidays where all the Muslims practice all over the world, they are two holidays. One, after Ramadan like the one we are living 8th day right now which is Eid al-Fitr, the break of the fast, the feast of breaking of the fast or the feast of sacrifice, which will come two months and ten days from now. And that's after pilgrimage.

Again, the practice of Islam – I'm moving to the other topic, practice of Islam information relevant to host families. The students who are practicing their faith they might ask to pray regularly five times, which will require them to have ablution or Wudu and washing, and that's where some of the families might see water or sprinkles of water here or there in the bathroom or when they go to school and they would like to wash. I explain to students since washing for the prayer also requires washing the feet, I explained to them that probably they might consider using the license of just wiping over their socks without washing their feet when they are outside or in the public places that might be inconvenient, and especially here, Americans are not used to see somebody in a public bathroom washing their feet in the basin in the bathroom.

So anyway, I just share that with the students that this also is a possibility if they already washed in the house before they go out and they put their socks after washing so they can wipe over gently, wipe over their socks for the rest of the day and the night.

Now if somebody is travelling also they can – like if they went with their host families for a trip, they can shorten the prayers. As you know, we pray, we have the Salat five times a day. I am saying Salat in order to distinguish that from only prayer. I mean, prayer here in America when people just lower their head and they pray to God. But in Islam, when we say Salat, it means physical movement, number one, as well as cleanliness with ablution before the prayer.

So these five times prayers in the morning, from dawn to sunrise, that's their first one, and then the noon and then the afternoon, and then the fourth one at the time of sunset and the last one, almost an hour and half after sunset, and that's evening prayers. When the students are travelling more than 50 miles, they can combine and shorten the prayers. The noon and afternoon can be prayed together. Instead of four and four they can pray two and two. And the evening prayers and that means the sunset and the evening prayer could be combined and shortened. The sunset will be prayed as a three Raca or three unit, and the evening prayers could be shortened from four to two.

Friday prayer. As you know, for Christians, Sunday is a day when they go the church or Jews is Saturday. For the Muslims, it's Friday. And I explained to the students when they arrive that they might not be able to go every Friday to the mosque unless it is a holiday, number one, or unless also they found a ride to take them to the mosque because mosques here are not as close to homes as it is back home in their countries. So when the students arrive, I hear from them you know some concerns about the prayer and especially Friday. And it's really (a difference) between a student and another student, and I'll be delighted to take more questions about that.

And I do mention also to the students that if one of the host family offer to take you for one time, two times, three times, but you cannot ask them all the time, especially some – again, some mosques might be half an hour one way or 45 minutes one way. So I told them you can pray noon prayer instead of Friday prayer.

Also, praying at school to explain to whoever in charge, the principal or anybody from administration that they need to pray a noon prayer. And especially when it comes to kind of November, December, January, those month in the – those months in the fall and in the winter, days are short and they might not be able to pray noon prayer by the time they get home. So they have options, either to pray in school by asking permission to pray somewhere, take a couple of minutes, five, 10 minutes in an empty classroom or in a library somewhere. Or if it was inconvenient and difficult, then they can combine the prayers and they can pray when they come back home. But

they do not shorten the prayers because they are not travelling. And that's what, again, I explained that to them.

The prayer and women issues. Of course, because the prayer and the Salat require ablution and washing, so girls who might be on their period, they might not be able to pray until when that is over and they take their shower then they pray. So some of you might see certain girls, they are praying certain times and they don't pray certain times because Islamically, when women are – during their period, they are exempt from fasting and from the actual five times daily prayers, but they still meditate and have supplication and continue their communion with Almighty, with God.

Now regarding bathroom and use of the bathroom, I do explain to the students about this issue and to be extremely sensitive by either putting towel or making sure that they don't splash water all over while they are using the bathroom in terms of making Wudu and ablution before the prayers. Greetings, of course, most of them they say A Salaam Alaikum, but some, they shake hands, some they don't shake hands.

And I also explained to them the issue from religious and cultural perspective here in America. And I do tell them that if you prefer not to shake hands, you have to explain first to the family that you don't mean any disrespect, it's just we put our hand on our chest. I'm talking for the opposite gender. This is the same way also you will see it probably among some Jewish that the issue of – they just greet from a distance, the same way you see it in India and other Eastern tradition that the issue of greetings.

I explained to the students also about the dogs and how to interact with the dogs and how to explain to the host families about how to go with the issue of the dog and the saliva. And again, that's because of the – during the time of the prophet 1,400 years ago, dogs were different than the dogs of today. They used to be mostly stray dogs and might be eating all kinds of things between dead animals or trash or whatever. So if they would bite someone, it might bring the rabies or – but today, when you are talking about dogs, we are talking about regular visits to the vets and shots, but still the concept of the saliva is mentioned in the books.

And I just explained to the students how to clean themselves if the dog licked their hands or their pants or whatever by just washing and – the issue of the confusion toward the seventh times and one of these times with dust and how today the soap is there and other kind of detergents which will take care of that.

I also explained to the students about Halal food, and by the way, this is going to be really a sensitive issue. Some of the students, it's hard for them to live without Halal food and they would rather go vegetarian the whole year. And some of the students will understand the situation, whether it is – the Halal food is far from them or it's expensive even if it's closed and that they cannot make the family to buy that for them all the time. So I just explained to them to expect that Halal food – I am talking about meat, Halal meat, that it's not available and they can resort to the verse in the Quran, which clearly says that the food of the people of the book is lawful for you and yours is lawful for them.

Even though we speak about it at the orientation, but still, some of the students are fixed in their mind that they would like to eat only Halal food. And really, that's different from, again, students from different backgrounds and what kind of orientation they had before they come here. And because last year, there were couple of incidents mainly also revolving around Halal meat.

Some of the students – also, I would like to talk here about the issue of gender dynamics. Some of the students are not use to taking orders from women, so you will see the relation between the host mother and some of the students who are coming from certain region where that is not common. I let the students know that they need to train themselves to understand that this is America and this issue for us is completely normal and they should keep that in mind the issue of respect to the host mother or the teacher or whoever.

Some of the students have headscarf, some they don't. Some, it's hard for them to take it off when they play sports. Some, for them, they don't want to wear shorts, too, revealing above the knee. Some, they would rather only

wear up to the knee. For those who have concerns, we have sent in the past some letters from CECF to different schools explaining the dress code for women and how covering the head for them is part of their Islamic dress code. But again, some students are – that's not an issue for them, and some, they are very strong towards the issue of covering and the practice.

I do also explain to the students that access to the mosques during their year is possible. They have the islamicfinder.org, where they put their zip code and that shows them the closer mosques to them and closer Islamic centers and communities and groceries, whether it is Asian or Middle Eastern. That's also accessible for them. And I will always advise towards making a phone call to the mosque where the student is going to go to.

The mosques here in America are really diverse. You have African-American mosques, which is kind of also full of African-American culture. And in the cities of America, the African-American experience went through so many phases and transitions from the nation of Islam during Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan and Malcolm X to the reformation within the movement itself towards the Muhammad and then moving towards mainstream Islam.

But today, you will see a lot of diversity within the African-American Muslim communities in America. And then you will see some immigrant mosques mainly Pakistani, Arabs, Asian, Indonesian, Filipino, it depends, or Malaysians. So really, mosques in America are diverse. And I will always explain to the students to that you are not here to be caught in the in-house politics of different communities and different mosques. You are there just to pray and then go.

Some of the students might be interested to become very active in the activities of the mosque, but that is really subject to the availability of the host family that he is coming first of all to study and to excel academically. And the visits to different mosques and Islamic center has to be in moderation and not to also loose himself with different activities which will impact his relation with host family or his achieving academically.

The last issue I would like to talk about here is really the issue of diversity within the student themselves and the getting together among themselves. And that's normally through the BUBW conferences, the Better Understanding for a Better World, which we hold at the CECF three times a year, one in Orlando, one in San Diego, one in Baltimore. And it has been proven extremely beneficial for students when they participate in these conferences. We have done 15 so far. And this year, we are moving towards having one for the alumni.

But I just want to say the last thing here that hopefully this year, CECF will be holding the same BUBW conferences but for adults of host families as well as staff of different organizations to be introduced to the importance of cultural diversity here in America, as well as the religious diversity and how to deal with the concept of hosting exchange students and the rest of the topics pertaining to America and the Muslim countries.

And the most important thing really is the rise of hate in America towards different ethnic groups and religious groups. I think some of you have seen on TV recently the issue of the billboard at Metro North Station, which causes a lot of outrage that's mentioned at the Huffington Post on the 17th of this month, just couple of days ago. We have the article. I'll be delighted to share it with you. But really, that shows something not healthy and that's the rise of different groups, whether they are talking about Islamophobic or killing and rhetoric as we have seen in the shooting a couple of weeks ago on Sunday to a Sikh Temple and then followed the next, on Monday, with the burning to the ground of a mosque.

Now that to me really extremely, extremely important topics to be shared with the students but in a kind way and not to make them also scared, but this is a reality. We are seeing it here in America. And sometimes, some of those exchange students are caught in the middle. And they might hear something, they might be told something on a negative side. But at the same time, there are a lot of positive and wonderful representatives of the American society who will come and embrace diversity.

But I just wanted to say that we are living in a time also we are seeing at the same time rise of different militia groups who are seeking certain rhetoric anti-immigrants, anti-religious groups or anti-Semitic or you know. I think the incidence just in the past couple of weeks speaks about itself.

I would rather stay here – stop here and look forward for your questions.

Bonnie Duyf: Thank you very much, Imam Arafat. And I think from what you have just said really underscores the reason that we are all involved in this kind of exchange programs so that we can dissuade this kind of thinking and recognize that no matter what state group we are in, we hope that our goals are peace and understanding and co-existence probably growing through that as well.

I know Imam Arafat is available to talk or to communicate though his organization with students who may be confronted with a difficult situation like that. There is a way to be able to explain that and give you some talking points if you are doing support work as well. In addition to that, if you are fortunate enough to be in a community as I am in St. Louis, we do have an interstate group, which brings together religious leaders from all the (Mamafia phase), as well as some of the others. And it's a place where we are able to find imams and pastors and rabbis who are able to put all of us together in a very positive way and help us messaging some of these issues, too.

So I encourage you to find that kind of a group if you have a community – have one in your community. I would say as a host mom and I'm going to speak on behalf of my husband who is a host dad, we've learned so much as all of you will who are going to be hosting for the first time and even again our Muslim students. And we've been very blessed to have students from many parts of the country – parts of the world.

So we've also been able to see the diversity of their practice individually and also to see that there are cultural or their ethnic group or the (pressure) group also puts another layer of diversity. So we need to be very careful not to generalize what a Muslim student is because a Muslim student from Yemen is different than a student from Mindanao and Kazakhstan and so on. So this is

a challenge for you also to really probe and learn what makes each one of them unique in their culture and also in the way they practice Islam.

A few comments on prayer time. This is something, of course, for the families. We need to determine how to adjust to if it's not a practice in your own homes, certainly not five times a day. And one of the things we made sure was that we have a very clean space in our home and the bedroom was a wonderful place for the prayer. And it's also a place to keep the door closed from your dog or cat anywhere there so that that space will remain clean. And with our own daughter, it was important for her to clean everything in the room as she felt comfortable with so that that could be a prayer space for her. So we are encouraged to do that.

We also found a little sign that we have to put on the door so when it is prayer time and she needed to close the door, we were not interrupting her because she was praying there. She was not responding and it may have been dinner is ready, and we knew that if the sign was on the door that we would just plan our schedule and let her have her prayer time happen first before we scheduled or tried to sit down to dinner.

We also learned the plans and the expectations in our own tasks around the kitchen and so on. We're on with the prayer time lunch for that day. So it wasn't the time to set the table or do the dishes or whatever, but we were able to work around that schedule so that she could participate and meet family obligations and still meet prayer time.

Also, what was interesting to me and would wager around to is to know that talking about women's issues and periods and so on were very much part of the open discussion among Muslim girls. And this indicates that many American teenagers thought it was an OK topic and one that was very open, and that was helpful for us to know.

For us to be able to travel, we've got with us in the car, we had water for washing and a prayer mat, so if we just happened to be out and the timing wasn't working for us to be in the right spot, there was always water and a prayer mat so that she could (tell students) trust and help they needed to, (stuff

that you taught). Or hence, you may want to talk to them about what seems to work with them.

Look for them. Islamicfinder.com was a great website for us to find out what the prayer time would be if we were traveling so that we would again plan around that schedule. Halal food, I think, Imam Arafat, if there is kosher food available, too, is that considered an acceptable alternative?

Mohamad Arafat: Exactly. And that's what I always show in my presentation that kosher food and especially the way meat is slaughtered according to the Jewish faith and Jewish tradition is almost exactly as the Halal. So they can have that if the Halal meat is not available and they say the prayer and they eat. And also, we show them at our presentations different signs and different labels with different packages that all referred to kosher.

Bonnie Duyf: Right. So that's something that you may want to talk to with them about. And also talk to your own butchers in your supermarkets because most often, these products are available, you just might not know where to find them in your store. Increasingly, I'm a food writer and a dietician and (I have been) watching what's coming into the supermarket. And those products, Halal products and kosher products, are more and more available. But if you have some ethnic markets, an Eastern market or in the Pakistani market, they'll have the Halal products as well.

On the website, not only the islamicfinder but also the IFANCA site, which is the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America. There are some lists of what foods are Halal and which foods are haram, which means those are prohibited food. (In fact), if your student has been very, very (at that), which ones are considered (must food) and which ones are questionable, so that may be something that you want to check and then talk to Imam Arafat or a local imam about if you need some guidance about that as well.

Also, one of the challenging issues for our daughter was what are you wearing for the prom or to the homecoming or whatever when the other girls are wearing strapless dresses and so on. And we found that it was easier than we thought. So when you have the dresses, have a little jacket. And some of the

girls decided that they want to wear the colors from their culture, which was wonderful. And so we need to make sure we looked around modesty but you won't be shocked. They sell some clothing for the Muslim women consumer are now providing some really pretty dresses and things like that which are coming into our marketing in St. Louis. So again, you might want to check on that.

Another comment I wanted to say is that this is a wonderful opportunity for you to together share your faith, whatever your faith base is. And we have also a very welcome being a Christian family going to the mosque and having our daughters and the young man who's been part of our Araria team also take us with them and determine what we should appropriately be wearing which were longer skirts and knee covered and having our heads covered as well.

But I think one of the things that I really so enjoyed was when the imam was making his remark or sermon. We found that they were doing it in English and we could participate in that, understand it and then our savvy daughter, she told us while they mentioned some names, that was the Arabic name for Jesus and Joseph and Mary. It was very, very comfortable for us to know that there was something that was part of a cultural perspective, religious perspective we had had. And we went home and we put the Bible and the Quran side by side and looked through the two books to find whether they were commonalities, and we can learn from each other, so I would encourage you to do likewise. It's a wonderful learning.

I'm going to just indicate, suggest some resources with you, and then we'll take your questions. On the AFS Wiki site, which is available to all of you, it's www.afs.wiki. And if you did a search on Ramadan, (or reformic), the resources will come up for you. If you have insights not only on Ramadan, which has just passed and you may want a resource that for yourself to the future. But other things on Islam, and it would be very, very helpful.

The handbook which Imam Arafat has developed from Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation is available there and it addresses many of the things that we've just been (cleaning), want to go back and look at those. And again, contact your local mosques for prayer times. And also,

as a local resource and certainly to others who have come before you in hosting is a tremendous resource.

With that, I will encourage all to unmute and feel free to ask questions. And you unmute by going cross-hash six. When you do, come on the line. If you would, please identify yourself and your location and your hosting, where your student is from. Make sure to be careful about background noise and then present all your questions to Imam Arafat.

So is there anybody who has a question?

A question maybe I should ask, you mentioned some holidays that may be different for Shi'a and Sunni students. And are there some holidays that we should be aware of that we can celebrate with the students? We just of course finished Ramadan and we will be certainly celebrating Christmas or Passover or whichever part of your own faith traditions. But are there some that we should be aware of to make our students feel at home and comfortable and that we can learn from them?

Mohamad Arafat: Again, it depends really on the background of the student. But some of them, also, they have cultural holidays. It's not religious. For example, some of the students might have Nauryz holiday, which is mostly for the Kurdish. They have that. And some, as I mentioned, they have the issue of Ashura, but I explained to the students also that the holidays here in the U.S., whether it is Christmas or Thanksgiving that – take Christmas, for example, that this is something mentioned in the Quran. And I shared with them some verses and we write letter and we send it to the students during these holidays to share with the host family about these holidays from also the Islamic perspective. And thanksgiving, at the same time, it has a wonderful meaning. So Hanukkah, I think, this year we are including in our letter to share the same thing with the students.

So it's really different again when it comes to holidays in Islam other than the both sides. It depend which culture and which religious background the student is from. Some, for example, they celebrate the Hijra, the migration of the Prophet, and some, they don't. Some, they celebrate the birthday of

Prophet Muhammad, which comes almost a month after pilgrimage and some, they don't. But most of the Muslim countries those kinds of things they do honor it when it comes to again the birthday of Prophet Mohammed or the one I just also mentioned. And some, it depends really. Some are more into Islam. Some are more into Salafi. But I'll be delighted to take other questions also.

Bonnie Duyf: Are there any questions anyone has about school and prayer times and how to talk to the counselor or around school about quiet place to pray? Maybe you could answer that. Just in case the parents (like to use this at a starting school year).

Mohamad Arafat: Well, I just wanted to note one thing that I have seen from the issues we counseled last year. There have been some really ego issues and sometimes religious issues, and I have seen some of the students, it is hard for them to follow orders of certain issues and certain instructions. And I have seen some of the students use the religion sometimes to justify what they are doing or what they don't want to do. And really, when it comes to that issue, it's important to talk about that a little bit deeper than only what the student is saying.

One of the students sometime was justifying the reason why he is late in the morning for the bus. It's just because of his morning prayer and reading of the Quran. So sometimes, some of the students, they justify certain behavior because of religious practice. But of course, when I explained to them and I speak with them, I make sure that they should not use these kinds of excuses to justify their behavior.

Bonnie Duyf: With that being the case, and thank you for that comment, could you talk a little bit about that early morning prayer when it might (make her) still want to go back to sleep a little while before they get ready for school? And that was the case with our daughter. And so we were trying to figure out who needs to wake her up, which of course, she is the (crucial type).

Mohamad Arafat: I just wanted to say that, that is true when it is in winter or in the summer or when – like now, the schedule still comes around 5:00 am. But when the time

change, it almost will be before they leave home to go to school. Sometimes, certain months of the year, I mean, I see it with our own daughters and children, they leave home and still the sun did not rise. So there is no time for them to go back to sleep and they almost – they pray and they get out of the door right away.

And when it is now, September, October or when it gets to May, then things change. But again, that's different based on the timing of the year. And regardless, it should not delay them from the school.

Bonnie Duyf: Great. Are there any questions related to sports or any issues related to sports now that this is the beginning of a school year and students are wanting to go out for sports. Fortunately, they don't have to worry – at this point since Ramadan is over, they don't have to worry about hydration as they did before. Are there any other issues related to contact sports? You talked about what to wear before prayer times if it is during sports practice that we can guide the students on or as parents we need to know. Imam Arafat?

Mohamad Arafat: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the last thing.

Bonnie Duyf: It was the question about school sports and if there are any things related to timing of afterschool practice and prayer time or what is worn or contact sports that parents and young people may need to know.

Mohamad Arafat: Again when it gets closer to winter time, the students, they can pray afternoon prayer in school if they have to stay a little bit longer. The issue of the dress and clothes, some of the girls they, of course, they will wear longer pants. Some of the boys sometimes also, they want to wear a longer pant and they don't want to wear shorts. But the issue of the scarf, that is the issue where some of the teachers might speak about it. And if that is an issue after the students explain to them, some, they prefer to have a letter, which we will be glad and delighted to write the letter.

But in general, we really encourage the students to participate in all kinds of sports and to learn because you are not only playing sports but also learning so many things from this experience. So I have not seen in the past somebody dropped from sports or any kind of sports because of religious issues, no. The

only thing is swimming. Some of the girls might have some concern. Can they ask if they can wear certain kind of material of a t-shirt? They can buy that from Sports Authority or different shops selling sports materials that they can wear. It's a kind of long sleeve and cover their body. But again, that is an issue. They need to explain it to their coach and to their teachers.

Bonnie Duyf: I also noticed various – it was a website, islamicwear.com. And I believe they have some swimming suits for women that can be ordered either on that site or some similar sites. And I have also seen women where I work out who wear those bathing suits that are more – they cover more. So if that is an issue, you might want to check that because there are so much better that are available that they could perhaps wear if they chose to.

And another question although we never require a student to go to another religious institution if they don't choose to, how is it – what is an appropriate way to invite them to just join you on a Sunday morning or Synagogue or wherever you pray? Do you suggest that, that may be a cultural experience for the students as well or what ...

Mohamad Arafat: We do mention this at our arrival orientation that it is good for you to join the host family for this religious observation. And you don't have to go. I mean, this is not an obligation. But I do mention to them that it is part of your experience in the United States to see how different religions practice. You can just sit and observe.

And also, I mentioned to the students that certain host families, for them, going to church on Sunday, that's a family activity, so everybody goes. And if you went and you have seen the service once, twice, three times, and you don't want to go in anymore, you can request to stay at either the library or at the hall or do something else. But it is good to go with them especially if it is a family activity.

Bonnie Duyf: Excellent, and I will add to that, that while we have taken our students to church and we've gone with them to prayers at the mosque, we have also taken them to the Synagogue, which was ahead of service that we also had listened and sat to the sermon that the Rabbi gave could have been given in

the mosque or in the church. There were just so many commonalities and the ethics and what we're being shared about, it's just respect for God that we found that (to the self) to be interesting that there was that experience that we all learned from that as well.

So again, maybe taking the student to a faith-based organization if you choose to. That is not even the one you know where he might go with you if you go. So again, another thought.

Mohamad Arafat: And that's why we ask them during our BUBW conferences to open their minds when we take them for the interfaith day and to visit the church, the mosque and the Synagogue and to see the beauty of the diversity here in America and the similarities, as well as the differences.

Bonnie Duyf: Great. Well, with that, it's five after nine, or where I am, five after 10, or five after seven for some of the others (of you). And we appreciate your being on the call today. We know that there is probably just a tip of the iceberg in the all the things that are going to come your way in the next few weeks and few months that you would like to learn. And again, the resources that are on the AFS Wiki are available to all those who are on the conference and to those in your teams, as well the volunteers.

Imam Arafat is available. To ask questions, you can send them on. Again this call and the two Ramadan calls are going to be available for you in notes as well as other achieves. So again, use those as a resource for you. And I think we can all say here ...

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