

Breaking bread, eradicating hate



uch can happen when we gather for a meal — new understandings, new commitments, new friendships.

In May 2018, several ELCA congregations and worshiping communities discovered this when they joined their Muslim neighbors for interfaith iftars.

An iftar is the meal for which Muslims break their daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

Augustana Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., and the mission congregation it shares building space with, *Pueblo de Dios*, hosted their first iftar. Almost 60 people attended, including members of Augustana Lutheran and *Pueblo de Dios* and Muslims from three mosques in town.

“There was a bit of discomfort on both sides — Christian and Muslim,” said Amy Martinell, Augustana’s pastor. But “when the food came out and we sat and ate together, the discomfort melted away and we became one community.”

For two years the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) hosted regular iftars with a nearby Turkish community. Sara Trumm, interim director of A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice at LSTC, reported that 60 to 100 people attended. Trumm said they’ve found that sharing a meal helps people feel comfortable meeting others from different backgrounds.

“Right now, with Islamophobia as strong as it is, it’s important for people to be informed about what

Islam is so they don’t fall prey to some of the negative stereotyping and falsities being shared, especially with one of the Ten Commandments telling us to not bear false witness against our neighbors,” she said.

To promote the interfaith iftars, Neighbors in Faith, a joint ministry of the Northwest Washington Synod of the ELCA, the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia and Washington’s Muslim community, worked with Shoulder-to-Shoulder, an interreligious campaign dedicated to ending anti-Muslim sentiment. *The ELCA is a founding member of Shoulder-to-Shoulder, which receives Mission Support funding.*

“What actually changes for people who are rooted in fear is to meet a Muslim and realize they’re just human too,” said Terry Kylo, an ELCA pastor and the director of Neighbors in Faith. “The iftars are a beautiful way to begin to understand the basics of Islam and how many similarities we have. And they help our Muslim neighbors to see that they aren’t alone, that we want to learn from them and are willing to stand in solidarity with them.”



Lutherans and Muslims broke bread together at interfaith iftars in May 2018. Your Mission Support dollars boost the ministry of Shoulder-to-Shoulder, an interreligious campaign to end anti-Muslim sentiment founded by the ELCA and other ministry partners.

