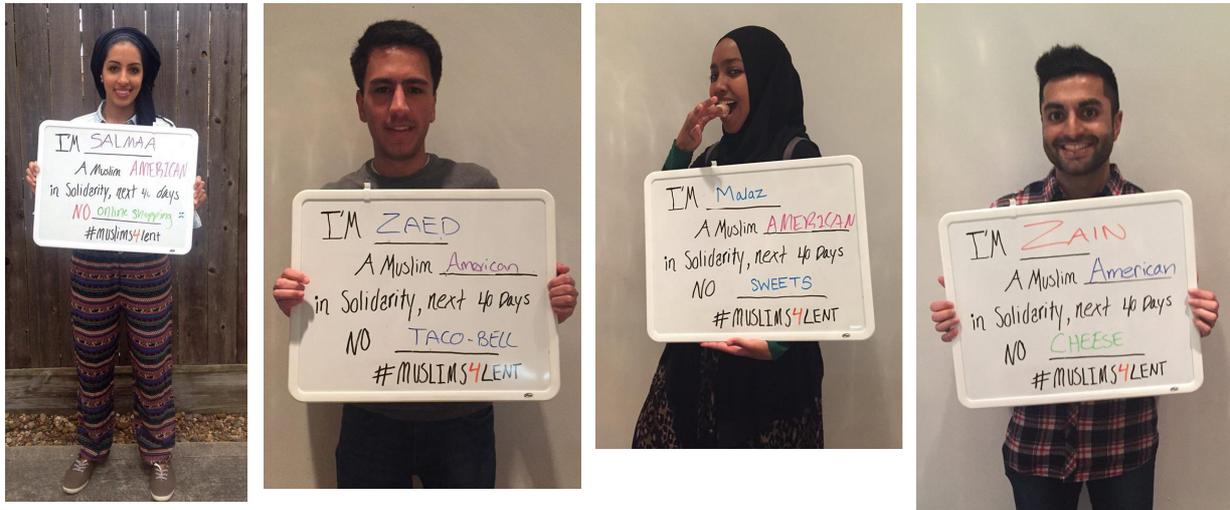


Why Some Muslims Are Fasting For Lent

Antonia Blumberg, *The Huffington Post*, 17 February 2015



Lent begins on February 18 in 2015, marking the 40-day fast many Christians partake in leading up to the Easter holiday. In a display of solidarity and interfaith appreciation, some Muslims are pledging to fast alongside their Christian neighbors this year, and they hope it will become an annual tradition.

Muslim-American Bassel Riche started the campaign using the hashtag [#Muslims4Lent](#) and has promoted it through a Facebook event page and on Twitter. Riche is also the creator of [EidPrayLove](#), a website that aims to showcase "the true teachings of Islam: peace, unity, and coexistence."

"Thus far, the reaction from Muslims and Christians alike has been wonderful and overwhelmingly positive," Riche told *The Huffington Post* in an email. "Many of my Christian friends have responded showing their support and appreciation for these interfaith efforts. I hope this is just the beginning."

Last year, Riche invited Muslims around the country to participate in [#BringEidToWork2014](#) by sharing sweets and greetings with their co-workers as a way of spreading awareness about the faith.

"The hope is that by doing these things we are making ourselves accessible to people to ask questions about Islam to help bridge the gap of understanding and to reclaim our voice that has been hijacked by our extremists," Riche told *HuffPost*.

[#Muslims4Lent](#) has a similar agenda to promote interfaith understanding, this time by engaging Muslims in a holiday period typically only observed by Christians.

The idea is not entirely a novel one. In 2009, prominent Christian pastor Brian McLaren announced that he and other Christians would be observing the Muslim season of Ramadan in order to "come close to our Muslim neighbors and to share this important part of life with

them." The idea caught on with some Christians, though others objected on theological grounds.

"[Observing Ramadan is] an explicit affirmation that this is a good and holy thing," Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, told The Associated Press that year. "From a New Testament perspective, it is not a good and holy thing."

But Muslims who observe Lent and Christians who observe Ramadan might disagree with Mohler's analysis.

"Fasting, either the Christian or the Muslim way, makes one feel the suffering of those who do not have food," Mike Kanawati, a Christian resident of Bethlehem, told Al-Arabiya News.

For Riche, the #Muslims4Lent campaign offers an opportunity for dialogue and greater understanding between faiths.

"It seems that nowadays hate can spread a lot faster than love," Riche said. "We put so much focus on the people that attack Islam and Muslims, but I'm willing to bet for every one of those people there are 100 that have extended their hands in kindness and respect."