

## **Factors Affecting Evangelism to Muslims by the Africa Inland Church (AIC) Leaders in Marigat, Baringo County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

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Around the world, Christians face challenges as they reach out to Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ, with many factors at play. In some cases, the missionary work among Muslims appears unfruitful; in others, the church does not have a vision and focus to reach out to Muslims. In Marigat, the evangelism focus of the Africa Inland Church (AIC) is more on the indigenous people than Muslims. This study investigated factors that hinder evangelism to Muslims by the AIC in this location. The qualitative approach was used to generate in-depth data on the phenomenon. The research looked at the religious, socio-cultural and economic factors that affect evangelism to Muslims. The findings revealed various factors that hinder evangelism as lack of knowledge about Islam by AIC leaders, lack of teachings on Muslim evangelism in churches, the different understanding of the way of life, lack of commitment and knowledge of the Bible by Christians, and general fear of Muslims. Further, the study makes recommendations for Muslim evangelism.

**Keywords:** Evangelism, AIC Leaders, Muslim Evangelism, Islam, Gospel, Missions, Baringo

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### **Introduction**

Many people have not made deliberate efforts to understand Islam and its adherents, “Muslims are one of the most discussed but least understood people groups in our contemporary world, yet they comprise about 2,854 of the globe’s nearly 7,000 unreached people groups. Unfortunately, there is only one Christian missionary for every 405,000 Muslims on the planet” (Alex, 2019). Among many other scholars who have researched on Islam religion, Parshall Phil remarks that “Islam is one of the youngest religions in the world, but it has become the second largest religion after Christianity; almost every nation on earth has on its



soil a community of dedicated sons of Ishmael” (Parshall, 1980, p. 13). Therefore for meaningful engagement, there should be some intentional interactions.

Christians have been given the mandate to reach out to all the world with the gospel (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15–16; Acts 1:8). The Great Commission was given to every follower of Christ and is a mandatory mission; to ignore it is disobedience, and God will hold Christians responsible for the unbelievers living around them (Warren 2002, 283). Believers have a role in warning evildoers to turn away from their evil and follow God, “When I say to a wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or evil ways, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself (Ezek 3:18–19. NIV Bible).

Corporately, evangelism is also the function of the church. It must, therefore, be projected in specific workable and effective activities for which those engaged in them can be held accountable. Where the passion for evangelism does not exist, a vital dimension of apostolic Christianity is missing. Similarly, if the church does not evangelise, it has forfeited the identity and right to be apostolic (Abraham 2002, 167).

In Marigat, Muslims from the Nubi tribe first migrated in sparse numbers in search of employment in the Perkerra Irrigation scheme in Baringo in the early 1980s. But today, many other Muslims, such as Somali Muslims, have moved in for business. Here, Christians and Muslims live as neighbours, doing business and agricultural activities in this small town. Also, Muslim children attend Christian schools with Christian children and are taught by Christian teachers. Upon invitation, some AIC members and leaders participate in Muslim ceremonies like weddings and funerals. There is a good social relationship between Muslims and Christians in Marigat.

In Marigat, the AIC was the first church to be planted through mission work in 1957. The church has multiplied to more than 10 AIC congregations in Marigat through evangelism. However, the main target in evangelism is the indigenous people than Muslims. It is worth noting that the vision of the AIC church is based on the Great Commission. The church also has biannual collections to support missionaries and mission work in the least reached areas. Despite this emphasis, the members were ill-equipped to reach their Muslim neighbours with the gospel. Thus the study examines factors that hinder evangelism to Muslims in Marigat.



## **Literature Underpinning**

This section surveys relevant literature on the subject. Mugenda and Mugenda argue that literature review is “the systematic identification, location and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem being investigated. And the main purpose of it is to determine what has been done already related to the research problem being studied” (Mugenda 2003, 29). The purpose of the section is to share with the readers the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported, and this helps the researcher to share the findings with the readers correctly (Creswell 2003, 2). Hence the research already done are of great benefit to new researchers. Janvier argues, “We are linked together and can benefit from each other” (Janvier 2004, 3). This section looks at challenges to Muslim evangelism. The factors discussed are religious, economic, and socio-cultural.

### **I. Factors Affecting Evangelism to Muslims**

#### **A. Religious Factors**

Islam is a religion and a way of life for all Muslims worldwide; it stipulates their social and religious customs. Rosemary Sookhdeo asserts that Muslims have a set of religious duties called “The Five Pillars of Islam,” which are compulsory for every Muslim. These are the Shahadah (confession of faith), Zakat (offerings), Salat (praying five times a day), Saum (fasting) and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) (Sookhdeo R. 2019, 49-55). All these are transmitted from one generation to another through the teachings in Islamic schools (Madrassas) and ensure that Muslims are acculturated in their religion. Kim observes that

A child who has gone through strong religious enculturation in a society whose central worldview is characteristically religious, become culturally conservative and fundamentalist, for example, a Muslim boy who has been acculturated into his Muslim society that is principally rooted in Islamic religious tenets, sees his culture as the right one to be known and followed by other people. Thus, anthropologically religious education through the Quranic School (Madrassa), is also a part of cultural education which is enculturation for Muslim children, then in this case, religion and culture can hardly be separated (Kim, 2019, p. 35).

Therefore, evangelising people who have been trained in their religion since childhood is an arduous task. Nehls & Eric states what is involved in the formation process of young children,

Through Madrassa, children get acquainted with Islamic worldview and values like what is *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (forbidden). Then apart from teachings of what is lawful or forbidden, children with Muslim backgrounds are also introduced to using negative words toward Christians and Christianity,



Anti-Christian propaganda is injected into Muslim children from small ones, just to safeguard them from courting (relating) with the Christian faith (Nehls & Eric, 2009, p. 75).

All this shows how Muslims ground themselves in Islamic teachings and can resist other religions. In addition, the instructions of the Quran are a significant factor affecting Christian witness to Muslims. The Quran Sura 5:51 asserts that “Oh you who believed take not the Jews and the Christians as “*Auliya*” (friends, protectors, helpers), they are but *Auliya* of each other. And if anyone amongst you takes them as *Auliya*, then surely, he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not those people who are *Zalimun* (polytheists and wrongdoers and unjusts)” (Sura 5:51). In Christian witness to Muslims, friendship is one of the fundamental principles before presenting the gospel to them. Therefore, if Muslims maintain such teachings, the friendship process becomes difficult, and evangelism is hindered.

Patrick Sookhdeo also argues that the antipathy of Muslims to Christians is reinforced by the fact that faithful Muslims who pray five times daily repeat 17 times a day in Arabic the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> verses of Sura1 (Al- Fatihah), which is seen as the most important sura in the whole Quran). It says, “Guide us to the straightway. The way of those on whom you have bestowed your grace, not the way of those who earned your anger (such as the Jews), not the way of those who went astray (such as the Christians)” (Sookhdeo, 2008,77). As faithful Christians meditate on God’s word and become firm believers, Muslims’ repetition of this sura daily greatly impacts their lives. It creates, in them, a rejection of Christianity.

Another factor affecting Muslim evangelism comes from differences between Christianity and Islam due to the theology and interpretations of beliefs in the two faiths (Kamau Patrick, 2018, 69). Although both Christians and Muslims believe in the existence of one God (Monotheism in Sura 2: 255; 6: 103; Deut 6: 4, Mark 12: 29), Muslims deny the Trinity, the deity of Jesus and his Sonship, but emphasise on the omnipotence of God and his greatness. It is blasphemy in Islam to associate God with a man (Sura 4:171, 5:17, 72, 9:31). However, the foundation of the Christian faith is on the deity of Jesus, his death on the cross and his resurrection, and in God’s love through the incarnation of Jesus (John 1:1–14, John 3: 16).

Christians believe in the Bible as the breathed word of God, and Muslims believe strongly in the Quran as their holy book, which came from God through their prophet Muhammad. Muslims are restricted in the use of the Bible. Sookhdeo Patrick notes that

New converts to Islam are given a book of instructions about the attitude they should have towards the Bible. They are taught that the previously divinely revealed books have suffered a great deal of distortion, addition, and deflection, as Allah has mentioned in the Quran (Sura 2: 75, 4:46, 5:13).



Therefore, Muslims are not permitted to read or look at those books, except the Muslim who is well grounded in Islam and has the desire to show what has occurred in them through distortions and contradictions (Sookhdeo, 2008, 80).

However, in the Middle East, for example, a study conducted by the Seventh Day Adventist about challenges to Muslim evangelism revealed the following as the main hindrances of evangelism to Muslims: the lack of coordinated administrative planning for evangelism, the weak spiritual commitment of some believers, the rise and spread of Nationalism during the colonial era and the prejudice between Christians and Muslims. Another factor was that Islam is both a religion and a political system where religion and State are united, and Islamic laws are both civil and religious (Roth Ray Lee 1983, pp. 53, 61, 79). Thus, wherever these issues were arising, Christian witness to Muslims was affected.

In the West, churches also face challenges in their encounter with Muslims because, in Islam, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, between the spiritual and the material. Muslims hold on to life's social, legal, cultural, political and even military aspects. They believe that their faith must impact society and contribute to the Islamic character of that society (Sookhdeo, 2008, 9–10). Although Christians are called to be the light and salt of the world, meaning that their faith must also impact society, Christianity is not a socio-political religion. There is a difference between the sacred (godly) and the secular, which includes even the ungodly systems. Therefore, before engaging in evangelism, Christians should learn and understand the Islamic faith (e.g. the concepts of sin in Islam, salvation, and life after death, among others, from the Muslim's perspective),

According to Kamau, Christians and Muslims have been involved in interfaith conflicts since the dawn of Islam. For centuries, they have had dark physical aggression and religious conflicts depicted in ancient Jihad, radical Islam and Medieval Crusades. But efforts are being made to improve relations between the two faith communities and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values (Kamau 2018, 61).

In summary, the main challenges of evangelism to Muslims around the world include the Muslim commitment to the five pillars of Islam, the teachings from the Quran which differ from the biblical teachings, the compulsory training in Madrassa, and the interfaith conflicts since the dawn of Islam due to differences of beliefs. Also, lack of planning and commitment to evangelism by Christians are some of the main challenges affecting evangelism to Muslims.



## **B. Cultural and Economic Factors**

History reveals that the colonial era has left negative thoughts in some Muslim's minds, who still associate Christian missions with imperialism. For example, Kate Zebiri quotes a British Muslim intellectual who asserts, "Most Christian missionaries exhibit the major characteristics of liberal secularism, imperialistic tendencies, domination, etc. Also, Christian work is seen by Muslims as oppression, exploitive, arrogant, immoral and destructive of indigenous cultures" (Zebiri, 2003, 30). Such attitudes hugely hinder Christian witness to Muslims. Thus history can easily influence generations either positively or negatively. In this case, it can be said that Christian-Muslim relationships in the past due to religious differences have affected their present relationships, making it difficult for Christians to share the gospel with Muslims.

In Kenya, cultural and economic factors have hindered evangelism to Muslims. First, the Christian missionaries in the past had a negative attitude towards Muslims, associating Islam with slavery and the slave trade. They even argued that Kiswahili is the language of former slave owners who used it to promote the spread of Islam. Thus, missionaries influenced the attitudes of the native people against Islam, hence the tensions between Muslims and Christians (Alio, 2015, 119). Such attitudes break trust and relationships, eventually creating obstacles for the Christian witness.

Second, Alio (2015) adds that during the colonial era, when the British colonialists took authority, the educational sector was under the leadership of missionaries. Muslims saw themselves as marginalised at that time. Even during the post-independence era, when the leadership of the country was given in the hands of Christian elites, Muslims felt marginalised because economically, their areas were left un-developed (no tarmac roads, no equipped health facilities, no communication projects or service schemes, shortage of facilities, books, teachers and teaching materials in the education sector, and there was lack of employment). This created a rift in interfaith relations (Alio, 2015, 123). Therefore, when Muslims feel neglected by Christian leaders, it affects their relationship with the Christian Church and becomes a hindrance to evangelistic work.

The third factor is on the issue of a series of terrorist attacks like the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, the Kikambala bombing in 2002, the Westgate Mall shooting in 2013, the Lamu attacks in 2014, the Mandera and Garissa University attacks and massacre in 2015. All this caused the death of many people and left others injured. Due to these acts, Christians and others associate Islam with terrorism, thus creating Islamophobia among Kenyans (Alio, 2015, p. 125). Therefore Christians are living in fear of Muslims, and it becomes hard to reach them with the gospel.



Momanyi notes that the various attacks in Kenya by the Al-Shabab were carried out in Churches, buses, bars, bus stations, military Camps, marketplaces and shopping centres. And these terrorists always target specific people. For example, the US Embassy bombing targeted the Americans, and the 2002 attack in Mombasa was to kill the Israeli tourists who landed that day. During the Westgate bombing, the terrorists spared Muslims and killed non-Muslims. They did the same on the bus travelling from Mandera to Nairobi on 24 November 2014, where they separated Christians from Muslims and then shot Christians to death (Momanyi, 2015, pp. 9–12). All these are factors that affect Christian–Muslim relationships limiting evangelistic progress.

The lack of preparation in Islamic matters, Muslim evangelism, and its challenges among Christians have also crippled Muslim evangelism. According to Kipruto and Sesi, little is known about Muslims and their religious identity in most Christian circles (Tanui & Sesi, 2019, p. 38). This means that it will not be easy for Christians to witness Muslims without knowing the kind of religion they have to deal with. Adequate preparation (in terms of knowing Islamic doctrine, conducting seminars on approach for evangelism to Muslims, knowing their ways of life, financial preparation, among other issues), is essential before engaging in any work and ministry.

Some other social issues that can hinder evangelism to Muslims are as follows: the influence of the community on the individuals, the Muslim family, the Sharia law in Islam, and shame and guilt, among others. In terms of individual and community, Sookhdeo argues that

The community takes priority over the individual. Thus an individual's needs and choices must always be subjected to the good of the wider group (the extended family firstly, and the entire Muslim community worldwide, the Umma, secondly), in any case of conflict of interest. Again, the same principle of community taking over the individual is reflected in the coercive nature of the *Shari'a* (Sookhdeo P.2006, 24).

Additionally, in Islam, the outward conformity to rituals and rules is often considered more important than the question of inner sincerity, being thus a religion which lends itself to enforcement by the State (Sookhdeo P. 2006, 25).

In addition, the extended family determines an individual's identity, position and status in society. Muslims are proud of their family connections and lineage. Loyalty to the family takes precedence over personal needs, obligations to friends or the demand of a job. A Muslim's first allegiance will always be to their relatives, and a basic rule is that nobody can really be trusted except family members. The family is the main source of emotional and





economic security. The family is the most crucial factor in all decisions, including matters of religion, marriage and jobs (Sookhdeo P. 2006, 31-32). In addition, contrary to Christianity, shame rather than guilt is the guiding principle in Islam. Muslims are after honour, self-esteem, dignity, good opinion from others, the reputation of an individual and his family, courage, good marriages, piety and loyalty to kin. Therefore, individuals are expected to suppress their personal needs and interests if they interfere with family or community honour (Sookhdeo 2006, 30). Moreover, the emotional and economic support reinforce unity among them, leading them to resist other religions. All these are challenges to the Christian witness to them.

The socio-cultural role of Muslim women can also be a challenge to evangelism. Saal argues that social and cultural activities, like weddings, circumcision, childbirth ceremonies, and so forth, are essential to women who mark each occasion with careful observance of local and religious customs where possible (Saal 1993, 61). In addition, women play a crucial role as guardians of religious and cultural practices such as the Islamic calendar like *Maulidi* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday celebrations), *Idd ul-ftr* (marking the end of Ramadhan fasting) (Saal 1999, 61). Therefore, all these obligations upon Muslim women can hinder them from attraction to Christianity and become a hindrance to evangelism to them. Further, other factors, such as economic issues, result from a lack of money and resources to plan and organise seminars in preparation for Muslim evangelism.

## II. The Church and Evangelism

As earlier stated, evangelism is the church's mandate, according to Mathew 28:18–20. It is an enduring obligation in every culture and every generation to gather, establish, and ground people in a kingdom marked by acts of love and mercy (Abraham, 2002, 184). It is the duty of the church as a whole and Christians as individuals. It demands obedience to God, who gave the command and wants everybody to repent (2 Peter 3:9) and to know the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Evangelism is also a means through which Christians can love for the people, including Muslims. Therefore, the presence of Muslims in Marigat should be taken by the AIC leaders and the entire church as new opportunities for evangelism.

Douglas Robert argued that Muslims are the largest block of an unreached people group in the world, and they are increasing in numbers because of the high birth rate (Douglas, 1999, 26). Therefore, due to this reality, Christian witness must be taken as a priority duty among the believers of Jesus Christ. Ed Stetzer emphasises that Christians must be trained to live on a mission approach daily, with a Christ-sharing mission outlook, and build





relationships with people to have evangelistic conversations. Also, they must focus less on creating expert gospel presenters, and instead, they must be encouraged to have gospel conversations as a normal part of life (Ed Stetzer, 2020).

Evangelism is not only a command but also a privilege and a source of blessings for Christians who live under God's presence as they take the gospel to all Nations (Matt 8:20). Michael Griffiths asserts that "It is however also gloriously true that it is a privilege as well as a duty, and it brings the greatest blessing to those who find greatest involvement in evangelism" (Griffiths, 1972, 36). The Bible says, "Yes, Jesus said to them, and I tell you that anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel, will receive much more in this present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, and fields, and persecutions as well, in the age to come he will receive eternal life" (Mark 10:29–30, NIV). Evangelism is thus a clear command coupled with promises along with challenges.

### **III. AIC Leaders and Evangelism in Marigat**

The Africa Inland Church members and leaders in Marigat understand the Great Commission and give biannually specifically to support mission work. They also evangelise through open-air meetings and face-to-face/ house-to-house, reaching men, women and even young people with the gospel using the Bible and other religious books and tracts. As a result, there are more than ten congregations in Marigat. However, these evangelism approaches have been inappropriate for reaching out to Muslims. They need special training to form contacts that would lead to conversions and support missionaries serving in these contexts.

From the discussion above, various issues have hindered evangelism to Muslims worldwide. Missiologists have given some suggestions to help the church to improve Christian–Muslim relations and then be able to overcome the challenges to Christian witness. However, the church can apply this if there is a willingness to reach out to this group. Ray Burkan suggests that overcoming some challenges in evangelism requires cross-cultural missionaries to go and live among unreached people groups to learn their culture and then present Christ to them through a contextualisation process (Burkan, 2018). Additionally, Burkan advises that evangelism should not be an on-and-off approach. It should be deliberate investing time in people, not taking authority over them, but letting the word of God be the authority in them. It is to learn and apply the gospel in various cultural settings and work alongside people towards Christ (Burkan, 2018). Winning souls for Christ involves sacrifice, patience and commitment to learning the target people's culture, language, and traditions. So



applying these principles can contribute to effectiveness in evangelism. S. P. Steinhaus proposed his method, “The Spirit-First Approach to Muslim- Evangelism.” This introduces the Holy Spirit as a solution to the troubled heart, attracting more attention and interest from Muslims than introducing to them firstly Jesus Christ, whom they deny his deity, seeing Him as a stumbling block (Steinhaus, 2000).

In conclusion, evangelism is a church’s mandate that has never been easy. Even during the apostolic era, there was persecution, but it did not hinder the spread of the gospel (Acts 8:1–4). God’s presence and grace accompanied them all through their evangelistic work. Churches must encourage believers to persevere in the evangelistic work despite challenges because Jesus promised his presence even amidst challenges (Matt 28:20b; Mark 10:29–30).

### **Methodology**

This article investigates the factors affecting evangelism to Muslims by the leaders of Africa Inland Church in the Marigat. The study used qualitative research to get in-depth information on the research questions. The qualitative approach explores the experience and perception of the participant regarding a phenomenon; it collects and analyses verbal and textual data and makes the researcher part of the research. (Selvam, 2007, p. 17). In addition, qualitative research occurs in the natural setting where the researcher often goes to the participant’s site (home, office) to collect data. This enables them to know more about the individual or the place and to be highly involved in the actual experiences of the participant (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999, 181). This approach ensured that the researcher was active, moving from one place to another and interacting with informants.

The Africa Inland Church in Marigat location has more than ten local Churches. These are the result of evangelism done by the leaders and believers to the local people in the location. Every local church has about seven and above leaders who form the Local Church Council (LCC). These leaders are the pastor in charge of the local church, the chairman and his vice, the secretary and his vice, the treasurer, the CED (Christian Education Department) worker, and the mission department leader. In some Churches, the pastor can also be the chairperson; in other cases, an elder can be elected to assume the role.

Above these leaders, there is also the top leadership: the District Church Council (DCC), which includes: The chairman and his vice, the secretary and vice, the treasurer, the CED worker, the mission department leader, and the Sunday school leader. This committee supervises and coordinates the local church activities in cooperation with every LCC. The



entire leadership is a broader population of more than 100 leaders. However, the researcher selected 25 leaders as her informants. Through purposeful sampling, they were chosen according to their experiences, long-term service in the church, and education level. They were five youths (18 years and above), six women (all married), and 14 men also married. The data was collected through ethnographic interviews with the 25 participants, who highlighted the factors that hinder evangelism to Muslims in the location where they live and meet on a daily basis through different activities.

After the collection, the data were transcribed and then analysed following the steps recommended in qualitative data analysis by Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. These steps are: First, the raw data management (data cleaning) which is the process of preparing and organising data into meaningful units for analysis and transforming text or audio data into transcripts. Second, data reduction (chunking, coding) involves making sense of the data by immersion through reading them several times, then doing the classification and categorisation for deeper immersion, writing notes in the margins and then doing the preliminary coding leading to the coding process. Thirdly, the data representation is the last step in phrasing the themes obtained from the coding process to present the narrative (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015, 310-311). Through the analysis of data then, the researcher was able to generate findings as described in the following section.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Findings**

This study investigated the factors affecting evangelism to Muslims by the Africa Inland Church in Marigat, Baringo County. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with 25 AIC leaders to collect the data. Then, the researcher analysed the data to answer the research questions regarding the factors affecting evangelism to Muslims in that area. This chapter presents the findings according to the four research questions that guided the study.

RQ1: What are the religious factors that affect evangelism to Muslims by the Africa Inland Church leaders in the Marigat location? In response to this research question, three themes emerged: AIC leaders lack enough knowledge about Islam religion, the lack of outreach plans and teachings on evangelism to Muslims, and lack of understanding of Muslim acculturation in the Islamic faith.



### *Lack of enough knowledge of the Islam religion*

Out of 25 participants, 21 respondents (84%) declared that through their interaction with their Muslim neighbours, they had learned a few realities about Islam: how it differs from Christianity, its rejection of Jesus' deity, his atoning death on the cross and his resurrection. Muslims believe in salvation through good works and believe in Mohammad as the last prophet sent by Allah; they practice the five pillars of Islam with a lot of zeal and commitment.

However, four participants (16%) only admitted they had little knowledge about Islam and Muslims. They attributed their lack of knowledge to the absence of training on Islam in their churches and the lack of interest in this religion.

### *Lack of plan and training for Muslim evangelism*

Most respondents indicated that as leaders, they have not planned for teachings about reaching out to Muslims with the gospel. In addition, they have not been equipped because "the church does not teach believers the issues concerning Islam religion." Some leaders indicated that past attempts to share the gospel with Muslims have resulted in tensions and arguments. Thus, although many interact with their Muslim neighbours on a daily basis (in business and agriculture, among other activities), they do not share the gospel. Additionally, AIC leaders claimed that they find evangelising other unbelievers more receptive to the gospel easier than Muslims.

### *Muslim's acculturation in the Islamic faith*

Most respondents cited similar reasons, stating that Muslims are well prepared to oppose other religions due to the teachings they receive in Madrassa from childhood. As a result, they always have intimidating questions, strongly disagree with the Bible and know more about their religion than Christians with their own Bible.

Some Christian churches lack consistent teachings, hindering their followers' spiritual growth. Muslim interactions can lead to gospel preaching if evangelists know the Bible and Quran. In this area, AIC leaders' and members' limited understanding of Islam led to opposing views, hindering their evangelisation ability. The church must teach the Bible regularly to all believers, including kids in Sunday Schools. Furthermore, Christians need to read and reflect on God's Word. This helps them evangelise, defend their faith and resist false teachings. If Madrassa attendance is mandatory, AIC leaders and believers must attend Church teachings.



RQ2: What socio-cultural factors affect evangelism to Muslims by the AIC leaders in the Marigat location? After data analysing, the following themes emerged: AIC leaders' interaction with their Muslim neighbours, Muslim ways of life, festivals/ceremonies, and Christian's fear of Muslims.

#### *AIC leader's interaction with Muslims*

Among the respondents, the majority claimed to have had contact with Muslims through various activities such as business, agriculture, farming, social meetings etc. Only a few stated that they had not interacted much because they were not interested in meeting with Muslims. Again, some leaders found their interactions positive and easy, while others found them negative and difficult, claiming that Muslims are open only to those they have known for a long time. It is not even easy for new visitors to enter into their homes. And when we talk with them, they seem to be in a hurry, as if they want us to end the conversation quickly and let them go.

#### *Muslim's way of life (Ceremonies/festivals)*

All 25 respondents pointed out that Muslims have specific ways of dressing to maintain purity, especially for women. They have particular ways of eating and conducting religious ceremonies and festivals, including weddings and funerals. Muslims adhere strongly to their traditions during ceremonies, showing great unity.

#### *Christian's fear of Muslims.*

All the respondents said that they always have a fear of their neighbours due to what has been happening in some parts of Kenya and also around the world when they hear about terrorism. Also, those who have shared the gospel with Muslims are afraid due to their reactions and the way they oppose Christians as they defend Islam, and this has led them to avoid talking about religion in their encounter with Muslims. In addition, some fear Muslims because of their intimidating questions and ways of quoting the Bible to show Christians that they know even the Bible more than Christians do. Leaders added that they are afraid of being challenged and ashamed by Muslims when they fail to defend Christianity.

RQ3: What economic factors affect evangelism to Muslims by the AIC leaders in the Marigat location? The following themes emerged through the data analysis collected in response to research question three: Unavailability of members to attend weekly fellowship, finances in the church (AIC), and Muslim unity.



### *Unavailability of leaders and members for Weekly fellowships*

Among the 25 leaders interviewed, only six leaders have permanent jobs, and four youths are still under their parent's care. The other 15 respondents earned daily bread through small businesses and agriculture in the Perkerra irrigation scheme and kept a few cattle. These occupations take much of their time, making them unavailable for weekday church programs. Yet these weekly programs, like Bible Studies and prayer fellowships, help ground them in God's word to reach out to Muslims.

### *Finances in the Churches*

The majority of the respondents (16 leaders) suggested that some churches (e.g. AIC Mother Church, AIC Town Church, Bethel, Perekera, and AIC Labos) can finance Muslim evangelism (especially seminars and teachings on how to evangelise Muslims), but they have never budgeted for it. Although, seven respondents claimed that local Churches could not do it due to the meagre finances collected by some churches.

### *Muslims Unity*

Almost 100% of the informants said Muslims are united and supportive of each other's welfare. Their unity is evident in their sharing of meals and participation in ceremonies like weddings and funerals. They do not call for weddings, school fees and even for funerals. The respondents indicated that Muslims love and value each other more than non-Muslims.

### *Missiological implications*

The majority of the respondents argued that the lack of enough knowledge about Islamic matters, the lack of planning and teaching on how to evangelise Muslims, the socio-cultural and religious differences between the two faiths, the unity among Muslims and their acculturation in their beliefs had hindered Christian witness in the location. Therefore, Christian leaders have a role in overcoming these challenges through prayers, loving and helping their Muslim neighbours, and planning for teachings on Muslim evangelism training. Leaders also have acknowledged their inadequate biblical knowledge as a challenge they must address by planning and attending church programs.

### *Discussion of the Findings*

From the findings on religious factors that affect evangelism to Muslims in the Marigat location, the researcher found that most respondents who have interacted with their Muslim neighbours have gained little knowledge about Islam religion and Muslim ways of life. Those who have not interacted with them remain ignorant about this faith. Again those who



attempted to share the gospel with Muslims were unsuccessful because of using inappropriate approaches. Thus, some leaders' willingness to witness their Muslim neighbours seems minimal due to the lack of appropriate strategies. Therefore, the lack of planning and training has hindered the AIC leader's ability to evangelise Muslims effectively. Strohbach asserts that "Christians often make mistakes in their interactions with others due to their lack of knowledge" (Strohbach 2012, 41). Therefore, the church must equip believers with the necessary knowledge and skills to evangelise Muslims effectively

Additionally, in terms of Muslim's acculturation into the Islamic faith, the researcher found that Muslims are being trained more thoroughly than Christians, and the training provided by Madrassa has helped Muslims to become steadfast in their belief. Citing Caleb Kim's research, the paper notes that a child who has undergone strong religious enculturation in a society with a religious worldview becomes culturally conservative and fundamentalist. For example, a Muslim boy raised in a Muslim society rooted in Islamic tenets sees his culture as the right one for others to follow (Kim 2019, 35).

Nehls and Eric also assert that: kids as young as four attend Madrassa and learn about Islam and Arabic basics. Children learn Islamic values, worldviews, and legal norms. Muslim kids are taught to speak negatively about Christianity and Christians to prevent them from showing any interest in the Christian faith (Nehls & Eric, 2006, 75). Madrassa training aids the Muslim faith, preserving the Muslim religion for generations (Rahman, 1979, 184). Thus Muslim acculturation in their faith is a real hindrance to Christian witness.

Therefore, the church must intensify Bible teaching to all believers, beginning with Sunday School. Additionally, Christians, including leaders, should be encouraged to spend time reading and meditating on the Word of God. This will help them to defend their faith when encountering Muslims and to stand firm against false teachings. While attending Madrassa is compulsory in Islam, Christians must attend all scheduled discipleship programs to be rooted in their faith.

After analysing the data on cultural factors affecting evangelism to Muslims in the Marigat location, the researcher observed that the interaction between the leaders and their Muslim neighbours was superficial and limited to specific activities. They appeared not to be true friends but merely engaged in activities together. Concerning Muslim ways of life, the researcher found that Muslims adhere strongly to their traditions during ceremonies and demonstrate great unity.

The researcher noted Christians fearing their Muslim neighbour as one of the various factors hindering evangelism in the area. Most respondents feel the same way about Islam and





extremism because of what they've heard about groups like Jihad, Alshabab, and Al-Qaeda. As a result, they prefer to avoid discussing religion with Muslims to maintain peace rather than preaching and creating tension. However, Christians should know that some Muslims view Jihad as a duty. Sofjan claims that participating in Jihad is a religious duty for Muslims and a mode of expressing their Muslimness (Sofjan, 2006).

AIC believers in this region must avoid fear and embrace Christian witness as commanded in the Bible. They should pray and trust God to change Muslim hearts. Today, scholars and missionaries offer booklets on Muslim evangelism methods to aid believers in reaching this unreached people group. These aids have been used and have brought some success in bringing conversions.

Concerning the economic factors hindering evangelism to Muslims, most church members are farmers and business people, making them unavailable to attend spiritual formation programs. Therefore, members would need to work on their commitment and prioritise spiritual formation and outreach in their programs. The church should also budget for activities that promote Muslim evangelism and live its mission of the Great Commission.

The church should also be united and look into the welfare of its members. In response to the biblical message, it should respond to the needs of the poor and underprivileged in society. In Islam, the issue of brotherhood is emphasised. Abdul-Fattah Ashoor asserts that “All over the world, Muslims are bound together in heart and in spirit. This unity is the means of strength for the Muslim Ummah; in fact, it is a divine gift that we Muslims must make use of” (Ashoor, Islam online 2022). Additionally, unity and coming together are among the basic principles of Islam, and there are many aspects of unity in Islam, such as one Lord, one book, one prophet, one religion, one qiblah, and one Ummah (*Strength and Unity in Islam*, <https://learn-islam.org/strength-unity-in-islam>). Their unity also encompasses their practices, “The Church has tremendous diversity, but within the Islamic nation, every congregation prays at the same time, and in the same way all over the world. Even the language of worship is the same everywhere. We are united as one worldwide Muslim nation” (Shenk David 2003, 171). Christians must emphasise the unity of the believers and unite together to evangelise Muslims, also making the unity of the church to be seen by Muslims as they are called to be the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13–16).

The church must recognise the Great Commission as God's mandate and equip Christians with skills and resources for Muslim evangelism. Ed Stetzer states that Christians should live with a missionary approach, have Christ-sharing missions, build relationships, and evangelise through conversations. He encourages believers to have normal gospel



conversations rather than creating expert presenters (Edstetzer & MacDonald, 2020). If the church prioritises this, evangelism will be part of every Christian's life.

## Conclusion

Christians have been mandated by Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18–20) to reach all the nations of the world with the gospel. Believers and the church should evangelise the world in obedience to this Great Commission, including the Muslims. This comes with challenges that should be surmounted. There is a need to equip the church with knowledge and strategies to reach people of different faith. It first begins by knowing the Bible and then understanding the other. The church should also budget for this outreach ministry and be intentional about it. It should look into the welfare of the poor and underprivileged both in and outside the church as a means of witness. Christians should not succumb to the fear of Islam but engage them as God's people in need of salvation.

## Recommendations for the Church

- I. Apart from equipping believers to conduct Muslim evangelism, the church should pray and support full-time missionaries among Muslims.
- II. The church needs to conduct basic training and seminars on Islam to equip the members better to reach out.
- III. The church must strengthen its discipleship programs from Sunday School to adult ministries.

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