

Reference text - Maria'M

THE COMPLETE DOCUMENT IN FRENCH CAN BE FOUND AT THIS ADDRESS:
[HTTP://CJF.QC.CA/USERFILES/FILE/MARIAM_PRESENTATION.PDF](http://CJF.QC.CA/USERFILES/FILE/MARIAM_PRESENTATION.PDF)

Maria'M is a feminist dialogue group between Christian and Muslim women whose members are committed to gender equality within their religious traditions and in society. This initiative is linked to the social feminist movement.

INITIATE INTERFAITH FEMINIST DIALOGUE

Many interfaith dialogue initiatives exist in various parts of the world, but the unique aspect of an interfaith feminist dialogue, like the one created by Maria'M, is its focus on the issue of equality among men and women within religious traditions and in society. The group recognizes the importance for women of sharing their perspectives on various elements of their spiritual tradition (religious calendar events, figures, practices, etc.), as well as their take on the various social issues that affect them.

Consequently, it is important that the process be linked to the social feminist movement. The participants in the dialogue group remain attuned to the issues debated within this movement and can also take part in the activities it organizes.

Some members of Maria'M participate actively, on an individual basis or on behalf of their respective organizations, in the États généraux de l'action et de l'analyse féministe and the World March of Women.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME MARIA'M

The name Maria'M was chosen by the participants to represent one of the convergences between the two religious traditions, Christian and Muslim, in reference to the figure of Mary (Maryam in Arabic). The "M" at the end of Maria'M evokes the pronunciation of the name in Arabic and the verb "to love." Mary remains an example for Christians and Muslims of a woman who felt deep devotion to God, but also for the poorest among her people. The figure of Mary, as understood by feminist believers, is also inspiring as an example of commitment to her religious tradition and to her society. She invites us to fully live out our role within our religious communities, while remaining sensitive and active with regard to social justice.



Maria'M

Féministes chrétiennes et musulmanes
en dialogue

VALUES

Social justice is a major concern for the participants of the dialogue group. Social justice pertains to discrimination against women from each religious tradition as well as discrimination against women and ethnic and religious minorities within society at large. In this sense, the dialogue group must be as sensitive to the interactions between the majority and minorities in society, as to the interactions within the religious traditions themselves.

Diversity is a core value in the dialogue group since its key objective is to take time to listen to the other and to truly understand the cultural and religious references of the other. Diversity cannot be limited to simply “recognizing” major religious traditions, but must also be truly reflected within each tradition (places of worship, religious or spiritual currents, ethnicities, origins, etc.).

Respect for **parity** among the participants is also an important principle in the dynamics of interfaith dialogue since it helps to maintain a balance in terms of participation and a more equal relationship between the spiritual traditions present.

THEMES

The themes of the meetings vary between the religious and the sociopolitical. Religious meetings can, for example, be based on the experience of women, address an event or practice of one of the participating traditions, while the sociopolitical meetings focus on a current issue that has an impact on the lives of women or is of importance to them.

The subjects addressed during the meetings at Maria'M include:

- The history of women over the last 20 years in Québec and around the world
- *Ramadan*, a month of fasting and piety
- The effects of the current debate on secularism in the lives of the participants
- Easter as an event
- Mary... Maryam: a free woman!

MEETINGS

Maria'M holds three to four meetings a year. The limited number of meetings does not demand too much time from the participating women, and therefore helps to ensure their long-term commitment to the dialogue process.

Always in keeping with the spirit of delving deeper into the spiritual references of the other, the meetings can be held in alternating locations specific to one or the other of the religious traditions present, based on availability and access.

Moreover, the feminist interfaith dialogue process can combine in interesting ways a friendly atmosphere with structured organization. It is recommended that the meetings begin with a meal, which has very important symbolic meaning within Christian and Muslim traditions in particular. Eating together creates a warm and friendly atmosphere conducive to discussion.

Time can also be allotted for prayer in either of the religious traditions, with variations that take into account the feminist perspective.

Various formats can also be used: short presentations, rituals, workshops or other. However, it is important to allocate time for discussion after the presentations or activities so that the participants can share their knowledge, their experiences and their questions; this can also be an opportunity for feedback about what the participants heard, saw or experienced during the meeting.

RELEVANCE

In a society like ours, grappling with ongoing debates about secularism and how to “manage” religious diversity as well as serious inequalities between men and women, it is paramount to create serene and respectful spaces where dialogue is not sacrificed for the sake of audience ratings and political votes.

These spaces can certainly be created in various contexts (academic, community, etc.), but it is also important that some of these spaces allow feminist believers to express their ideas from their double affiliation, without having to exclude one or the other. Moreover, these spaces provide women with a context in which they can appropriate elements of their religious tradition while taking into account their own experience and also, through discussion with the other, enrich their interpretation of their sacred texts, for example.

The initiative of the interfaith feminist dialogue also provides an opportunity for religious women—of all origins and faiths who are concerned about gender equality—to deconstruct the myths around differences that are often perceived as obstacles to living together. It also allows these women to develop their capacity to resist and confront sexist discrimination that persists within their respective traditions and in society in general.

