



## How Religious Communities Locally Responded to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Name of Religious Tradition: Ahmadiyya Muslim Association Leamington Spa

Location: Riverside, Adelaide

Place of Worship: Baitul Ehsan, Mosque

During the Pandemic, the main changes to our ways of worshipping were:

A Muslim's heart should be continuously engaged in the worship of God; in fact, according to Islam, worship is another word for the extreme love of God as such in that sense there is no change in the worship of God for a Muslim.

However, there is also the formal form of worship known as the five Daily Prayers or Salat – these are usually offered in congregation at the Mosque; this fosters a sense of brotherhood and the community becomes like one family, coming together on a regular basis in prayer. However, according to Islam the Salat can be offered anywhere, and no special place is necessary for such prayers; the Holy Prophet (pbuh) said the whole world is a Mosque, so such prayers can be offered at home or even outside anywhere. As such during the pandemic, depending on the laws issued by the Government, where the law has not allowed for the Prayers to take place at the Mosque these have taken place at home.

Additionally, once the rules were relaxed; congregational prayers do take place in the Mosque, however there are many guidelines in place so that they can take place safely:

- Over 65s and under 12s are requested to pray at home
- When entering the Mosque temperature is checked, and questions asked regarding where the individual has travelled and whether they have any symptoms
- Each person is registered
- On entry and exit each person has to disinfect their hands
- Ablutions should be done at home

Coventry SACRE & Warwickshire SACRE

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- 2m distancing is in place
- The Mosque is well ventilated
- The areas of the Mosque used are disinfected following each Prayer
- Shoes have to be taken off and place in a bag
- Prayer mats should be brought from home
- Face masks should be worn
- The Mosque should be hoovered daily
- Frankincense is burnt daily, as it is said to have air purification properties

During the Pandemic, the ways in which our religious community reached out to the local community were:

- Our first campaign to help the community was to launch a 'neighbourhood helper' campaign entitled: "just because you're self-isolating doesn't mean you're alone". Association members were encouraged to distribute cards offering help to their neighbours, and also cards were distributed to the neighbours of the Mosque. This resulted in over 700 cards being distributed in the local area. The campaign was then taken up nationally across the UK and also spread as far afield as Canada and the USA. Local neighbours reacted extremely positively to this campaign, with one neighbour remarking:  
"We have received your card offering help if people are self isolating due to Covid-19. I simply wanted to say thank you...! Was in tears when I saw your card this morning. Bless you all."
- Early on at the beginning of the pandemic, the Association realised that foodbanks and homeless shelters will require urgent assistance. As such we initially began providing weekly hot meals/bakes to the local night shelter, and as the requirements changed, we setup a rota to provide weekly food drops. In a similar manner we have continued to regularly collect food at the Mosque and drop off at the local food banks. In total, so far over 1.7 tonnes of food have been dropped off during the pandemic and hot meals have been provided to those in need, including to households who were self-isolating

- The Association held various online fundraisers to support local charities who were serving at the frontline of the COVID response, such as LWS Night Shelter, Helping Hands and Springfield mind. To date over £2400 has been donated to local charitable causes.
- Around April time, the country was facing an acute shortage of PPE gowns and equipment. The National Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association sprang into action and began sewing and producing home-made gowns for use by frontline workers. However, soon the specific royal blue colours in polycotton material were also becoming scarce; a call went out to source and find material across the country. The local Ahmadiyya Muslim Association was able to raise funds to purchase and donate over £500 worth of material to a local Scrubs group who were able to use them to produce the gowns required.
- Another initiative that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association across the UK initiated was the production of tens of thousands of washable face masks for distribution amongst the community. The local Ahmadiyya Muslim Association was able to source material and went to work sewing over 700 facemasks, and purchasing a further 500, distributing over 1200 re-useable facemasks to care homes, residents in Leamington and Warwick, homeless, community members, Churches and in Leicester prior to their local lockdown.
- One care home expressed their appreciation in the following words: "We just wanted to say a huge thank you to yourself and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association for the extremely kind gesture of the face masks that you donated to use here...They have been of great use to us during this COVID-19 pandemic...They have helped to keep both our staff and residents safe."
- The pandemic not only affected people physically; but also began taking a mental toll; with many people especially the elderly becoming confined to their homes. To address this issue, the Association began a series of online seminars to engage with not only our own Association members, but also to provide intellectual stimulus to members of the general public. As such the Association held online events such as 'Race, Equality & Faith', 'Virtual Remembrance Service', 'Poets for Peace' and others.
- The Association created online videos on a range of different topics including: a video production in Urdu for EQUIP, advising residents in the Warwickshire area of the precautions they should be taking

during the Covid pandemic video diaries were produced during the month of Ramadan which were played nationally; a video was produced for Warwickshire SACRE for use in local schools about Eid, also highlighting Eid arrangements during lockdown poetry videos were produced for the largest ideas festival in the UK - the ALSO festival. videos were produced highlighting and addressing racial unrest sweeping the US and resulting protests in the UK

- Amongst the many problems affecting people, food poverty has been sharply on the rise during the pandemic, with even UNICEF for the first time in its 70-year history launching an emergency response to tackle this problem in the UK. In an effort to try and play our part to help address this dire problem, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association in Leamington launched a campaign called 'Cheap & Easy Cooking'. As part of this campaign we have produced a small recipe booklet to help cook 5 Indian curries cheaply, easily and healthily, with meals costing from 9p per serving! Furthermore, accompanying videos were produced to demonstrate how to make these curries. Watch the videos at: <https://www.LoveForAllHatredForNone.org/cheap-easy-cooking/> In addition, the local Association distributed 50 curry starter packs to the local Food Banks which contained rice, lentils, spices, chickpeas, passata and a recipe booklet to help the most vulnerable in society get started. This campaign has now been rolled out Nationwide across the Country.
- Marcus Rashford's campaign for free school lunch vouchers during the school holidays had a tremendous impact across the country. During the autumn half-term break, the local Association teamed up with Morrisons and distributed a total of 150 free school lunches to those families that needed them.
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