

# THE MOSQUE IN MORGANTOWN

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

### STARTING THE CONVERSATION

The characters and issues in *THE MOSQUE IN MORGANTOWN* may touch deeply held beliefs and stir strong emotions. With such controversial subject matter, **DIALOGUE** is preferable to debate. In a debate, participants try to convince others that their position is right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints. Remember that **LISTENING** is as important as discussion. Try to "actively" listen without interrupting the speaker, and then rephrase statements to make sure they are understood. Listen for things that challenge your ideas or cause you to reconsider your assumptions, as well as comments that reinforce your beliefs. Most importantly, maintain an environment of **RESPECT**, where all participants can feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns and opinions.

To learn more about the film or to download the Event Planning Guide, please visit [WWW.THEMOSQUEINMORGANTOWN.COM](http://WWW.THEMOSQUEINMORGANTOWN.COM).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does the portrayal of American Muslim women and men in this film coincide with your impressions of the role and treatment of Muslim women and men before watching the film? Has watching the film changed your perspective?
2. Which of the three main voices presented (Asra Nomani and the progressives, Ihtishaam Qazi and the moderates, or Mona Fahmy Ammar and the traditionalists) were the most powerful to you? Why?
3. Asra and Ihtishaam disagreed about how best to bring change to their community. Describe the differences between their two approaches. Which was more effective? What style of activism has been most effective in your own experience?
4. What are some issues and struggles encountered by women in your community? How do those issues relate to what you saw in this film? How would you go about bringing attention to these issues?
5. In the long run, how do you think the movement espoused by progressives might have an impact on mainstream Muslims and conservative Muslims in America?
6. What role does culture play in how the various groups portrayed in the film follow and interpret their religion? How does culture affect the way you practice your religion?
7. Describe your experiences with trying to strike a balance between modernity and tradition in your way of life.
8. Asra Nomani sees her struggle as extending beyond the issue of women's rights to a broader system of intolerance. In advocating mixed-gender prayer, she feels she is taking a step toward preventing her community from traveling down a "slippery slope" of intolerance that could lead to violence. What are your thoughts on her connection of gender segregation with violence and extremism?
9. What about Asra Nomani's character do you think seems threatening to people at her mosque, and perhaps to audience members as well? What is actually motivating her? What is at stake for the people at the mosque? What things in our own lives serve as triggers that prompt us to act out of emotion rather than thought? How can we restart the thought process when this happens?
10. Since Asra Nomani's activism began, similar protest pray-ins have sprung up in the Washington, DC, area. Mosque officials responded by calling the police. In June 2010, the police made the decision not to escort women off mosque premises, and protest organizers saw this as a victory. What are your views on police involvement with peaceful protests that are in breach of the rules of places of worship?
11. Which are most important to you: equality and justice, or diversity and tolerance? How did these core American values clash in the film? Do you think these values are compatible?
12. Is religion about transcendent, non-negotiable absolutes—or is it simply a set of guidelines open to human interpretation? Can such competing visions coexist in one religion? What is a believer in absolutes to do if those absolutes seem to endorse something the larger society sees as wrong?

*Successful dialogue requires an environment of civility and respect. Be sure to listen carefully to others even if you disagree with their opinions.*

