Muslims join in Lenten fasts for solidarity

by [Husna Haq](#)

March 25, 2015

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) You can't really understand another person's experience until you've walked a mile in his or her shoes. Bassel Riche, a Muslim American, learned this firsthand.

After years of hosting fast-athons at the University of Houston during which students of other faiths joined him for one day of the Ramadan fast, he decided to return the favor and join his Christian friends during Lent.

"Sacrificing something for Lent has been a personal gesture of solidarity on my part for the past three to four years," Riche said, cofounder of interfaith initiative EidPrayLove. "Towards the end of last year I began to brainstorm ideas of how to . . . have more of an impact. Especially with all the misconceptions that are being spread about Islam and our beliefs, it is an important step to combat this negativity with positive action."

What began as a simple gesture of appreciation quickly grew into an international interfaith campaign that has gone viral over social media.

Thousands of Muslims are now participating in #Muslims4Lent, pledging to fast alongside Christians in a show of solidarity and respect. Using that hashtag, Muslims across North America, Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Asia are tweeting pictures of themselves holding placards declaring what they will be giving up for Lent.

Falah Adnan, a University of Houston graduate student, gave up Instagram for her Lenten fast. And Shafiq Fazel, a student in India, gave up shawarma.

Riche said that "people are thirsty for interfaith understanding and respect." And at a time when many faithful around the world feel embattled, gestures that bring people of faith together are especially important, he added.

"We don't want to be viewed as some far-off faith," he said. "We want people to know that our beliefs are not that different from Christianity, and even with our differences it is ingrained in Islamic teachings for us to live side by side in respect and harmony."