

FAMILY PLANNING SERMON AND MESSAGING GUIDE FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES



CCIH

Christian Connections
for International Health



The *Family Planning Sermon and Messaging Guide for Faith Communities* was produced by Christian Connections for International Health (CCIH) in collaboration with consultant Reverend Canon Gideon B. Byamugisha and his team of fellow teachers, program specialists, and congregational leaders in Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i, and Sikhism in Uganda. The development team included Paddy W. Nahabwe, PhD, Brain Trust Consult Ltd., Uganda; Mariam Namata, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council Population and Family Health Programme; and Ruth Ninsiima Mbalinda, Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation in Uganda.

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Family Planning: This document uses the term family planning (FP). However, other terms may be used depending on the faith and cultural context, such as healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, birth spacing, child spacing, or planning. We understand that teachers will use terms consistent with the values and beliefs of their faith and context.

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Executive Summary

Many issues challenge our individual and collective physical, emotional, socio-economic, and spiritual health. These challenges can occur at personal, family, local, country, regional, and global levels and often have a greater impact on people in the global south. These issues include the huge “unmet need for family planning”¹ that results in mothers and children, fathers, and communities suffering the preventable and controllable burden of unplanned pregnancies that occur too early and too often, harming the health of a woman or girl and negatively affecting her family and community.

Faith communities, congregations, and religious leaders have significant influence on social and health issues. Integrating family planning information into sermons and other messaging opportunities leverages this influence and is consistent with a holistic approach to health, addressing physical health along with spiritual health. Such integration, in turn, helps both the faith community members and their leaders be more conscious of the interrelatedness of socio-economic inequalities, religion-cultural factors, educational deprivations, and practical health service injustice that facilitate, sustain, or worsen the unmet FP need.

This guide is designed to support faith communities, congregations, and leaders desiring to boost FP literacy, competence, and vigilance through sermons. The sermon guide addresses how religious texts and sacred traditions can be a source of transformative energy for increased and sustained FP, leadership enhancement in FP equity and justice, and breaking the silence and correcting misinformation around FP. We recommend that religious leaders partner with healthcare professionals and refer people interested in more detailed information to their local healthcare workers.

Messages can be delivered in a variety of settings, including within worship services, during faith community ceremonies, and at different local community, national, or global level events.

Section 1 introduces the guide. This section explains why the guide was developed and how faith and lay leaders and congregations will benefit from the guide.

Section 2 on “Faiths as Pillars in Family Planning” outlines the nature and importance of supporting a given faith, a congregation, and its sacred texts and traditions in promoting the acceptance, ownership, and promotion of FP in a community.

Section 3 on “Key Issues and Key Sermon Messages” discusses the critical issues and sermon message points without attaching them to a particular faith so that they can be read and utilized in a variety of faith settings and contexts.

CCIH acknowledges all the input, investment, and encouragement we have received beyond the writing team and appreciates critiques from faith community leaders and other professionals, communities, and congregations. We thank champions in the faith community who have made family planning a central part of your holistic faith mission and ministry. Your commitment to this lifesaving health intervention and requests inspired us to create this guide.

For further faith and FP resources, please visit www.ccih.org > [Resources](#).

¹ DHS Program. *Demographic and Health Surveys*. In this document, the concept of “unmet need for family planning” is defined as the percentage of married women who do not want to become pregnant but are not using contraception. Accessible at: <https://dhsprogram.com/topics/unmet-need.cfm>.

Section 1: Introduction

Why People of Faith, their Communities, Congregations, and Leaders?

People of faith, their communities, congregations, and leaders share common values and virtues of love, grace, compassion, equity, peace, justice, and human dignity. They value and want to protect life and health. Faith communities recognize that when pregnancies are wanted and planned, this supports the health of mothers and babies and families' ability to have sufficient resources to care for their children.

Faith communities and faith leaders play crucial gatekeeping and influencing roles in the success of advancing health in many countries. The influence of faith communities and faith leaders has been an essential component of efforts to address early marriage, combat harmful traditional practices, establish equitable treatment for women and girls, and overcome the stigma around male involvement in sexual, reproductive, and family health. It is even more urgent and most important to engage faith leaders and faith communities in the following:

- Sharing accurate information about FP;
- Changing attitudes and beliefs at family and community levels;
- Building individual-level competencies and societal capabilities for FP;
- Engaging in theological and ethical discussions, spiritual and pastoral dialogues, prayer, service provision, and referral activities.

Definition of a Sermon

The word “sermon” can be used and interpreted differently. In this guide, we use the word in its spiritual and religious context to mean a speech given by a pastor, priest, imam, rabbi, or other leader as part of a religious service, function, or activity. Most sermons will focus on scriptural passages of a given faith with official religious books or scriptures to deliver theological and moral lessons, spiritual and pastoral teachings, and a prophetic voice on a given societal issue or challenge.

Common family health challenges make the role of religious leaders to provide theological and spiritual reflection even more pertinent. These leaders are already part of the communities and families struggling with:

- Early, frequent, and multiple pregnancies and childbirths;
- Child illness and death;
- Pregnancy-related illness or death;
- Lack of access to appropriate and adequate FP services;
- Poverty and other health insecurities.

As preachers of love and faith, peace and hope, equity, and justice in broad contexts and FP situations, these leaders need resources to support them in their leadership, mentorship, and preaching work. This guide has been produced for that very purpose.

Anticipated Benefits of Using the Guide

It is anticipated that sermons on family planning will bring the following benefits:

Pausing, Reflecting, and Praying: Whereas the world wants believers and preachers to go from one activity to another, most good sermons teach the value of pausing, reflecting, and praying for knowledge, greater understanding, and deeper wisdom. Is FP important to believers, preachers, their families, local communities, and globally? If so, it is imperative that faith leaders take time to step back, pause, reflect, and seek God's direction on how they can meaningfully engage their communities to support health through family planning.

Inner Conviction: Sometimes, we (individually or collectively as families and communities) lack the belief, power, and resolve to act on something important for our health, our inner peace, and our greater fulfillment. Impactful sermons on FP can help both the preacher and the audience form the inner conviction to act and also encourage their families and communities to support and advocate for FP conducted in a healthy and safe way.

Section 2: Faiths as Pillars in FP

Christianity

In Christianity, God is at the center of creating sexual partnerships (Genesis 1:27c)² for company and pleasure (Genesis 2:18, 25) and procreation (Genesis 1:28). The Christian God is mindful of every human life from the womb. Every life is unique and planned for by God. He cherishes good planning in every human endeavor, including how we “replenish the earth.” Therefore, families should be formed responsibly.

Modern contraception methods did not exist in Bible times, and therefore, scripture is silent on them. The Bible presents children as a gift from God (Genesis 4:1; Genesis 33:5), a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5), a blessing from God (Luke 1:42), and a crown to the aged (Proverb 17:6). Hence, planning for the birth, longevity, and quality of life of children is a great spiritual responsibility and moral duty for parents.

Family planning by contraception and fertility awareness methods³ is planning one's sexual and marital life in a way that ensures conception happens when it is in the best interests of the mother, child, and family.

It is not the act of using FP that is called into question in the Onan story in the Bible (Genesis 3:8); it is the motivation behind the action that raises the question of morality.

Some couples may feel their service to God and the community necessitates careful and prayerful decision-making about when they should conceive a child. Some may be convinced that God has a plan for them that does not involve having children or having them immediately after marriage. Ultimately, a couple's motives for choosing not to have children, delaying childbearing, using contraception, or having numerous children are between their love for God, their love for neighbors (including the unborn ones), and their love for themselves.

According to the Bible, children are gifts from God, and “happy is the man whose quiver is full of them.” (Psalm 127:5). But in all reality, not everyone has the same size quiver (capacity to care for a large family). If couples decide to use FP, they should carefully consider the best method for their family's needs.

In Christianity, FP in general and birth spacing in particular is not wrong as long as we seek God's will in what we do. The principle of James 4:15-17 is certainly applicable here: “You ought to say instead, ‘If the Lord is willing, then we will live and do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.”

In Genesis 1:28, God said to the man and woman, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Some people interpret this to mean that intentionally preventing pregnancy would be wrong. But in its original context, this verse was part of a passage telling how God has given humankind stewardship over the world, and it was not a statement about contraception. “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Genesis 1:28)

² BibleGateway. All verses referring to books of the Bible can be found at this website: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

³ Knowledge SUCCESS. *Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers*. 2022. Chapter 18. Accessed: <https://fphandbook.org/chapter-18-fertility-awareness-methods>.

The Christian Bible and traditions provide guidance on many topics of spirituality and morality but not specifically on contraception and birth spacing. Instead, they provide a broad framework for understanding FP by describing the origin and sanctity of human life.

As said above, God created humankind (male and female) uniquely in His image. He further dignified human life through the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a man and promised the resurrection of the physical body at the end of time. Thus, all human life should be treated as a gift from God and worthy of respect.

The preciousness of unborn human life is celebrated in Psalm 139, where David writes, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully made... your eyes beheld my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalm 139: 13-14, 16). Even in utero, at the earliest stages of development, God recognizes the humanity of the embryo (see Genesis 20:18, 29:31, 30:2, 30:22; Judges 13:2-3; Ruth 4:13; 1 Samuel 1:6; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1: 13-15 and 1:24-25, 1:44). In other words, good plans and decisions on conceiving and parenting children should be central in the lives, homes, and faith communities of all believers.

Key FP Message from Christianity:

Family planning helps individuals, families, and whole communities to:

- Carry out and fulfill the God-given stewardship and procreation role well
- Avoid unplanned pregnancy; give birth to a child who is planned
- Determine the number of children that are desired and have them at the right time.⁴

⁴ USAID Access Program (RCLS/MOH/UNFPA). *Christians and Muslims Promoting Maternal and Infant Health: A Sermon Guide Based on The Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an*. Kigali: RCLS, 2009.

Islam

In Islam, the Holy Qur'an and Hadith are authoritative sources of teaching and guidance on FP. Other sources, such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *ijma'* (collective consensus among *ulama'*), and *qiyas* (analogy), approve reversible or temporary methods of contraception; however, permanent methods are allowed only when the life of a woman is threatened.

Guidance from the Holy Qur'an

*The Qur'an does not prohibit contraception, nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number. Thus, the great majority of Islamic jurists believe that FP is permissible in Islam.*⁵

The Qur'an specifically recommends that mothers breastfeed for two complete years: "and mothers should suckle their children for two whole years." (Qur'an 2:233)⁶

(سورة البقرة، من الآية 233) (وَإِذَا رَزَقْتَ وَلَدًا فَارْضَعْنِ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ)

In the Qur'an, (exclusive) breastfeeding is mentioned 14 times as a method for birth spacing, demonstrating that the Qur'an supports breastfeeding as a birth spacing method. Based on the verse above, scholars have a consensus that mothers should observe birth spacing. Mothers are advised to breastfeed their children for two years, during which time the chances of becoming pregnant are low.

The Qur'an says: "The mothers shall give such to their offspring for two whole years, for those who desire to complete the term." (Qur'an 2:233)

(سورة البقرة، من الآية 233) (....) (وَإِذَا رَزَقْتَ وَلَدًا فَارْضَعْنِ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُتِمَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ)

"And we have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years." (Qur'an 31:14)

(سورة لقمان، من الآية 14) (....) (وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفَصَّالَهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ)

Scholars describe these two years of breastfeeding as a means of child spacing to give the mother adequate time to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and to care for the child. The two years of breastfeeding mentioned in the Qur'an are consistent with the World Health Organization's birth spacing recommendation.

⁵ PRB. *Islam and Family Planning*. 2004. Accessible at: <https://www.prb.org/wpcontent/uploads/2004/09/IslamFamilyPlanning.pdf>.

⁶ Quran.com. All verses mentioned in the guide referring to Islamic holy texts can be found at this website: <https://quran.com/>.

Another Qur'anic guidance is on the “Divine Plan to Create Sexual Partners/Spouses and Divine Will” that the sexual partners hold dialogues on family and spousal peace. Surat Al-Rum 30:21, “And one of Allah’s signs is that He has created for you mates from yourselves, that you dwell in tranquility with them, and has ordained between you love and mercy.”

(سورة الروم، من الآية 21) (... وَأَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً)

The purpose of marriage is to find peace and tranquility, and discussion on the use of contraception is crucial before starting a family. The decision will lead to a peaceful and healthy married life.

More Qur'anic Guidance

Al Baqarah 2:185: “Allah desires for you ease (Yusr); he desires not hardship (usr) for you...”

(سورة البقرة، من الآية 185) (...يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ...)

Al Nisa 4:28: “Allah desires to enlighten your burden for man was created weak...”

(سورة النساء، آية 26) يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ عَنْكُمْ وَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا

Islam emphasizes FP to space out pregnancies and limit the number of children, and hence to allow mothers to be more physically and mentally healthy and fathers to be more financially capable of supporting family members. This is not antagonistic to any categorical text of prohibition in the Qur'an or Sunnah (Prophet sayings or deeds).

Al-Isra 17:29: “And let not your hand (in giving) be chained to your neck, nor yet open it to the extreme, lest you end up in rebuke, in beggary.”

(سورة الإسراء، آية 29) (وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَحْسُورًا)

The Holy Quran and the Prophetic speeches have confirmed the conception and stages of creation in the womb in a very accurate scientific manner.

1. "He makes you in the wombs of your mothers in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness."
(Chapter: Az-Zumar, Verse 6).

2. The creation of man from a mingled fluid-drop (nutfa amshaj) (First stage of conception), as coined by the Holy Quran, which says;

(إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا)

"Verily we created man from a drop of a mingled fluid-drop (nutfa amshaj), in order to try him: so We gave him (the gifts), of hearing and sight."

(Chapter: Al Insan, Verse 2)

3. (ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً)

We created a leech-like clot" (Chapter: Al Mu'minun, Verse 14).

Thus, the stage of alaq is the second stage of embryonic stages, and it is mentioned in the Quran in several verses. He the Almighty says,

4. (أَلَمْ يَكُنْ نُطْفَةً مِنْ مَنِيٍّ يُمْنَى . ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّى . فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى)

"Was he not a drop of sperm emitted (in lowly form)? Then did he become a leech-like clot; then did (Allah) make and fashion (him) in due proportion. And of him He made two sexes, male and female."

(Chapter Al Qiymah: 37-39)

5. Second stage of conception as given in the Holy Quran—And in a surah called al-alaq, i.e., a leech-like clot, Allah says;

(خلق الإنسان من علق) " (We) Created man, out of a leech-like clot."

(Chapter: AL Alaq, Verse: 2)

6. The third stage of mudgha comes after the stage of alaq. This coincides with the Holy verse (فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً) "And of that clot We made a (foetus) lump." (Chapter: Al Mu'minun, Verse 14)

Guidance from Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet Peace be Upon Him)

The Sunnah, a documentation of the prophet Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) tradition, indicates that the coitus interruptus or withdrawal (ejaculation outside the vagina or al-azl) method was practiced during the time of the prophet (PBUH).

Guidance 1 from Hadith

“We [the Companions of the Prophet] used to practice azl during the time of the Prophet. The Prophet knew about it and did not forbid it.”

The Sunnah does not directly address child spacing, but it talks about the Prophet (PBUH) noticing that his companions were practicing coitus interruptus (al-azl). When he heard about it, he did not forbid this practice. Therefore, his followers concluded that if it was anything that was not allowed in Islam, he could have stopped it immediately. The intention of al-azl was to prevent pregnancy, just like the modern temporary methods.

Since child spacing through breastfeeding and al-azl is permitted, Muslims are permitted to seek information and counseling on FP services. Holistic information should be given to couples and individuals to enable them to make informed decisions in line with their faith, beliefs, and health status, and this should be part of premarital counseling.

Guidance 2 from Hadith

In a hadith authenticated by al-Bukhari, “the right due to a child from parents is to teach him writing, swimming, and archery and to provide him with nothing but what is wholesome.”

Young men and women should be provided with accessible, complete, and accurate information about FP and FP methods, including their benefits, so they can make decisions at the appropriate time in marriage and enable them to provide for and care for their children.

Guidance 3 from Hadith

In a hadith authenticated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, “Instruct your children in prayer at age seven, punish them if they fail at age ten, and let them sleep separately from one another.”

This hadith brings out the necessity to have planned procreation. The separate sleeping arrangements mean a separate room for boys and girls. Spacing of children and having the family size consistent with the family's means are a part of the solution, as well as improving the housing situations of the family.⁷

Guidance 4 from Hadith

In one hadith narrated by Abdullah bin Umar fil Mustadicrak, the Prophet (PBUH) said, “...it is a great misery to have too many children without means of supporting them...” In another hadith, he said, “Too many children are the other face of poverty, and fewer children are the other face of comfort.”⁸ The explanation is that the strength of a Muslim community lies in having good, healthy, and pious children who are educated and able to look after themselves in the future and be useful to the community.

⁷ Omran, Abdel Rahim. *Family Planning in the Legacy of Islam*. 1992. Accessible at the United Nations Digital Library: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/191682?ln=en>.

⁸ Ismail, Ndifuna. *Family Planning: Policy and Practice: A Simplified Guide for Family Planning Champions, Communicators, and Users in the Muslim Community in Uganda*. Kampala: Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, 2005. Supported by the Policy II project.

Birth Control and Contraception

Contraception has a long history in Islam that needs to be situated in relation to the broader Islamic ethos of marriage and sexuality. Historically, the various Islamic legal schools with an overwhelming majority have permitted coitus interruptus, called *azl*, as a method of contraception. This was a contraceptive technique practiced by pre-Islamic Arabs and continued to be used during the time of the Prophet with his knowledge and without his prohibition. The only condition the Prophet attached to the acceptability of this practice, which Muslim jurists reiterated, was that the husband was to secure the wife's permission before practicing withdrawal. Since the male sexual partner initiates this technique, there needs to be consensual agreement about its use by both partners for two primary reasons. Firstly, the wife is entitled to full sexual pleasure, and coitus interruptus may diminish her pleasure. Secondly, she has the right to offspring if she so desires. These requirements speak to the priority given in Islam to mutual sexual fulfillment consultation as well as consultative decision-making between married couples in terms of family planning.

As early as the 9th century, female contraceptive techniques like intravaginal suppositories and tampons were also a part of both medical and judicial discussions in Islam. While medical manuals listed the different female contraceptive options and their relative effectiveness, legal positions differed around whether the consent of the husband was necessary or not with the use of female contraceptives. In classical Islamic law, which informs contemporary Islamic jurisprudence law, the majority position in eight out of the nine legal schools permits contraception.

Due to this broad-based legal permissibility of contraception in Islamic law, Muslim physicians in the medieval period conducted in-depth investigations into the medical dimension of birth control, which were unparalleled in European medicine until the 19th century.

Ibn Sina, in his book "Qanun," lists 20 birth control substances, and physician Abu Bakr al-Razi, in his book "Hawi," lists 176 birth control substances. The permissibility of contraceptive practice in Islamic history at the level of both theory and practice is abundantly evident in both its medical and legal legacies.⁹⁻¹²

While different legal scholars discussed the acceptability or reprehensibility of particular individual motives for using contraceptives, this discussion did not contest the overarching permissibility of contraceptive practice. The scholar Al-Ghazzali (d. 1111) supported the use of contraceptive practice for many different reasons, including economic factors where a large number of dependents would impose financial and psychological hardship on the family. He reasoned that a large family may cause one to resort to unlawful means to support these excessive responsibilities. Fewer material burdens, he adds, are an aid to religion. He also supported the decision to use contraception to protect the life of the wife, given the possible physical dangers that childbirth posed to the life of the mother. In addition, he considered the need for the wife to preserve her beauty and attractiveness for the enjoyment of the marriage as a reasonable justification for contraception.¹³

⁹ Adeniji, L. A. *Religion and Birth Control: The Position of Islam, Religion, and Modernity*. NASRED. Alamsek Press Ltd., 2007.

¹⁰ Pakistan Today. "Birth Spacing Is Lawful Under Islam: Hafiz Ashrafi." May 25, 2013. Accessible at: <https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/05/25/birth-spacing-is-lawful-under-islam-hafiz-ashrafi/>.

¹¹ Serour, G. I., ed. *Family Planning in Islam and the Opinion of Current Senior Religious Leaders*. IICPSR Publications, 2022. Available in Arabic: <https://www.alazhar-iicpsr.org/books.php?id=83>.

¹² Uganda Muslim Supreme Council Population Committee. *Towards a Happy and Prosperous Muslim Family: A Reproductive Health Guide for the Muslim Community in Uganda*. Kampala: Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, 1998.

¹³ Habib, M., and S. I. Ihmed. "Al-qanun fi tibb." *Journal of Rawalpindi Medical College (JRMC)* 11, no. 2 (2007). Accessible via Scribd: <https://www.scribd.com/document/437121144/Al-qanun-Fi-Tibb>.

Conclusion

According to the vast majority of Islamic scholars, misinterpretation of Islamic teaching on contraception may discourage the uptake of FP. Lack of reproductive health knowledge, cultural beliefs, and lack of women's decision-making power continue to be reasons for the unmet need for FP. Countering the negative notions of FP use requires the active engagement of religious leaders and Muslim scholars who are in positions of power and influence at the community level.^{14–15}

Key FP Message from Islam

Properly spacing births in a family is a very important way to protect the health of mothers and babies.¹⁶

¹⁴ Omran, Abdel Rahim. Family Planning in the Legacy of Islam. 1992. Accessible at the United Nations Digital Library: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/191682?ln=en>.

¹⁵ Ismail, Ndifuna. Family Planning: Policy and Practice: A Simplified Guide for Family Planning Champions, Communicators, and Users in the Muslim Community in Uganda. Kampala: Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, 2005.

¹⁶ Faith to Action Network. Islam and Family Planning. 2014. Accessible at: www.faithtoactionnetwork.org/resource/islam-and-family-planning/.

Hinduism

The Hindu scriptures do not prohibit contraception or include anything that should discourage couples from space pregnancies.¹⁷ Hindu scriptures promote healthy families and respect between spouses.

An interfaith document on FP titled “Keeping the Faith in Sexual and Reproductive Health: Faithful Affirmations”¹⁸ supports the following themes.

From the Earliest Age

Hindu children are taught to revere the divine feminine, as embodied in Her multiplicity of forms from Sita, the perfect wife, to Saraswati, the Goddess of learning, to Radha, the Lover of God, to the heroic Durpa, the slayer of demons, and beyond.

Promotion of Strong Women

Hindu scriptures discuss the importance of promoting women’s strength. “Parents should gift their daughter intellectuality and power of knowledge.” (Rig Veda 10.85.7)¹⁹ “O woman may you be powerful like a rock. May you gain brilliance of the sun and have a long prosperous life that benefits all.” (Arthava Veda 14.1.47) Women have the same rights and responsibilities as men when it comes to FP with regard to the size of the family, the method of contraception, the well-being of sexual life, and the wealth of the family.

Marriage Is Seen as a Sacred Bond That Lasts Lifetimes

Through marriage, a couple learns to love one another so they can more completely love God. For that reason, ancient scriptures like the Arthava Veda urge: “May the husband and wife be complementary to each other. May the husband be a song the wife be a verse.” (14:2)¹⁹

Females and Males Are Equally Valued

All that is and all that ever existed is forever pure and undifferentiated from divinity itself. According to the most ancient Hindu scripture, Manusmriti—a daughter is equivalent to a son—as there is no sex distinction in the “Atman”—the eternal soul, inseparable from God.²⁰ Hence, no one should (a) overproduce children in an attempt to have male children, (b) kill children in or outside of the womb to guarantee a particular sex, and (c) mistreat a woman by denying access to family planning or subjecting her to violence of any kind.

Hindu Scriptures

Hindu scripture emphasizes that intimate relations should be respected as sacred and kept within the confines of marriage. “It is through their union (i.e., the marriage partners) that offspring results. Each has to emotionally fulfill the vow of being faithful to the higher values of life.” (Arthava Veda 14.2.7)

¹⁷ Srinivas, M. N. “A Part of Life: The Hindu View.” *Asiaweek*, October 27, 1993, 59. PMID: 12345274. Accessible at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12345274/#:~:text=The%20Hindu%20scriptures%20do%20not,the%20universal%20stages%20of%20life.>

¹⁸ UNFPA. *Keeping the Faith in Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 2017. Accessible at: https://addis.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Religious%20Affirmations%20of%20SRHR_0.pdf.

¹⁹ Hindu American Foundation. *Vedic Teachings About Womanhood*. 2015. Accessible at: <https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/vedic-teachings-about-womanhood-2/>.

²⁰ Fieser, James. “Eastern Philosophy.” From *The History of Philosophy: A Short Survey*. Revised 2020. Accessible at: <https://www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class/110/4-eastern.htm>.

Bahá'í

Family planning is left to the personal conscience of a follower of the Baha'i faith, although there is some guidance regarding specific situations, such as:

- Irreversible sterilization in either sex is discouraged unless there is a medical condition relevant to the decision, in which case the individual would seek qualified medical advice.
- Abortion is permitted only where there are strong medical grounds, such as risk to the mother's life and health. Abortion is not regarded lightly and is not permitted as a contraceptive measure.
- Artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization are permitted, provided that the wife's egg is fertilized by the husband's sperm and that the child is born from the womb of the natural mother.²¹
- Though the birth of a child is a time of joy, and Baha'is may wish to express their gratitude to God with prayer, they have no rituals associated with birth.²²

Sikhism

Sikhs have no objection to contraception.²³ Whether or not Sikhs use contraception and the form of contraception used is a matter for individual couples to decide.²⁴ NP Singh and other Sikh scholars and leaders speak of the vision of the founder of the Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak, as a vision in which we are all spiritual beings “who have realized God.” So, how do we realize God in family health and family planning?

We are realizing God when we recognize that:

- We are spiritual beings; the earth, the universe, and the children born and unborn are all sacred.
- All life is unity.
- Our mission is the spiritualization of all.
- The reality that humans create around themselves is a reflection of their inner state.
- The current situation includes pregnancies that are dangerous for women and girls, including those that are too early, too frequent, too many, or too late in a woman's life. These pregnancies have negative health effects on women and children, which can affect families, their communities, and countries.

²¹ Weston Area Health NHS Trust. Faith and Culture: Bahá'í Faith. 2020. Accessible at: <https://www.waht.nhs.uk/en-GB/Our-Services1/Non-Clinical-Services1/Chapel/Faith-and-Culture/Bahai-faith/>.

²² Parrinder, Geoffrey. Sexual Morality in the World's Religions, Bahá'í Ideals. Chapter 11. Bahá'í Library Online, 1996. Accessible at: https://bahai-library.com/parrinder_sexual_morality_religions.

²³ Queensland Health. Sikh Beliefs Affecting Healthcare. Health Care Providers' Handbook on Sikh Patients. Accessible at: https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/157639/hbook-sikh-s2.pdf.

²⁴ SikhiWiki. "Sikhi on Family Planning." Accessible at: https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sikhi_on_Family_Planning.

Buddhism

Buddhist attitudes toward contraception are based on the idea that it is wrong to kill for any reason. The most common Buddhist view on FP is that contraception is acceptable if it prevents conception but that contraceptives that work by stopping the development of a fertilized egg are wrong and should not be used.²⁵

Unlike some other religions, Buddhism does not regard having children as a religious duty, except that having children in the family whose religious devotion leads them to be monks is highly revered and treasured. To seek enlightenment, Buddhists should not pursue sexual pleasure. If, however, they engage in sexual activity that is non-reproductive by virtue of using contraception that prevents conception, that is acceptable.²⁶

Finally, FP as a personal and family issue, a community health and societal need, and a global and development challenge are, in Buddhism, not discussed in the language of rights but rather in terms of benefit and harm to a family and from within an intention of relieving human suffering.

If spacing, postponing, limiting, or abstaining from having children will contribute to limiting or overcoming suffering, family planning is encouraged.

There are no dogmas in Buddhism that influence the size of a family, but the family head is asked to fulfill certain caring duties towards his immediate family and, by extension, towards society at large.²⁷

²⁵ UNFPA. Keeping the Faith in Sexual and Reproductive Health. 2017. Retrieved from:

https://addis.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Religious%20Affirmations%20of%20SRHR_0.pdf.

²⁶ Gnanawimala, B. "Free to Choose: The Buddhist View." 1993. Accessible at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12345273/>.

²⁷ Van Loon, L. Family Planning and Birth Control in Buddhist Perspective. 1992. Accessible at: https://www.bps.lk/olib/bl/bl127_van-Loon_Family-Planning-and-Birth-Control.html.

Section 3: Key Sermon Messages

3.1 Introduction:

The messages about family planning that can be used by faith and lay leaders during sermons and other opportunities fall under six themes. These six areas encourage community engagement and advocacy:

1. Societal Governance Duties and Community Leadership Obligations on FP
2. Boosting Male Involvement in FP
3. Inequalities and Injustices Hindering FP
4. Partnerships and Collaboration for Enhanced FP
5. Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue
6. Enhancing Servant Leadership, Passion, and Solidarity for Greater FP

3.2 Unmet Need in Family Planning and Child Spacing Among Women

The concept of unmet need for FP is useful for identifying women and families who may want to use, but are not currently using, a method of contraception.

A concept infrequently preached and discussed among faith leaders and communities is that if all women who wanted to avoid pregnancy were to use a modern contraceptive method, abortions, as well as unplanned births, would drop dramatically.²⁸ Reducing unmet needs is also an important strategy to lower fertility rates in communities and countries with population growth that is too rapid and not aligned with growth in the economy, including jobs and housing, and increased food and industrial production.²⁹

Below are the advantages of using FP methods:

- Avoid health risks to a breastfeeding child from premature cessation of breastmilk due to another pregnancy before two years;
- Avoid health risks to the mother that would result from repeated pregnancies, short birth intervals, or young age;
- Avoid the economic hardships of caring for a larger family, which might compel parents to resort to illegal activities or exhaust themselves to earn a living;
- Allow for comprehensive education, which is more feasible with fewer children;
- Some methods protect against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

²⁸ Hussain, R., et al. Unmet Need for Contraception in Developing Countries: Examining Women's Reasons for Not Using a Method. New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2016. Accessible at: <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/unmet-need-for-contraception-in-developing-countries#levels-of-contraceptive-use-and-unmet-need>.

²⁹ USAID. Helping People and the Planet Flourish Through Family Planning. Accessible at: <https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/health-areas/family-planning/resources/helping-people-planet-flourish-family-planning>.

A March 2022 report said nearly half of all pregnancies globally are unintended.³⁰ Please find specific statistics on your country on [the Demographic and Health Surveys \(DHS\) Program website](#).

Most faith leaders and their followers share a deeply held conviction that all families, regardless of their religious beliefs, are entitled to lead healthy lives free from suffering and deprivation. Tragically, an absence of basic FP services (or, if available, a lack of awareness that services exist and a capability to access services) deprives millions of women, families, and communities of this fundamental right every year.

Sermons focused on addressing this issue can help millions of women and families in your country and worldwide who lack access to modern contraceptives to plan children for their well-being with greater spiritual confidence and moral conviction.

What Progress Do We Have to Thank the Divine For? Thankful Messages to Be Incorporated into Any Sermon Messages.

- Faith-run and faith-owned institutions and facilities for communication, health, and education help to provide FP information, services, and supplies. This gives people the knowledge and capability to choose when and how many children they want.
- Many faith leaders, communities, and congregations across faiths encourage conversations and generate educational materials that provide a religious context and cultural awareness that makes FP options more acceptable, accessible, and affordable.

³⁰ UNFPA. State of World Population 2022. Accessible at: <https://www.unfpa.org/swp2022>.

Six Key Messages That Can Be Tailored to Your Religious and Geographical Context

Topic	Description of the Challenge	Sermon Messages
Societal Governance and Community Leadership Obligations on FP	Empowering individuals to determine the number and timing of pregnancies, including the voluntary use of methods for preventing pregnancy—not including abortion—harmonious with their values and religious beliefs is a theological, ethical, and pastoral duty of faith and lay leaders and individual believers. Fulfilling this duty contributes to achieving their overall faith obligations to love their neighbor as self and to attain righteousness and spiritual fulfillment through preaching, modeling, and enhancing holistic life and health, human dignity, peace, equity, and justice. Unfortunately, cultures and traditions don't change overnight. Long-term investment is required to promote greater understanding and encourage collective action.	<p>Key Message: Divine courage and commitment are needed to provide adequate leadership for enhanced FP.</p> <p>Good societal governance and effective community leadership are about having the conviction, courage, and commitment to do what is best for the health and well-being of local communities, families, and individual citizens.</p> <p>As community leaders and societal governors, we must seek to make FP information, services, and products available and affordable to the people. As leaders, we must not expect everyone to agree with everything we believe, do, or say. But we are still called upon to love them and not be afraid to be decisive in empowering mothers and fathers, families, and communities.</p> <p>If we are good leaders in bringing about greater family health and security and higher family development and transformation, we must stand for family planning and be decisive and unapologetic about it. Making important decisions that support the health of children and their mothers, fathers, and whole families goes with the job of leadership. In certain situations, major decisions require firmness, authority, and finality that, in the end, will deliver great joy to God and children, mothers, and families.</p> <p>Identify scriptural references on leadership, courage and commitment, love for and solidarity with others, and apply them to FP.</p>
Boosting Male Involvement in FP	FP messaging focuses on girls and women. As a result, many boys and men are still unreached and not empowered or encouraged to reflect on various issues related to effective FP, such as gender norms, faith, and culture and the impact of family size on family resources, food, health care, housing, and education needs.	<p>Key Message: None should be left behind on FP to have love and solidarity and take care of our responsibilities.</p> <p>Inclusive family health and holistic well-being for families demand that no one be left out of accessing adequate information, help, and support for FP. Family love and solidarity mean boys and men are lovingly and equally involved in prayer, decision-making, information gathering, and planning with the girls and women needing FP.</p>
Inequalities and Injustices Hindering FP	Many people cannot access FP information and services due to a lack of education, economic means, or status. This hinders them from meeting their reproductive health, parenting, and family health needs and reaching their potential.	<p>Key Message: We are called to serve the least and the last in capabilities, access, and utilization of FP information, skills, and services.</p> <p>All great religions and faith traditions are founded on serving those in need. When it comes to FP availability, affordability, and usage, we are called to preach and model love, equity, and justice for the vulnerable and disadvantaged genders, age groups, families, and communities.</p>

Topic	Description of the Challenge	Sermon Messages
Partnerships and Collaborations for Enhanced FP	In faith community congregational spaces, we find people of a variety of ages, professions, and communities, including local and community leaders. There are missed opportunities for collaboration in faith communities and houses of worship to enhance family planning education, service provision, pastoral care, counseling, referrals, and advocacy.	<p>Key Message: Promoting healthy alliances, collaborations, and partnerships promotes life, health, and fulfillment for the human body.</p> <p>This works best when all the body parts and systems are working in a synchronized manner. Humans, our families, communities, and our leadership and governance teams were created for community, communion, and cooperation. We all need allies with whom we can plan and work in many areas of life, and more so regarding bridging and meeting a community's family planning needs. Almost all religions have stories about great men and women who succeeded in their community leadership and societal governance roles because they created strong partnerships, teams, and alliances at different levels, in different sectors, and with different community groups.</p> <p>Recommendation: Invite healthcare staff to speak with your community on FP and related issues.</p>
Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue on FP	Limited partnership and collaboration among different generations or socioeconomic groups.	<p>Key Message: Train children and empower youth to live healthy lives and flourish.</p> <p>Intergenerational dialogues are interactive, personal, and empathic in nature. They bring together older and younger generations and are intended to create shared knowledge and meaning and a collective experience around the importance of planning families, the births of children, and their parenting in the most empowering manner. A better understanding of each other, answering their questions, and sharing hopes, fears, and anxieties related to FP helps prepare youth to handle their sexual, reproductive, and family health responsibilities more confidently. This will lead to better decision-making and higher chances of success. Family, community, and one-on-one dialogues benefit the people involved. Good dialogues help improve the youth's confidence and understanding of the importance of accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and encourage them to make responsible choices.</p> <p>A greater understanding of the importance of family planning and equipping youth with accurate information will help overcome cultural and religious challenges and other barriers to youth's access to sexual, reproductive, and family health information and services. Educate youth and first-time parents on FP. Create mutual understanding, trust, and solidarity on FP between different generations, family members, and community groups.</p>
Enhancing Servant Leadership, Passion, and Solidarity for Greater FP (This message and sermon are most appropriate when talking to other faith and lay leaders)	Many communities have limited knowledge, unhealthy attitudes, and unfounded fears and myths about FP. In addition, they live in areas with limited FP services and skilled providers. These communities will need more servant leaders who are passionate about improving family and community health in general and who are very intentional in preventing unplanned pregnancies and the suffering and deaths of children and mothers that result. Many people of faith lack the FP education opportunities, empowerment, capabilities, and user-friendly spaces to make informed, healthy, and holistically fulfilling decisions about their sexual, reproductive, and family health. Also, the faith sector, civil society, and governments' investments in FP education, empowerment, and service provision are still low compared to the need.	<p>Key Message: Servant leaders sacrifice themselves to serve and satisfy others' health, peace, dignity, and well-being.</p> <p>More often than not, our leadership abilities, skills, and authority are used to serve our satisfaction (including what we want to be said and done) rather than what the most disadvantaged and vulnerable need to boost their health and well-being and, ultimately, the health and well-being of everyone. Considering the number of lives lost each year, the types of illnesses and complications endured by women, and the multiple traumas suffered by families because women were not supported in their wish to delay pregnancy, the urgency and the extent to which a leader uses their office, authority, and connections to come to the family planning rescue of these women and families is what counts as servant leadership, for which all faiths and spiritualities believe.</p>

FAMILY PLANNING SERMON AND MESSAGING GUIDE FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES



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