25 Texas Mosques Open Their Doors to Harvey Survivors- **Faith In Action**

The Lone Star State hasn’t always been the most welcoming place to Muslims, but Texas members of the faith have looked beyond that to help Harvey’s victims.

[**DEAN OBEIDALLAH**](http://www.thedailybeast.com/author/dean-obeidallah)

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While Joel Osteen needed the media to shame him into opening his megachurch for the victims of Hurricane Harvey, the Muslims in Texas didn’t need any prodding. They quickly jumped into action by [opening mosques](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/muslims-opening-their-doors-to-flood-victims-we-feel-and-suffer-the-same_us_59a6e953e4b00795c2a341b9)across the Houston area, handing out supplies to those in need and raising money for the victims.

Mustafaa Carroll, the executive director of the Houston chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, explained to me, “Over 25 mosques in the Houston area have opened their doors to those seeking shelter from this deadly storm.”

Beyond that over 100 young Muslim Texans who are part of Muslim Youth USA, together with 40 more from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association, took to the streets volunteering to help their fellow Americans in need. These [young Muslims](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/harvey-muslim-group-relief-effort-texas-houston-hurrican-youth-usa-a7917406.html) handed out food, water, and other supplies to their fellow residents of the Lone Star State, while some used their personal boats to help rescue those stranded.

And it’s not just Muslims in the Houston area who are mobilizing to help their fellow Texans. As Alia Salem, a leader in the Dallas-Forth Worth Muslim community, noted, “Muslims in the Dallas area mobilized quickly for volunteer training and donation collecting.” Salem explained, “Over 300 volunteers showed up at the Islamic Center in Dallas for training with Islamic Relief with only a few hours’ notice, and five Dallas-area mosques immediately started a collection to help those people in need.”

These actions represent the best of America and the best of Islam. But I’m not writing this article in any way to suggest that Muslims are the only ones helping the victims of Hurricane Harvey. It’s truly been an all-hands-on-deck mentality with people of all backgrounds lending a helping hand. Countless churches have opened their doors and provided much needed relief for those fleeing the storm. Two [Jewish summer camps](https://www.jta.org/2017/08/29/news-opinion/united-states/jewish-summer-camps-are-reopening-to-host-houston-victims) in the area of the floods have opened their doors to people evacuating their homes. And the list goes on of people of other faiths or no faith helping out people who have lost in some cases everything to this devastating hurricane.

But the difference is that compared to other faith groups, being Muslim in Texas is far more challenging—to say the least. In the last year there has been a rash of anti-Muslim incidents. In January, two Texas mosques were set on fire in incidents the police have deemed to be arson, one of these fires occurring [within hours of Donald Trump](https://www.texastribune.org/2017/01/30/two-texas-mosques-burned-ground-january/) signing his original Muslim ban executive order. Arrests in [both incidents](https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/2017/mar/10/victoria-man-25-accused-of-burning-mosque/) were made by [the police](http://www.kiro7.com/news/local/man-suspected-in-bellevue-arson-had-run-in-at-mosque-last-summer/484554801).

There has been a string of protests by armed right-wing anti-Muslim bigots surrounding Texas-area mosques with the purpose to bully and intimidate the local Muslim population. The most [recent in June](https://www.dallasnews.com/news/news/2017/06/10/anti-shariah-protesters-gather-front-north-texas-islamic-center) saw several hundred anti-Muslim activists take part in a nationwide effort by the vile anti-Muslim group ACT for America.

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Mosques in Texas, as well as many other states, have been subject to death threats by letter and phone. One incident involved [phone calls](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/08/11/we-will-cut-all-your-heads-off-texas-mosque-threatened-by-man-claiming-to-be-army-veteran/?utm_term=.e36dca569b5d) from a man who claimed to be “armed to the teeth.” He parroted the typical right-wing lie that Muslims in America want to impose Islamic law while threatening the local mosque in a voicemail that stated, “We will cut all of your heads off. Do you understand me? All of you.”

Other anti-Muslim events ranged from Qurans being thrown into a toilet at a [Texas college](http://utdmercury.com/qurans-found-su-bathroom/) to a Muslim-American restaurant owner in Galveston coming to work and [seeing bacon covering his front door](http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Muslim-group-calls-for-hate-crime-investigation-10690643.php) and bacon grease smeared on the door handles. The tactic of using pork to taunt Muslims—[recently invoked again by Donald Trump](http://time.com/4905420/donald-trump-pershing-pigs-blood-muslim-tweet/)—has been employed by anti-Muslim activists in various other states, typically targeting mosques.

And this is just a small sampling of what the Texas Muslim community has been subject to in the last year. But still at a time when their fellow Texans were in need, there was no hesitation to help. Instead there was just action. As Qasim Rashid, a spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim community explained about the volunteer effort in Texas, Muslims have an obligation that “whenever you see your fellow Americans are in need, you need to be the first ones on the ground to help them.”

Salem added that “charity and helping those in need are part of the backbone of our Islamic faith.”

Carroll also helped put things in perspective about the hate incidents, noting that “while there are some bad people, there are far more good.” In fact after arson destroyed a mosque in Victoria, Texas, hours after Trump’s January Muslim ban was signed, people of all different faiths [donated over $600,000](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/americans-raise-600000-rebuild-burned-texas-mosque-170129205625913.html)to rebuild that place of worship.

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“I’m praying that all these people of different backgrounds working together to help the people of Houston will be a catalyst to build more bridges between us,” Carroll remarked, adding, “the response of people uniting to work for a common good is truly a testament to the good of America.”

There are no silver linings or congratulations to be had when speaking of a hurricane like Harvey that has taken lives, destroyed families, and resulted in so much heartbreak. But I truly hope Carroll is right that the display of Americans of all faiths, ethnicities, and races working together does foster some degree of understanding and unity. These are two things that our nation desperately needs more of.

