

Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria take steps toward reconciling

## **Conflict in northern Nigeria has often pitted the Muslim majority against the Christian minority. Some neighbors are working to change that.**

by [Doreen Ajiambo](#) in the [July 31, 2019](#) issue

Judy Ugwu, a 38-year-old mother of four who lives in northwestern Nigeria, was shocked when a group of Muslims visited her and other Christian widows and orphans, donating food, clothing, and school supplies.

“I can’t believe they came and visited me,” she said. “I want to forgive every Muslim who has wronged me in any way.”

Her husband was among 60 people in their village killed earlier this year by gunmen dressed in military uniforms and armed with AK-47 rifles and other weapons. Ugwu believes the attackers were Hausa-Fulani, who are predominantly Muslim herders of cattle.

“I had vowed never to forgive them,” she said.

She tied the violence to the elections early this year, in which Muslim candidates won all the leadership roles in Kaduna State where Ugwu lives.

Conflict in northern Nigeria has pitted the Muslim majority against the Christian minority, with many Christians seeing Muslim leaders as controlling political power, economic development, and job opportunities. In the February elections, no Christian candidate won office in Kaduna—which is 60 percent Muslim and 40 percent Christian and other religions—or in the majority of states in the northern region. The president, who is Muslim, was reelected. ([The vice president is a Pentecostal pastor.](#))

There have been attacks on churches, mosques, and Islamic schools. But there have also been small-scale efforts by Muslims reaching out to Christians to seek reunion

and deliver a message of peace, hope, and solidarity.

Mahamadou Aliyu, a Muslim from Kaduna, recently reconciled with his Christian neighbor after he realized that Islam was a peaceful religion and that both the Bible and Qur'an are holy books.

"We reconciled and shared a meal together," said Aliyu, 35, a father of five. "We all worship one God who loves peace, and we should respect and tolerate each other as brothers and sisters. We should never kill each other and hide behind religion."

Muhammadu Sanusi II, an Islamic scholar, Fulani nobleman, and emir of Kano—a top Muslim leadership role in Nigeria—called for peace between the peoples.

"Jihad is not about killing people in the name of jihad," he said. "That's not Islam. People who are killing others and looting their properties are criminals. Islam promotes peace, and I urge Muslims to show their Christian brothers that Islam is a peaceful religion."

Yohanna Buru, pastor of Christ Evangelical and Life Intervention Ministry, welcomed acts of kindness by Muslims and reminded Christians to be peace-loving people as well. He encouraged Christians also to reach out to Muslims and promote peace and unity among people despite their religious differences.

"Let us live in peace and tolerate each despite our religion differences," he urged. "We should preach peace everywhere we go to bring the lost love between us. Christians and Muslims are one people, and we should love one another."

Ugwu, the Christian woman in Kaduna, agreed.

"If we continue with this act of kindness, then we can heal and forgive each other," she said. "There's nothing impossible before God." —Religion News Service

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