

**FATHER BOULOS [Father Boulos Nassif, Founder, Hand in Hand]**

My name is Boulos Nassif, I am a priest at the Coptic Catholic Church and I am responsible for serving the disadvantaged groups and the groups with special needs

**ABDEL [Sheik Abdel Rahman]**

My name is Sheik Abdel Rahman Hassan Ali Ammar. I'm the first supervisor and coordinator for the call to Islam in the area of Minia

**The collision between Christian and Muslim cultures is perhaps greater in the Middle East than anywhere in the world. In his work as a prison chaplain, Father Boulos has faced the challenges of trying to provide support to prisoners of different faiths**

**FATHER BOULOS**

In the beginning, the Prison Fellowship group Jesus the Prisoner, was serving Christian inmates in prison. And the Muslims were not getting the support that the Christians were getting.

The Muslim families started to coming to the church to request support in the same way that was given to the Christian families. So veiled women started coming. And here in Egypt, it is a bit sensitive to have Muslims coming to Church. It causes a lot of doubts.

But at the same time, if you want to follow Christ's model, he did not refuse anybody and he was going to serve everybody. We needed to be able to a serve everybody without creating all the sensitivities about the Muslim coming to the church.

In Egypt we are people who come from various backgrounds. There is a lot of religious extremism, people are very conservative. People are quite fixed in their thoughts, in their faith and are quite closed up.

I was always looking for a Sheik with volunteers who would work with me in the same spirit as Jesus the Prisoner and serve the Muslim families.

**ABDEL**

We were walking together and everybody was amazed how we, a Muslim cleric and a Christian priest walked together. People were looking at us, because this is not a very usual sight.

**FATHER BOULOS**

It was important for us to make it clear that the intent of them coming to us and us going to them was not to convert them, but the intent was to come together to be able to serve the poor, the needy, the families of the prisoners.

We started discussing together and finding out what are the basic principles and values that unite us and that make us work together in the same ministry, in the same mission

All of this process was quite challenging and there were a lot of risks, because people were looking at us with a lot of suspicion. Muslims and Christians sitting together raise doubts from both sides. They couldn't understand why would we be together.

**Despite suspicion and concerns from Christians and Muslims in the community, Father Boulos and Sheik Abdel Rahman started a volunteer group called 'Hand in Hand,' — helping support inmates and their families with schooling, financial support and social activities.**

### **FATHER BOULOS**

We were having an excursion, an outing for the families and eventually we came to a church. A little muslim girl did not want to go into the church. She said "I have been taught at the Mosque that if I go into a church, then I will die." So there were a lot of suspicions and a lot of prejudice that we had to overcome. It took a lot of prayer and a lot of preparation.

### **ABDEL**

It's mainly love that binds us together as Christians and Muslim. This is the thing that really unites us and makes us one and makes us able to serve and do the ministry.

### **AMAL [Sheikha Amal]**

We do not come as Christians, we do not come as Muslims. We come as people who belong to the same humanity.

### **FATHER BOULOS**

What is unique is that we have an inter-religious volunteer group. We could have some volunteers working in the church, we could have some volunteers working in the mosque, but having a group of volunteers, coming together because they believe in the same cause, in the same values and principles — in the Egyptian society this is a very unique experience. This has never happened before. We are all brothers.

### **ROY MOUSSALLI [PF Envoy for the Middle East]**

In the Hand and Hand group we can see the person and we become friends with the person, and him being a Christian or a Muslim is not the real issue.

### **FATHER BOULOS**

We would meet sometimes in some of the areas where there is a lot of tension, and we would walk together, me and the Muslim Sheik, and this would cool people down because they can see that there is no animosity. There is peace. There is friendship between us as persons, a Christian pastor and a Muslim cleric.

**ABDEL**

Extremists from all the sides, they have so many arguments. But when people see us together, then this calms everybody down and gives a very different impression.

**FATHER ANTOUN JAYED [General Vicar, Copt Catholic Diocese of Minia]**

For the Christians who think that the Muslims are enemies, first, they don't know very well their faith, they don't know their Christ, and they don't know their Gospel.

**FATHER BOULOS**

Many changes have happened within the group between Christians and Muslim. This has created a whole different culture. We have even started visiting each other in our homes

**AMAL**

The Christian group would come to the Muslims during their feasts, and the Muslims also would go to the Christians and visit them during their feasts. There is no hypocrisy. It is all very genuine and very transparent.

**ABDEL**

I can say that Father Boulos is one of the closest and most faithful friends that I ever had.

**FATHER BOULOS**

We are now much more friends than workers or co-workers. We even share in our personal lives, in our family lives and visiting our respective homes. This is a beautiful relationship.

**ROY MOUSSALLI**

Father Boulos is a very special person. He understands very well the challenges that he is posing because many of the christians are saying 'Why do we need to help those people, to serve those people. They are persecuting us.'

**AMAL**

If you really believe in your faith, and the message you want to bring, Your words, and what you do, should not be theoretical. You should go down to the field, to the places where people are in pain, and are in need. This is where you will find the real meaning of what you believe in.

**FATHER ANTOUN JAYED**

We should take the initiative in building bridges especially with the Muslims. We are living among them and with them. We are a gospel. We are a living gospel. We are an open gospel.

**ABDEL**

Forgiveness is the basis of all religions. It will conquer any problems, any quarrels between any groups and it will show that there are no barriers separating the people of Egypt. Once we have forgiveness... everybody can be together united.