

BOSNIAKS OF NORTH AMERICA

A PEOPLE PORTRAIT



WHO ARE THEY?

The term “Bosniak” is the historical name referring to the majority ethnic group of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina is located in Eastern Europe across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. An estimated 2.1 million Bosniaks live in Bosnia-Herzegovina with 2.8 million Bosniaks scattered around the world. The Bosniaks arrived in North America in three waves at the beginning of the 20th Century, during the post-World War II period in the 1950’s, and after the civil war in Bosnia in the 1990’s. Most Bosniaks are Muslims that blend Western values with their Islamic traditions. Bosniak immigrants formed the first American Muslim organization in 1906 in Illinois. They work hard to maintain their Bosniak identity by forming organization like the Congress of North American Bosniaks. Bosniaks are diverse regarding their religious devotion and assimilation into North America. Most Bosniaks are very kind and hospitable people that place a high value on family life. They love good Mediterranean food, soccer, dancing, and Turkish coffee. Almost all Bosniaks share a deep passion for their home country and cultural heritage.

WHAT IS THEIR HERITAGE?

The Bosniak people are a Southeast European ethnic group. They descended from the South Slavic people that converted to Islam during the reign of the Ottoman Empire. Bosniaks enjoyed security and prestige under Ottoman rule. The Ottoman rule ended in 1878 when the Austro-Hungarian Empire took control of Bosnia. The Austro-Hungarian Empire suppressed the Bosniak people. An intense struggle for recognition marks the following 120 years of Bosniak history. After World War II, Bosnia became one of the six units that formed communist Yugoslavia. The province of Bosnia officially declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1992. A three-year war began that divided the country along ethnic and religious lines. The two dominant groups were the Eastern Orthodox Serbs and the Muslim Bosniaks. The Serbian army was far superior and devastated Bosnia. Over 2,000,000 refugees were displaced and 200,000 Bosniaks were killed, many through ethnic cleansing. After international intervention, the brutal war ended in December of 1995. Much Bosniak blood has been shed to defend their country and cultural heritage. Hence, Bosniaks share a deep love and concern for their homeland. They take great pride in being Bosniak. Many Bosniaks may reside in North America, yet a large part of their heart will always remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Population in
North America
Over 350,000

Languages
Spoken by
Bosnians:
Bosnian

Top 5 locations
with highest
population of
this people in
North America:

St. Louis
Chicago
New York
New Jersey
Atlanta



WHAT ARE THEIR BELIEFS?

Bosniaks take pride in their Islamic heritage. They adhere to the common teachings of Islam that there is one God, his name is Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. They look to the Koran and their local Imam for religious authority. Many Bosniaks attempt to fast during Ramadan. They celebrate the major festivals of Islam, which keep their community connected. However, despite four hundred years of Islamic heritage, the vast majority of Bosniaks are nominal Muslims. Many Bosniaks willingly engage in activities forbidden in Islam like drinking alcohol and dressing immodestly. Very few Bosniak women cover their heads in public. Most Bosniaks are unfamiliar with the Koran. As children, they learn about the Koran and Islamic traditions at the Mosque. As Bosniaks grow older, their devotion to Islam is more cultural than religious. Some Bosniaks may identify themselves as non-practicing Muslims and make statements that imply both Christians and Muslims worship the same God. However, most Bosniaks are taught the Bible is corrupted and Jesus was only a prophet. Bosniaks have many misconceptions about the Christian faith.

WHAT ARE THEIR NEEDS?

They need hope that is only found in Christ since they remain classified as an unreached people group. For many Bosniaks, life is extremely hard. Their English is often too poor to advance in the workplace, leaving them to survive on low paying jobs. Bosniaks in this category need help improving their English and finding better jobs. Many have done well in America, but need to know that wealth will never bring true peace or contentment. Most Bosniaks are burdened by the events in their homeland especially as relatives become sick and die. They are very concerned that fighting will resume in Bosnia. They need to know Americans will stand with them to protect the peace of their country. They need true friends that will love them and learn their stories. They need believing friends that will show them a good example of biblical Christianity, which includes sharing the Gospel in both words and deeds.

WHAT IS KEEPING THE GOSPEL FROM THEM?

Islam is a significant cultural barrier. To be Bosniak is to be Muslim. Also, the anger related to the so-called Christian (Serbian Orthodox) aggression against their people continues to fester. One of their mottos is "Never Forget!" The younger Bosniaks are often obsessed with the American materialistic culture. Their focus on self-image and wealth reduces their interest in spiritual things. Furthermore, a lack of contact with sincere believers contributes to the Bosniaks' continued ignorance of biblical Christianity. Most Bosniaks have simply never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel or developed a sincere friendship with a loving believer.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

- Pray that God will reveal himself to the Bosniaks and soften their hearts.
- Pray that believers will represent Christ to their Bosniak neighbors and co-workers.
- Pray that God will save and call out Bosniak Christian leaders to establish a witness among Bosniaks in North America. Pray for their endurance and obedience.
- Pray for more labors to join the work in reaching Bosniaks for Christ.
- Pray that the Old Testament will be translated and published in the Bosnian language.

WHAT CAN MY CHURCH DO?

Endvisioning – beginning with the end in mind

- Assemble a study group to research the Bosniak worldview and existing demographics.
- Connect with missionaries in Bosnia to learn what the church looks like in their homeland.
- Based on your research, list ways you would love to see the Gospel transform the Bosniaks you know. Try to describe what you think a Bosniak Church would look like in your city.

Prayer -- focusing on the people as well as calling out workers to the harvest

- As a church, vote to adopt the Bosniak of North America. Begin praying for those who may be in your community, but keep the Acts 1:8 challenge in mind.
- Develop and distribute prayer advocacy materials that communicate the Bosniak's needs.
- Faithfully pray through the 30 days of Ramadan each year for their salvation, especially the "Day of Power" when Muslims believe God reveals truth.
- Prayer walk among the largest pockets or concentrations of Bosniaks in your community.

Networking for Evangelism – identifying relationships within the people and evangelizing by following that network of connected relationships

- Look for natural relationships with Bosniaks. They may be your co-workers, classmates, or neighbors. Intentional acts of kindness are appreciated, especially in times of need.
- Frequent Bosnian restaurants, bakeries, and stores. When encountering Bosniaks, be models of grace and forgiveness starting with being good listeners to their personal stories. By showing genuine care, bridges can be built upon which the gospel may flow.
- Build relationships with local Bosniak leaders and find ways to work together toward common goals like protecting the peace in Bosnia through diplomatic means.
- If there is a Bosnian Mosque in your community, make contact with the Imam and ask to visit the Mosque. Take the posture of a learner and ask questions about Islam. Look to build long-term relationships and take opportunities to share about your faith in Jesus.

Starting Small Groups – that can become churches

- Ask Bosniak persons of peace if they would like to conduct a short series of meetings to discuss spiritual things. Be familiar with some basic Muslim evangelism strategies.
- Learn the basics of storying so you can share the Gospel in a culturally appropriate way.
- Form groups with dual purposes like learning to cook Bosnian food and study the Bible.

Scripture

- Distribute New Testaments in the Bosnian language in printed and audio formats.
- Distribute copies of the Bosnian Jesus Film in a relational way. Offer to watch it with them.

Mobilization

- Train church members to identify and equip new leaders among Bosniak believers through discipleship. Train new believers to share their faith and reach their people with the Gospel.
- Contact believers in other cities and states and ask them to adopt the Bosniaks.
- Network with other believers working among the Bosniak in North America.

All other inquiries should be addressed to: Permissions, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, Ga. 30022-4176; or e-mail permissions@namb.net.