

'We are all the same' - Barcelona church opens doors to Ramadan dinners

Every evening between 50 and 60 Muslims, many of them homeless, stream into the centuries-old stone passages of the Santa Anna church, where volunteers offer a hearty meal of home-cooked food

Reuters | Barcelona

With COVID-19 restrictions preventing Barcelona's Islamic population from celebrating Ramadan at the usual indoor venues, a Catholic church has offered up its open-air cloisters for Muslims to eat and pray together.

Every evening between 50 and 60 Muslims, many of them homeless, stream into the centuries-old stone passages of the Santa Anna church, where volunteers offer a hearty meal of home-cooked food.

"We are all the same... If you are Catholic or of another religion and I am Muslim, that's fine," said Hafid Oubrahim, a 27-year old Moroccan of Berber descent who attends the dinners.

"We are all like brothers and we must help each other too."

During the month of Ramadan, observant Muslims do not eat between sunrise and sundown, breaking their fast only after nightfall with a meal known as Iftar.



People carry food trays during a charity Ramadan dinner in the cloister at Santa Anna church in Barcelona

Faouzia Chati, president of the Catalan Association of Moroccan Women, used to organise Iftar gatherings in the city, but limits on indoor dining forced her to seek an alternative space

with good ventilation and room for distancing. She found a receptive ear in Father Peio Sanchez, Santa Anna's rector, who sees the meeting of different faiths as emblematic of

civic coexistence.

"People are very happy that Muslims can do Iftar in a Catholic church, because religions serve to unite us, not to separate us," said Chati.

Sanchez looked on as a man intoned the Muslim evening call to prayer beneath the orange trees of the church's central courtyard, illuminated by the flames of gas heaters.

"Even with different cultures, different languages, different religions, we are more capable of sitting down and talking than some politicians," said the rector.



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HAFID OUBRAHIM



Priest Peio Sanchez speaks with people during a charity Ramadan dinner



Priest Peio Sanchez speaks with people during a charity Ramadan dinner in the cloister at Santa Anna church in Barcelona



Volunteers prepare a charity Ramadan dinner in the cloister at Santa Anna church in Barcelona



People eat during a charity Ramadan dinner in the cloister at Santa Anna church in Barcelona

Ramadan cooking

Ingredients

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/3 tsp vanilla essence
- 2 cups white flour
- 3 tbsp powdered milk
- pinch of salt
- 3 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp yeast
- 3 tbsp oil
- warm water, as needed
- 140g soft white cheese (preferably the Laughing Cow triangle cheese wedges)
- 1 egg yolk, for egg wash
- black seeds (nigella seeds)

Khaliat Nahel (Beehives)

Method

To make syrup:

Mix the water and sugar in a saucepan over medium heat, and stir in the vanilla essence. Cook, stirring, till all the sugar has melted. Remove from heat and set aside.

To make beehives:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour, milk, salt, sugar and yeast. Add in the oil and warm water. Mix well and knead till you get a soft dough. Cover the mixing bowl with a damp cloth and set aside for 30 minutes.

2. Grease a lined baking tray.

3. Divide the dough into small balls (about the size of a ping pong ball). Press a small piece of the cheese into the middle of each ball, and enclose in the dough. Place the dough balls into the baking tray, allowing them to touch.

4. When you have filled the baking tray with dough balls, brush the surface with egg wash. Sprinkle with the black seeds and bake in an oven pre-heated to 250°C for 20 minutes.

5. Remove from oven and pour the syrup over. Serve warm.

