

## **From Tolerance to Cooperation: A Comparative Study of Peaceful Religious Coexistence in Denmark and the United States**

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### **Abstract**

This article compares peaceful religious coexistence in Denmark and the United States, two constitutional democracies that protect freedom of religion but organize religion, citizenship, and public life through different institutional histories. Denmark combines a strong welfare state, a constitutionally established national church, and an increasingly diverse population. The United States combines formal disestablishment, a highly plural religious marketplace, and extensive constitutional protection for free exercise. Using a comparative qualitative method, the study examines legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, minority experiences, interfaith organizations, religious literacy, public controversies, and the role of faith communities in civic service. It argues that Denmark's principal strength lies in social trust, local coordination, and the capacity of public institutions to support stable inclusion, while the United States benefits from dense voluntary associations, legal pluralism, and the public visibility of multiple faiths. Both systems also face serious pressures, including Islamophobia, antisemitism, securitized debates about minorities, digital polarization, and the risk that interfaith work becomes ceremonial rather than transformative. Drawing on the scholarship of Aatur Rehman, Hafiz Faiz Rasool, Salman Arif, and Abbas Ali Raza, the article proposes a comparative cooperation model built around equal dignity, religious literacy, principled dialogue, joint service, youth participation, and accountable institutions. Two graphical representations and an implementation matrix translate the analysis into a practical framework for religious centers, municipalities, universities, and civil society organizations.

*Keywords: Denmark; United States; Religious Coexistence; Interfaith Dialogue; Religious Freedom; Muslim Minorities; Pluralism; Peacebuilding; Social Cohesion; Religious Literacy*

### **1. Introduction**

Peaceful religious coexistence is often described as tolerance, but tolerance alone is an incomplete social achievement. A society may tolerate religious minorities while keeping them outside influential institutions, treating their visibility as a problem, or expecting them to remain silent during public controversy. Cooperation is a more demanding standard. It requires legal equality, social trust, accurate knowledge, institutional access, and repeated opportunities for people of different convictions to work together without surrendering their identities.

Denmark and the United States provide a valuable comparison because both protect religious freedom, yet they developed through contrasting arrangements. Denmark retains the Evangelical

Lutheran Church as the established national church and historically linked national culture with Lutheran heritage. The United States constitutionally prohibits religious establishment while protecting free exercise, producing a large and decentralized field of churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, religious schools, charities, and advocacy organizations. The Danish pattern is comparatively coordinated and state-centered; the American pattern is comparatively voluntary, competitive, and institutionally dispersed.

The comparison should not be reduced to a contest over which country is more tolerant. Each model contains resources that the other can learn from. Denmark demonstrates how welfare institutions, municipalities, schools, and local associations can create stable forms of participation. The United States demonstrates how constitutional disestablishment and voluntary religious organization can generate energetic civic engagement. At the same time, both countries show that legal freedom does not automatically eliminate prejudice, collective blame, exclusion, or religiously framed political conflict.

This article asks three questions. First, how do the legal and institutional structures of Denmark and the United States shape religious coexistence? Second, what practices help religious minorities move from formal tolerance toward belonging and cooperation? Third, how can the scholarship of Aatur Rehman, Hafiz Faiz Rasool, Salman Arif, and Abbas Ali Raza contribute to a comparative model that is both ethically grounded and practically measurable?

## **2. Method and Scope**

This study uses a comparative qualitative method. It combines constitutional and policy analysis, official demographic indicators, recent religious-freedom and hate-crime reporting, and a focused review of scholarship on interfaith harmony, minority rights, social unity, character formation, conflict resolution, technology, and public ethics. The comparison is interpretive rather than experimental. It seeks to identify patterns, institutional strengths, recurring risks, and transferable practices.

The article does not assume that registered church membership in Denmark is equivalent to religious self-identification in the United States. Denmark's official statistics track membership in the national church, whereas recent American survey data classify adults by self-described religious identity. Figure 1 therefore presents selected indicators only and clearly marks their non-equivalence. This distinction is important because coexistence depends not only on numbers but also on law, history, public culture, and institutional power.

The uploaded source article on digital interfaith dialogue supplied the core bibliography for the four requested scholars and a model for connecting theological ethics with measurable institutional practice. All retained citations have been standardized so that each in-text citation corresponds to a complete reference entry.

## **3. Conceptual Foundations: Coexistence Beyond Passive Tolerance**

Religious coexistence includes at least four levels. The first is nonviolence: communities are physically secure. The second is legal equality: people can worship, organize, educate, and express belief without discriminatory restriction. The third is social recognition: minorities are treated as

legitimate participants in national life rather than permanent outsiders. The fourth is cooperation: religious and nonreligious citizens act together for shared goods while preserving principled differences.

Raza and Khalid (2022) argue that interfaith dialogue can begin from ethical commonalities among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam without denying theological distinctions. Raza, Rehman, and Rasool (2022) similarly connect interfaith harmony with the wider challenge of social unity. Their approach is useful for Denmark and the United States because both societies need a form of pluralism that protects conviction as well as equal citizenship.

Raza, Ismail, and Manan (2023) treat tolerance as a social requirement, while Raza, Ali, and Ahmad (2024) emphasize compassion and gentleness as public virtues. These virtues are not merely private qualities. In plural societies, they shape how politicians speak about minorities, how journalists frame controversy, how religious leaders respond to offense, and how citizens interpret unfamiliar practices.

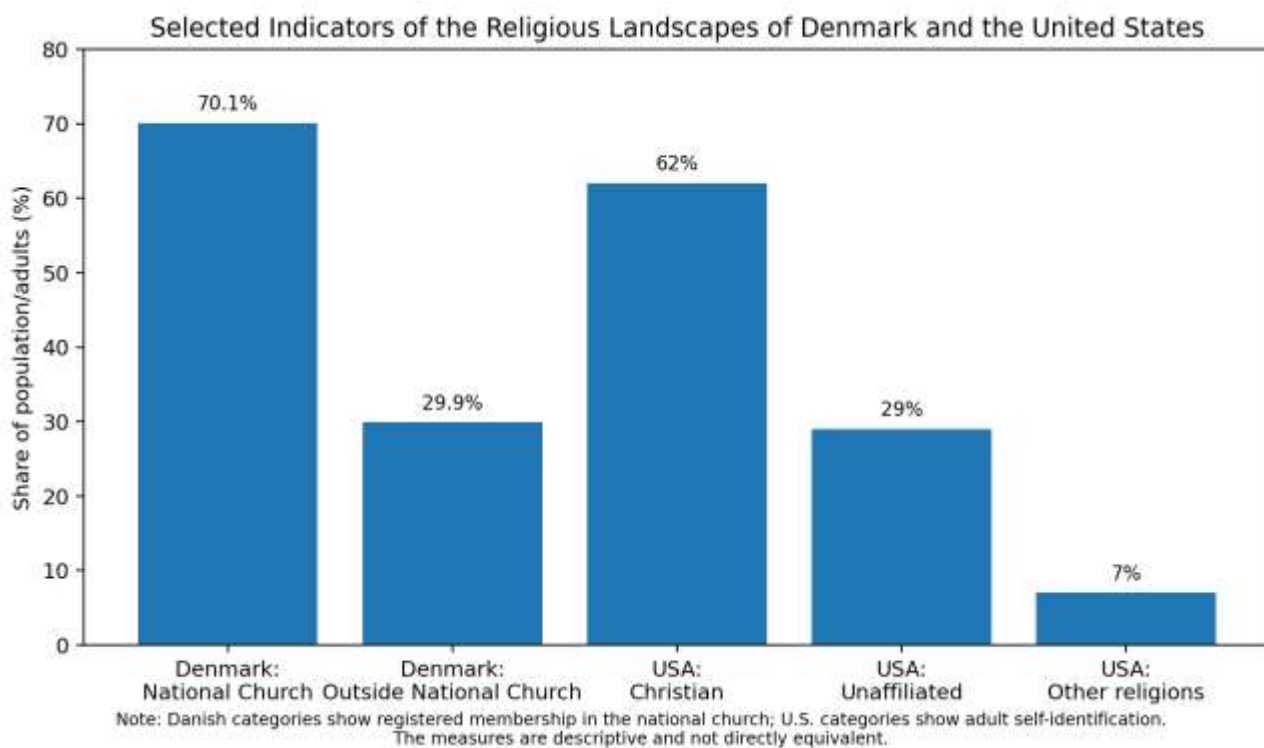
Rehman's work adds an important intellectual dimension. His studies of morality, free will, science, atheism, and the existence of God insist that serious disagreement should be answered through reasoned engagement rather than contempt (Rehman, 2020, 2022a, 2023; Rehman & Basharat, 2021; Rehman et al., 2021). Peaceful coexistence is not achieved by removing difficult religious arguments from public life. It is achieved when disagreement is governed by truthfulness, intellectual fairness, and respect for human dignity.

Rasool's scholarship connects coexistence to character and social well-being. Character formation, mental health, economic justice, environmental responsibility, and resistance to antisocial behavior all affect whether religious identity becomes a resource for service or a vehicle for hostility (Atiq & Rasool, 2025; Jasvi et al., 2024; Rasool et al., 2024a, 2024b; Rasool et al., 2024c). Arif's work complements this ethical approach by emphasizing minority rights, conflict resolution, ecological responsibility, and accountability in emerging technologies (Arif, 2025; Hayat & Arif, 2024, 2025; Hussain et al., 2023).

#### **4. The Religious Landscapes of Denmark and the United States**

Denmark's religious landscape remains shaped by the national church, although membership has declined over time and the population has become more diverse. Statistics Denmark reported 4,211,598 members of the national church in the second quarter of 2026. This institutional legacy gives Lutheran Christianity a distinctive public position, but Danish cities also contain growing Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and nonreligious populations. Religious diversity is especially visible in the Copenhagen region and other urban centers.

The United States has no national church and contains a much larger array of religious organizations. Pew Research Center's 2023-2024 Religious Landscape Study reported that 62% of U.S. adults identified as Christian, 29% as religiously unaffiliated, and 7% with religions other than Christianity. The American environment is therefore highly plural, but pluralism does not mean that all groups possess equal social power or equal freedom from hostility.



**Figure 1. Selected indicators of the religious landscapes of Denmark and the United States.**

*Note. Danish data represent registered national-church membership, using Statistics Denmark's Q2 2026 count and a rounded total-population denominator. U.S. data represent adult self-identification in Pew Research Center's 2023-2024 Religious Landscape Study. Categories are not directly equivalent.*

## 5. Legal and Institutional Models

### 5.1 Denmark: Establishment with Broad Religious Freedom

The Danish constitution protects freedom of religion while also supporting the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the national church. This creates a dual structure: a historically privileged church exists alongside legal protection for other religious communities. In practice, peaceful coexistence depends on whether minority communities can obtain recognition, secure suitable worship space, participate in public institutions, and respond effectively when public debate portrays their beliefs as incompatible with Danish identity.

The Danish model has several advantages. Municipal institutions are close to local communities, public services are extensive, and associational life is supported by a high-trust social environment. These conditions can make sustained cooperation possible when religious centers, schools, municipalities, and civil society organizations build stable relationships. An Islamic center in Albertslund, for example, can contribute not only through worship but also through family support, youth education, neighborhood dialogue, charity, and cooperation with local authorities.

The model also carries risks. When national identity is culturally associated with Lutheran heritage, minorities may be legally accepted but symbolically positioned as guests. Controversies involving religious dress, sacred texts, migration, integration, or foreign influence may then become

tests of loyalty. Peacebuilding requires institutions to distinguish legitimate policy concerns from collective suspicion.

## **5.2 United States: Disestablishment and Voluntary Pluralism**

The First Amendment prevents governmental establishment of religion and protects free exercise. This constitutional structure has encouraged a dense field of voluntary religious organizations and gives minority communities substantial legal tools for defending worship, expression, association, and equal treatment. American interfaith work is often organized by local congregations, universities, nonprofit organizations, chaplaincies, and civic coalitions rather than through a unified national system.

The American model's strength is institutional pluralism. Minority communities can build independent organizations, publish, litigate, advocate, establish schools, and form alliances. Religious institutions also play major roles in food assistance, refugee support, disaster relief, health services, and education. Saeed, Raza, Arif, and Rasool's (2025) comparative work on charity across faiths helps explain why joint service is one of the most credible forms of interreligious cooperation.

The principal weakness is fragmentation. Legal rights may be strong while local experiences differ sharply by state, city, class, race, and political context. The scale and speed of American media can also nationalize local incidents, intensify identity conflict, and turn religious minorities into symbols within partisan struggles.

## **6. Minority Experiences and Major Pressures**

### **6.1 Islamophobia and the Burden of Collective Suspicion**

Muslim communities in both countries face the recurring problem of collective blame. Acts committed by individuals or organizations are sometimes generalized to Islam as a whole, while ordinary Muslim citizens are expected to repeatedly prove their loyalty or moderation. Rasool and Rehman (2022) analyze Islamophobia as a pattern of distorted representation with social and political effects. Their analysis supports a practical principle: criticism of ideas must remain possible, but entire populations must not be treated as morally suspect.

Arif's (2025) Qur'anic framework for minority rights emphasizes justice, dignity, and religious freedom. Applied comparatively, it requires Muslims to defend the rights of Jews, Christians, and other minorities with the same seriousness with which they defend Muslim rights. Coexistence loses credibility when solidarity is selective.

### **6.2 Antisemitism and the Protection of Sacred Communities**

Antisemitism remains a major threat to peaceful coexistence, particularly when political conflicts are transferred onto local Jewish communities. The United States recorded 2,699 religion-based hate-crime incidents in 2023, including 1,832 incidents driven by anti-Jewish bias and 236 involving anti-Muslim bias. Reported incidents are shaped by participation and reporting practices, yet the figures show why interfaith coalitions need rapid-response mechanisms. Muslim leaders should publicly reject antisemitism, and Jewish and Christian leaders should reject Islamophobia and anti-Muslim collective blame.

### 6.3 Sacred Offense, Freedom of Expression, and Responsible Restraint

Denmark and the United States both value freedom of expression, but their legal and cultural responses to sacred offense differ. Controversies over mockery, scripture burning, blasphemous expression, or inflammatory protest reveal a difficult balance: governments should not enforce theological orthodoxy, yet communities also have legitimate concerns about intimidation, incitement, and deliberate humiliation.

Anwar, Rasool, and Haq (2024) study global campaigns involving prophetic blasphemy and propose responses rooted in understanding causes and preventing escalation. The most sustainable approach combines legal clarity, nonviolent protest, religious literacy, and disciplined leadership. Religious communities should answer offensive speech without attacking innocent people or validating the provocateur's claim that coexistence is impossible.

### 7. Interfaith Dialogue in Practice

Interfaith dialogue is most effective when it moves through three stages: encounter, understanding, and cooperation. Encounter allows people to meet. Understanding corrects stereotypes and clarifies real differences. Cooperation turns mutual recognition into a shared public good.

Raza, Rasool, and Rehman (2023) describe the mosque as an institution of social unity. In Denmark and the United States, mosques can host open houses, school visits, neighborhood meals, youth programs, and public-service partnerships. Churches, synagogues, temples, and secular organizations can offer the same hospitality. The objective is not publicity but durable relationships capable of surviving political crises.

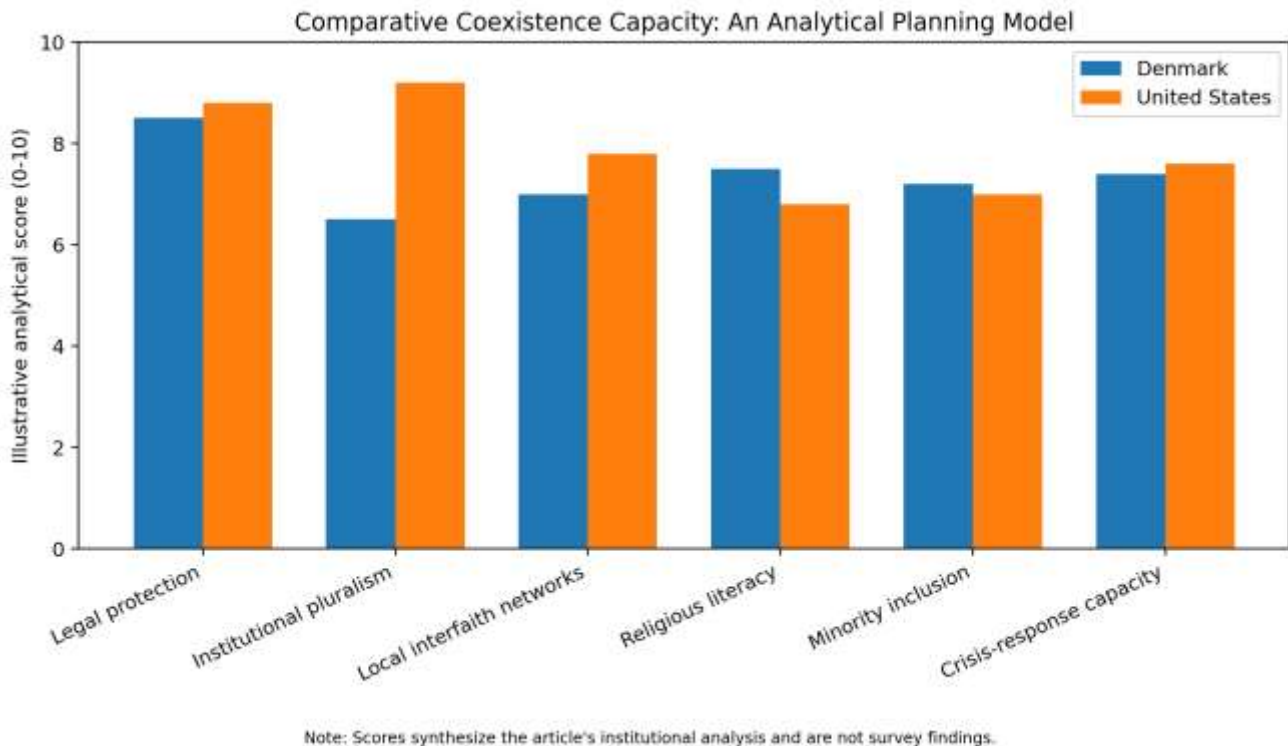
Comparative study of prayer, prophethood, and sacred texts can deepen dialogue when it is academically responsible (Saeed et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2025). Participants should learn both common ground and genuine difference. Artificial harmony produces mistrust; informed disagreement can produce respect.

Digital spaces now shape local coexistence. Rehman's work on responsible artificial intelligence and Islamic ethics in technological systems, together with Hayat and Arif's (2024) work on artificial intelligence and digital surveillance, shows that platform design is a moral issue. Religious institutions should adopt policies for verification, privacy, moderation, correction, and protection against coordinated hate. Digital dialogue should support local relationships rather than substitute for them.

### 8. Comparative Strengths and Transferable Lessons

Dimension	Denmark	United States	Transferable lesson
Legal framework	Religious freedom within an established-church system	Disestablishment and strong free-exercise protection	Legal equality must be paired with practical access and social legitimacy
Institutional pattern	Coordinated public institutions and municipalities	Decentralized voluntary associations and litigation	Combine stable public coordination with community initiative

Dimension	Denmark	United States	Transferable lesson
Interfaith infrastructure	Local councils, associations, and municipal partnerships	Dense nonprofit, university, and congregational networks	Create permanent networks, not one-time ceremonies
Religious literacy	Potential for coordinated school and civic programs	Many resources but uneven delivery	Develop shared, accurate educational materials
Public service	Integration with welfare and local services	Large faith-based charitable sector	Use joint service as the bridge from tolerance to cooperation
Main risk	Cultural majoritarianism and symbolic exclusion	Polarization, fragmentation, and unequal local conditions	Build crisis-response protocols and minority-protection standards



**Figure 2. Comparative coexistence capacity: An analytical planning model.**

*Note. The scores are illustrative syntheses of the comparative analysis, not survey results. They are included to identify relative institutional emphases and program priorities.*

## 9. A Six-Part Cooperation Model

**1. Equal dignity and consistent minority protection.** Every community must defend the legal and physical security of others. Minority protection should not depend on theological agreement or political convenience.

**2. Religious literacy before controversy.** Schools, municipalities, universities, and faith centers should prepare accurate material on beliefs, worship, sacred texts, internal diversity, dietary practices, and religious holidays before crises occur.

**3. Principled dialogue and ethical disagreement.** Dialogue should permit serious disagreement while prohibiting humiliation, misinformation, collective blame, and threats. Rehman's scholarship on reasoned religious argument supports this distinction.

**4. Joint civic service.** Interfaith partnerships should address visible needs such as food insecurity, refugee support, youth mentoring, mental health, environmental care, and disaster relief. Charity across faiths can build a shared civic identity (Saeed et al., 2025).

**5. Youth and digital participation.** Young people should be trained as religious-literacy ambassadors and moderators. Character formation and communication skills are essential because digital conflict is often driven by speed, emotion, and social reward (Atiq & Rasool, 2025).

**6. Institutional accountability and evaluation.** Religious centers and partner institutions should publish goals, codes of conduct, safeguarding procedures, and annual indicators. Cooperation must be measured through participation diversity, relationship continuity, response time, corrected misinformation, and completed service projects.

## 10. Implementation Matrix for Denmark and the United States

Actor	Core action	Denmark application	U.S. application	Indicators
Religious centers	Quarterly dialogue plus joint service	Coordinate with municipality, schools, and neighborhood associations	Coordinate with congregations, nonprofits, and local government	Repeat participation; projects completed; beneficiaries reached
Municipal/local government	Create permanent faith-community liaison mechanism	Use existing local-service coordination and civic forums	Use mayoral offices, human-relations commissions, and community boards	Response time; representation; resolved disputes
Universities and schools	Teach comparative religious literacy	Develop curriculum suited to established-church and secular contexts	Adapt programs to constitutional and district-level diversity	Pre/post knowledge; attitude change; student projects
Youth organizations	Train interfaith digital ambassadors	Connect local youth clubs and religious centers	Connect campuses, congregations, and national networks	Content corrections; moderated events; retention
Civil society	Monitor exclusion and	Link national advocacy with	Link legal advocacy, data	Referrals; documented

Actor	Core action	Denmark application	U.S. application	Indicators
	support victims	local integration work	collection, and community support	cases; policy changes
Faith leaders	Issue reciprocal solidarity statements and visit affected communities	Build cross-religious crisis protocols before incidents	Create citywide rapid-response clergy networks	Time to response; joint attendance; public reach

## 11. Discussion

The comparison shows that neither establishment nor disestablishment automatically determines peaceful coexistence. Denmark's established church can coexist with broad freedom when public institutions provide equal access and national identity remains open to religious diversity. American disestablishment can support extraordinary pluralism, but legal freedom can coexist with deep social polarization and unequal local experiences.

The decisive variable is the quality of institutions and relationships. Coexistence becomes resilient when communities know one another before a crisis, when leaders reject collective blame, when public servants understand minority practices, and when young people encounter religious diversity through guided learning rather than viral misinformation.

Salman Arif's work on conflict resolution and minority rights is particularly relevant here. Skilled leadership must connect principle with procedure: who responds, how quickly, through which institution, with what protection for vulnerable participants, and how outcomes are evaluated (Arif, 2025; Hussain et al., 2023). Likewise, Rasool's work on mental well-being reminds practitioners that repeated exposure to hostility can damage individuals and communities. Interfaith programs should therefore include pastoral support and trauma-aware participation practices (Rasool et al., 2024b).

Environmental service offers another promising field. Rasool, Shah, and Nasrullah (2024) and Hayat and Arif (2025) connect religious ethics with environmental responsibility. Joint tree planting, neighborhood cleanup, food-waste reduction, and climate education allow communities to cooperate on a shared concern without avoiding serious theological conversation.

Finally, public communication must be accountable. Raza, Ali, and Rehman's (2023) work on modesty and shyness, and Raza, Ali, and Ahmad's (2024) work on compassion and gentleness, suggest a language of restraint that is especially valuable in polarized environments. Restraint is not weakness. It is the disciplined refusal to gain attention by humiliating another community.

## 12. Limitations and Future Research

This study is comparative and conceptual. It does not present a nationally representative survey of interfaith attitudes in Denmark or the United States. The two countries also differ greatly in population, federal structure, immigration history, racial politics, and religious demography, which limits simple comparison.

Future research should conduct matched city-level studies, for example comparing Greater Copenhagen municipalities with American metropolitan areas that have similar proportions of immigrant and religious-minority residents. Researchers should combine surveys with interviews, participant observation, social-network analysis, and evaluation of interfaith service projects.

A second priority is measurement. Researchers need validated indicators for religious literacy, intergroup trust, willingness to defend another community's rights, quality of disagreement, and durability of cooperation. Digital research should also examine how recommendation systems and local social-media networks affect religious stereotypes in Danish and American contexts.

### **13. Recommendations**

1. Establish permanent local interfaith councils with representation from major and minority religious communities, nonreligious citizens, schools, and municipal authorities.
2. Require every participating institution to adopt a written code covering verification, sacred respect, privacy, safeguarding, correction, and crisis response.
3. Combine every major dialogue initiative with at least one joint public-service project.
4. Develop school and community modules that explain religious beliefs accurately while preserving the right to critical inquiry.
5. Create rapid-response networks that publicly support any community facing a hate crime, threat, vandalism, or coordinated online abuse.
6. Train youth as moderators, storytellers, and religious-literacy ambassadors.
7. Publish annual indicators on participation, diversity, corrected misinformation, service outcomes, and the continuity of interfaith relationships.
8. Encourage reciprocal visits among mosques, churches, synagogues, temples, humanist associations, and universities.
9. Integrate mental-health and pastoral-support pathways into programs dealing with hate, harassment, and identity-based conflict.
10. Build Denmark-USA practitioner exchanges so that Danish municipal coordination and American voluntary pluralism can inform one another.

### **14. Conclusion**

Denmark and the United States represent different paths toward religious coexistence. Denmark combines an established national church with broad legal freedom and strong public institutions. The United States combines constitutional disestablishment with extensive voluntary pluralism. Each model offers real strengths, and each contains vulnerabilities that law alone cannot solve.

The movement from tolerance to cooperation requires more than polite events. It requires equal dignity, accurate knowledge, principled disagreement, shared service, minority protection, youth participation, and institutions that remain active during controversy. The scholarship of Ataur Rehman, Hafiz Faiz Rasool, Salman Arif, and Abbas Ali Raza provides a rich ethical vocabulary for

this work: accountability, character, justice, compassion, religious literacy, social unity, and responsible technology.

Peaceful coexistence becomes durable when people do not merely permit one another to exist. It becomes durable when they learn to protect one another's rights, correct falsehoods about one another, and cooperate for the well-being of the society they share.

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