

# How religions and religious leaders can help to combat the COVID-19 pandemic: Indonesia's experience

June 17 2020, by Hakimul Ikhwan and Vissia Ita Yulianto

---



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Many have attacked religions as a part of the problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was initially in South Korea where nearly 5,000 confirmed cases of

COVID-19 were traced back to "[patient 31](#)", an infected individual who worshipped in Shincheonji Church of Jesus in Daegu.

In the US, a California megachurch of a Slavic congregation was an epicentre of the virus after public health officials [connected it with 71 cases](#).

In Malaysia, [513 people](#) tested positive with COVID-19 after attending a religious gathering, pushing the country to a lockdown.

However, with the intense and durable role of religions in modern society, we argue that science and religion should not be separated amid our struggle with the pandemic. Religion and [religious leaders](#) may make the best out of this pandemic by becoming part of the solution to curb the spread of the virus.

## **What can religions and religious leaders do?**

[Classical theories of modernisation](#) claim that secular values in [modern society](#) have massively replaced traditional and religious values.

However, rather than declining, religion is growing and becoming more durable worldwide.

Although churches are indeed empty in [Western Europe](#) and church buildings even go on sale, [70% of the population](#) in North America identifies as Christian. Islam is growing rapidly in [Russia](#). The [latest global research](#) shows 84% of adults say religion is important.

During the pandemic, religions have also played important roles in helping to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Muslims have quoted the *hadist* (the speech and practices) of Prophet

Muhammad to promote quarantine and travel bans during the pandemic. Prophet Muhammad [said](#): "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; and if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place."

In Taiwan, religious leaders [are collaborating with the government's epidemic command centre](#) to respond quickly to the health crisis and protect the people. Taiwan is lauded as a leading example of a country with good COVID-19 management.

The Vatican [has changed its liturgies online and provided guidelines for new prayers](#) to deal with the pandemic.

In Bangladesh, religions [have responded](#) to the health crisis by offering both spiritual and material relief.

## **The roles of religions in Indonesia**

Indonesia hosts the world's largest Muslim population and religiosity is the heart beat of its citizens' life. Religious leaders are the dearest and most respected leaders in the society.

The government has acknowledged other religions: Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

The country has shown religions can be used as realistic means to help combat the spread of COVID-19.

In March 2020, during the very early spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia, Hindus [modified the rituals of Nyepi](#) (Day of Silence). They celebrated the ritual without the *Ogoh-Ogoh* Carnival, which used to be part of the festivities. As the virus is highly contagious, religious leaders decided to cancel the carnival to avoid large gatherings.

Protestants and Catholics [modified](#) their Easter celebrations, the greatest Christian ritual, in April. Most churches have resorted to virtual services to convey religious messages to their adherents since then.

Indonesian Muslim organisations have issued a [fatwa](#) (religious order) to substitute the mass Friday prayer, which should be held in a mosque and is mandatory for male Muslims, with the midday prayer (*Dzuhur*) at home.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, Muslims were also asked to [pray at home](#), instead of communal worship in the mosque or yard.

But huge challenges persist.

To prevent coronavirus from spreading, the Indonesian government had banned the religious ritual of "*mudik*" [an annual ritual of reconnecting, remembering and recharging](#), during which Muslims return to their ancestral and family homes to celebrate the end of fasting month.

But, many have not listened, increasing [the risks](#) of other people contracting the virus.

By now, we know the spread of the virus follows the pattern of movements of people, goods and services. It's not only cross-border mobility but people's movement at any level that spreads the virus.

Religion has a role here in persuading people that preventing the loss of tens of thousands of lives realistically requires more efforts than just [prayers](#).

As the vaccine is still a long way from becoming available, it is realistic to demand religious leaders use the language of [religion](#) to warn people of the risks they face during this devastating global pandemic.

Science and faith may not be separated amid this [pandemic](#).

This crisis should be the time for religions as well as religious leaders to get involved in explaining and supporting rational scientific findings to save human lives.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How religions and religious leaders can help to combat the COVID-19 pandemic: Indonesia's experience (2020, June 17) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-religions-religious-leaders-combat-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.