ISLAM 101

Islam is one of the Abrahamic religions. In Arabic, its initial language, the word islam means "submission." Adherents of Islam are Muslims, and they believe the core of their faith is submission to the will of God, whom they name as Allah.

Islam teaches the Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible are also authentic revelations from God, but their main text is the Qur'an. They believe Muhammad was the last and final prophet of Allah, and the Qur'an contains his teachings.

Muhammad was born in Mecca (inside present day Saudi Arabia) in approximately 570 C.E. As a young man he longed for solitude. In a cave outside Mecca he found it and was able to connect in a powerful way with Allah. He received a revelation, the foundation of which was that Allah demands morality and monotheistic devotion from the humans he created. By the time Muhammad died in 632 C.E. most of people of that area of the world were adherents.

As of 2015 there were over 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide and Islam had become the fastest growing religion in the world. In the United States there were over 2,100 Islamic centers and organizations, with a membership of over 7 million.
In some cultures the couple will be presented with eggs, which represent fertility and righteousness.
WHAT CHRISTIAN CLERGY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MUSLIM WEDDINGS

Adherents of Islam believe marriage is the norm for adults, unless for some reason they are not able to marry.

Since Muslims view the family as the basic unity of a healthy society, they believe marriage is essential and sacred. Muslims also see it as a sacred covenant that legalizes sexual intercourse and the procreation of children. A traditional Muslim wedding is an event of a lifetime. It may last for days, include many people, and be a lavish event.

The marriage ceremony is a stand-alone ritual that lasts anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour. It is common for the wedding to be announced formally and in writing in the mosque. For non-Muslims the invitation frequently is given orally. An RSVP and gift are appropriate. The gift may be monetary.

The ceremony will likely take place at a mosque or Islamic center. There will probably not be assigned seating. There is no particular requirement for men’s attire. However, women should wear a dress or skirt that extends below the knees and should cover their heads with a scarf. Jewelry should be modest.

The only required elements of the ceremony are: the proposal of marriage, the consent of the other party (including the meher or written statement specifying the monetary amount the groom will give the bride), the transfer of the dower, and the acknowledgment of the witnesses. Usually, an imam, or a prayer leader, will deliver a sermon about marriage. This will be given in the language of the families. There will be a witness for the bride and a witness for the groom. And, you will notice the bride and groom say yes to each other three times during the ceremony.

Afterward, there is generally a waleemah, or a reception, and it can be held anywhere. There will be no alcoholic beverages, but there will probably be meat, rice, fruit and sweets. You need not wait for a blessing before eating. There will be dancing only if the reception is not held in the mosque. It is appropriate for guests to greet the new couple by saying: "Mabrook alaik" to the groom, or "Mabrook alaik!" to the bride.

In some cultures congratulating the bride with a kiss is not allowed.
We have described here very general information about Islam in North America. It is always a good idea to talk with the couple getting married directly about how observant they are and the culture of the mosque/Islamic center in which they participate. It is also a good idea to speak with the imam who may also be participating in the service. Finally, it is important to remember some Muslims have traveled to North America from all over the world. They have brought with them their own cultural context, which may vary from country-of-origin to country-of-origin. If you have questions, make sure you ask.
Resources for Deeper Study

Islamic Society of North America:
317-839-8157
www.isna.net

The Perfect Stranger’s Guide to Wedding Ceremonies:

www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/06/04
muslims-wedding_n_5446388.html

The Council of Bishops Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships, publisher of this brochure, wishes to acknowledge the contents are intended as a guide and have been developed from a general North American context. United Methodists of other cultural contexts are encouraged to volunteer to create a similar resource applicable specifically for them.