

In the last decade, Qatar has lessened its restrictions on religious freedoms and has increased its tolerance of other Abrahamic faiths. Shia and Sunni Muslims practice their faith freely and Christian denominations are able to worship within governmental guidelines. Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Baha'i faiths are not legally recognized. In 2005 the Qatari government recognized six Christian Churches, granting them legal status to build houses of worship. The recognized denominations are the Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic, and Indian Christian Churches. The land for these six churches, on the southeastern outskirts of Doha, was donated by the government in that same year. Since that time, six churches have either been built or are in various stages of construction. Collectively, they are officially designated as the "Religious Complex" and informally they are referred to as "Church City." Officially, they are the only places of non-Muslim worship in the country. The Roman Catholic Church, completed in 2008, was the first Christian church allowed in Qatar in more than 1,400 years!

The six church buildings in "Church City" serve large, vibrant, multilingual congregations of the expatriate population within Qatar. Within any given week, worship services are held in more than 20 different languages. The Anglican Center and Roman Catholic Church, the two churches that offer services that would most likely appeal to military members and families, offer many opportunities for worship in English. Furthermore, the Anglican Center is the only Protestant church building; therefore, the Anglican Center oversees more than 50 different congregations that meet in their building. As soon as their building is completed in the spring of 2013, they anticipate that they will accommodate more than 100 different Protestant communities. Any of the communities of faith at "Church City" would welcome your participation and involvement. Without a doubt, any of the churches would offer a unique multicultural, multinational experience you would long remember.

What about meeting in house churches? Several faith groups do meet in private homes. According to the Rev. Bill Schwartz, one of the primary leaders of "Church City's" ministerial council,

"The government policy is that Christians should 'say their prayers' in the designated area known as "the Religious Complex" at Messaimeer. Christians meeting for worship/prayer in any location other than the Religious Complex are at risk of a formal complaint, which affects the continuation of residency in the country. Experience shows that the government is not looking to shut down Christian groups worshipping in villas, but experience also shows that any complaint from neighbors will bring a desist order. Christians renting halls in hotels or other commercial places have been told to desist, and the managers of these commercial places have been threatened with withdrawal of license if the activities continue.

The policy is not consistently applied, but there is a risk."

Similarly, there are restrictions placed on signs, symbols, and advertising. The good news is that Qatar has made great strides in tolerating non-Muslim religious activity. One must

remember, however, that the government has established parameters for the legal practice of non-Muslim faiths in Qatar. As long as one practices faith within these parameters, there is a great deal of religious tolerance in Qatar.

The following websites are for some of the main faith communities at the “Religious Complex”:

Roman Catholic

[www.rosarychurchqatar.com](http://www.rosarychurchqatar.com)

Anglican

<http://www.epiphany-qatar.org/>

Greek Orthodox

[http://orthodox-world.org/en/i/15826/St.Isaac and St. George Greek Orthodox Church of Qatar Doha](http://orthodox-world.org/en/i/15826/St.Isaac_and_St._George_Greek_Orthodox_Church_of_Qatar_Doha)

Syrian Orthodox

[http://mocdoha.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=93](http://mocdoha.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=93)

Coptic

<http://www.copticchurchdoha.com/>

Indian Christian Churches

[http://mocdoha.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=120](http://mocdoha.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=120)