

PRAYER, FEAST END FASTING FOR HOLY MONTH

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More than 400 came, kneeled, prayed and ended the holy month of Ramadan.

On Wednesday, the Islamic Center in South Charleston hosted the Eid ul-Fitr, the feast to end the fast that Muslims all around the world and here in the Kanawha Valley observed.

The fast was to mark the month when the Quran was to have been revealed to the prophet Muhammed. Each day during Ramadan, Islam dictates that Muslims fast, from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.

Wednesday's feast -- which included beef curry, chicken curry, saffron rice, salad and bread -- was to designate that Ramadan had ended. Pizza was available for the kids.

Women in long, colorful holiday scarves that covered their heads were in the back of the prayer hall, while the men, some of whom also had their heads covered, were in the front. Some men and women held prayer beads. There was one bead for each of the 99 names of Allah.

Zubair Solkar, an Imam (Muslim prayer leader) visiting from England, gave the sermon after prayer.

In his lecture, which he delivered in both Arabic and English, he said the man or woman that Allah loves best is the one who fears him the most. "Pride is in the heart," he said. "Islam breaks the barrier."

Much of Solkar's sermon was based on this passage from the Quran: "Oh, mankind, we made you, man and woman, tribes and nations, that you may come to know one another."

Local Imam Hussein Elkhansa said Ramadan is about spiritually training oneself "to the best and the better ways of life." The hunger that Ramadan dictates is to bring people more in communion with the poor and is to combat the ego as well.

"Normally, when you are a little bit starving it brings you down. It keeps you down to your level," Elkhansa said.

Jahana, an 8-year-old, fasted for the first time this Ramadan. She said her fasting has helped her come to know and "respect the poor" by experiencing some of the hunger they feel. She said her mother would let her fast only on the weekends.

Her teacher at Holz Elementary School told her not to worry that she didn't celebrate Christmas. The children in her class learned about all the holidays of this season: Ramadan, Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.

The month of Ramadan is the holiest in the Islamic calendar, which is based on the moon. The month begins with the sighting of the new moon and ends at the sighting of the next new moon. Ramadan is observed during the ninth lunar month of the year.

Ramadan is celebrated by more than 1 billion Muslims the worldwide. More than 5 million of them are in the United States, according to statistics from Britannica.