

MUSLIMS PRAY FOR VICTIMS

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"Requite evil with good, and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend." -- The Koran

When he started his prayers Tuesday night, Hussein Elkhansa prayed for families who lost loved ones in Tuesday's terrorist attacks.

Elkhansa, who writes a newsletter for the local Islamic community, said Wednesday, "Acts like this are against God. There is nothing holy about it. No holy book would encourage this."

Elkhansa, who is also waiting for news about his own family members, said one of his nieces was enjoying her visit to West Virginia before the attacks. "She was talking about how peaceful West Virginia is. Now she was trembling as she watched on television, and she is afraid to fly home," he said.

"This is our country now. Our children go to schools here. I e-mailed the president, telling him we support him. There is a sadness with us now. Anyone who did this is guilty of a stupid, criminal act."

Dr. Riaz Riaz, who has a medical practice in Mercer County, said members of his mosque will be working on an official statement of condemnation to release later. "After our Friday prayers, we will be making plans for giving blood and collecting donations," he said.

Riaz said he has heard a few reports of children being taunted at school. "They were saying, 'Did you do it? Did you do it?' We have to teach our children not to respond to this."

Mahmoud Shahbandy is the former president of the Islamic Association. "Every person I have talked to strongly condemns this kind of terrorism, especially against civilians. It is horrific.

"We hope there is swift apprehension and punishment for whoever is responsible. We hope to God they find them as soon as possible. But at the same time, we hope people do not rush to judgment," he said.

Shahbandy said in the wake of the Oklahoma bombing, he knows of 200 cases of violence against Islamic people across the nation. "But none of those made it into the media," he said.

"Tuesday's events were beyond imagining. All those people who went to work and hoped to come home simply perished. There are not even bodies there for their families to collect. We are sending out our sincere condolences to all of the families," he said.

Ruby Abdulla is a treasurer of the Kanawha Valley Interfaith Council. "Tuesday I was in such a state of shock. People are just now starting to realize the devastation. But I have been attending church services, looking for some peace somewhere."

She said the root word for peace in Arabic is "Islam." "If anyone is doing this in the name of Islam, they are not true Muslims.

"We must try to come together as a nation, be strong as a nation and pray together. Sometimes there are no words to describe the grief," she said.