

LOCAL MUSLIMS RECEIVE SUPPORT MEMBERS SAY THEY ARE PEACEFUL

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Members of the local Islamic community say in the wake of the U.S. tragedy they have been enveloped with love, support, prayers and offers of protection from any potential problems.

Riverside High School teacher Parween Qazi, who was born in Pakistan and whose religion is Islam, said she has received hugs from colleagues as well as encouraging words from her students.

"I love my students here," she said. "They know that. We have another Pakistani teacher here. Riverside is very culturally diverse. I don't feel threatened here."

She has expressed her opinion to students and staff about recent acts of terrorism in the nation.

"They know how I express myself," she said. "I'm really upset about what happened. We don't want violence or terrorism anywhere. We are living in this country. We don't want anything to happen to us or anyone else."

Nobody had been pinpointed in the recent terrorist incidents. However, preliminary evidence points to terrorist Osama bin Laden, a Saudi billionaire now sheltered by Afghanistan's Taliban regime. His exact whereabouts is unknown as he is said to move several times each week accompanied by his security entourage. Bin Laden is a Wahibi Muslim.

The Islam or Muslim religion was founded by prophet Muhammed. Followers honor but do not worship him. It is believed the word of God (called Allah) was revealed to him by angel Gabriel 1,400 years ago. The message was then relayed to scribes and recorded in the book of Quran (Koran).

This holy book includes laws for serving God and rules for living and conducting business. Elements of Islam include prayer, helping the needy, and striving for high moral standards.

"Islam means peace," said Ruby Abdulla, who was born in India and whose religion is Islam. She serves on the Kanawha Valley Interfaith Council.

She said the media needs to show restraint in showing pictures of those celebrating in the wake of the recent attacks. People who would celebrate such horrible acts are ignorant and uneducated, she said.

Dr. Raheel Khan, local pediatrician and vice president of the Islamic Association, has received calls of support from pastors and priests and friends of various denominations.

"I'm overrun with concern from a lot of people who are non-Muslim," he said. "They have offered to guard our property and our mosque."

There have been reports of attacks on Muslim temples in other parts of the country.

"Our hearts go out to people who have suffered," Khan said. "It touches everyone. Nobody can justify it."

While the overall atmosphere has been supportive, a few members of the local Islamic community have expressed concern that one or two ignorant people could cause problems by painting everyone with the same discriminatory brush.

Ashraf Moghal, who has children in Kanawha County schools, said he has heard no negative comments. He added that the local Islamic community is known for acts of kindness in reaching out to others as well as acceptance and respect for all faiths. Most people in the area are aware of the love and open-mindedness of the Islamic community, he said.

For those who wish to learn more about the Islamic faith, a session has been scheduled at the University of Charleston by Mary Lee Daugherty, professor of religion and director of special projects, and Robert Newman, chairman of the department of religion and philosophy emeritus.

The session is set for 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. today in room 223 of Riggleman Hall.

The session is for students as well as the public.

"We will have persons from the Islamic center and international students," Daugherty said.

"The two-hour session with film and dialogue is a proactive effort for reconciliation, healing and understanding."

Also, an interfaith prayer service is set for 4 p.m. Sunday in Riggleman Hall with various faith groups, Appalachian Children's Chorus and UC Chorus.

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