



Photo by Andre Ranieri

Khaled Azzouni, director of the Muslim Student Association, observes the sacred month of Ramadan in the Islamic Center of Eugene.

Muslim students fast during sacred month

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Contributor

Muslim students at the University are currently observing the sacred month of Ramadan by fasting each day from sunrise to sunset and donating money to the poor.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is considered a cornerstone of the Islamic religion.

"In the Islamic belief, it was during this month that the prophet Mohammed received the Koran (the sacred text of Islam) from God through the angel Gabriel," said junior Khaled Azzouni, a native of Saudi Arabia who is now the director of the Muslim Student Association at the University.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims "do not eat one grain of food or drink even one drop of water from sunrise to sunset for 30 days," Azzouni said.

"Fasting is an exercise in self-control. If a person can exercise self-control in this area, then it helps in other aspects of life," said graduate student Ali Siddiq, an MSA member.

Those who are ill and women who are pregnant or nursing are not required to fast, but are expected to observe the 30 days at a different time during the year.

The purpose of the fast is to "make every Muslim feel the same, that there is no difference between us. Whether rich or poor, each Muslim must participate the same," Azzouni said.

Because the Muslim community around the world is made up of so many different nationalities, there is a need to have a time that stresses unity. "Muslims make up one-fourth of the globe. There are many different nationalities involved... It is not a nationalistic (religion). It is a global one," Azzouni said.

The fast is also meant to remind Muslims that there are people throughout the world who cannot afford food. Muslims are encouraged to donate money to the poor throughout the year, but donations are emphasized during Ramadan.

"It is a time to think of the poor and the needy, to think of those who cannot eat," Azzouni said.

The Muslim students at the University donate money to local organizations "or to local poor families, unless that Muslim is poor. Then they are the ones who receive aid," Azzouni said.

When the 30-day fast is completed, the three-day festival of Eid begins. It is one of two major Islamic festivals during the year.

Muslims who live in the Eugene area will celebrate Eid beginning April 27 at the Islamic Center of Eugene. Many students who are active in the MSA also participate in activities at the Islamic Center.

Although there are approximately 6 million Muslims in the United States, Azzouni believes it is one of the most misunderstood religions in the country. "I haven't faced any prejudice here, but sometimes people ask harsh questions. It is due to an ignorance of the Islamic culture," Azzouni said.

Along with questions about the Islamic religion, Muslim students are sometimes asked about political issues in the Muslim community, especially about the Palestinian struggle in the West Bank.

"Ninety-three percent of Palestinians are Muslim. In the Islamic belief, the issue of Palestine is more an Islamic issue than a political one. It concerns all Muslims, because (one of the) holy shrines is in that area," Azzouni said.

"We feel that Palestinian human rights were not, for the most part, presented truly and honestly (by the media), so it is our duty to highlight the human rights of Palestinians from an Islamic perspective," Azzouni said.

Azzouni praised the University for being receptive to the Muslim community. MSA has a yearly exhibit of Islamic culture, art and human rights issues. The group also sponsors guest lectures and films at the University.

"The turnout is always great. It helps raise awareness at such an intellectual school," Azzouni said.

Although there are more than 100 Muslim students at the University and the Eugene area is receptive to the Muslim community, Siddiq said it is still quite different from celebrating Ramadan in his home country of Saudi Arabia.

"I prefer Ramadan at home," he said. "There, everyone is in the same situation, everyone is fasting. It's a different environment here, but a person gets used to it."

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