

## GROWING FAITH

*Publication: CHARLESTON DAILY MAIL*

*Published: 01/13/2006*

*Byline: CHARLOTTE FERRELL SMITH, Daily Mail Staff*

When hundreds of Muslims from throughout the state gathered at the Islamic Center of West Virginia earlier this week for Eid ul-Adha, or "festival of the sacrifice," the parking lot overflowed and the center was packed.

The situation represented how the Muslim community has grown in the Kanawha Valley. Members are trying to respond to the growing pangs.

Already, the center leases a tract of land for \$1 a year from Marshall University's Graduate College in South Charleston that adds about 60 parking spaces, doubling the current capacity. Other plans call for building a gymnasium and more classrooms as funds become available.

"When we have a big event, we ask for help from the South Charleston Police Department to facilitate traffic," said Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi, who is the center's spiritual leader.

"Marshall University was nice and cooperative," he said of the parking agreement. "The whole neighborhood has been supportive to the center and members. In the last five years, the (Muslim) community has grown rapidly. We have probably added 10 families in the last year."

Kemp Winfree, vice president of regional operations for Marshall University and executive vice president of the MU Graduate College Foundation, said the foundation leased about two acres of land to the center in March 2002 for \$1 a year and the center has since paid for improvements. The additional parking area is now graveled and eventually will be paved.

"They have done a good job," Winfree said. "A creek was beside it. They had to put engineering work into it.

"We want to be good neighbors to people with property close to us. We benefit, too, with improvements to our property that was unimproved."

Daoudi said projects are completed only when the money is available.

"We don't borrow money," he said. "We collect from members and do it step by step."

The additional parking area will be paved and surveillance cameras added, he said. After that plans call for expanding the center by adding a gymnasium and more classrooms. He estimates everything will be completed within four years.

West Virginia's Islamic community has grown rapidly over the last five years, he said. Islamic centers are now located in Charleston, Princeton, Beckley, and Morgantown.

"A new Islamic center is under construction close to Marshall University (in Huntington)," he said. "Professionals are moving here. Physicians and engineers are seeking opportunities in West Virginia and adding to the community."

He said there are now about 2,000 Muslims in West Virginia and an estimated 1.4 billion in the world.

When Muslims celebrated the holiday of Eid ul-Adha on Tuesday, the largest gathering in the state was at the Islamic Center in South Charleston. The event included prayer, sermon and catered luncheon.

The celebration follows the season of pilgrimage for Muslims throughout the world.

The pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia this year included an estimated 2.5 million Muslims from 180 different countries, Daoudi said.

Performed once in a lifetime, the pilgrimage is made in response to God's command to the prophet Abraham. The journey is geared to boost faith and uplift spirits as those who make the pilgrimage are called to perform it properly by avoiding all sins, arguments, gossip and other violations of the sacred ritual.

Eid ul-Adha, the festival of the sacrifice, celebrates the end of the pilgrimage and commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command.

The holiday is celebrated with prayers, small gifts for children, the distribution of meat to the needy and social gatherings.

The pilgrimage, called Hajj in Arabic, includes Muslims from around the world as they gather to worship Allah, the name of God in Arabic.

"Allah is the same God who spoke to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad," Daoudi said.

In Islam, followers honor the prophet Muhammad, but do not worship him. It is believed the word of God was revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel over 1,400 years ago.

Muhammad relayed the message to scribes who recorded the book of Quran. Also known as Koran, this book includes laws for serving God as well as rules for living and conducting business.

The month of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic lunar calendar, is when the Quran was to have been revealed to Muhammad.

"In 2006 we will celebrate the festival of the sacrifice twice because the lunar year is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian year," Daoudi said.