Fasting for Ramadan: Students, Faculty Choose Fasting as a Way to Respond to Sept. 11 Attacks

By Christopher Fretz
Contributing Writer

“How can we respond?” One group of students and faculty have decided that one way to react to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent retaliation by the United States is to join Muslims worldwide in fasting for Ramadan.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and is the month when the Koran is believed to have been revealed to Muhammad. One of the five pillars of the Muslim faith is fasting between dawn and dusk during this entire month. As the idea to fast for Ramadan circulated campus, several faculty and students decided to participate.

Although some Muslims fast very strictly and drink little or no liquids, most people involved here at EMU drink liquids throughout the day, then eat supper after dusk.

There are various reasons and motives people have for fasting. For junior Kristine Sensenig, showing solidarity between Muslims and Christians was a strong motivator. After spending three years in the North African country of Sudan during her preteen years, Sensenig learned about Ramadan from Muslim friends who were starting to talk about the Muslim experience in their own lives. “I share this world with Muslims,” Sensenig said. “I want to understand the disparity, Sensenig decided to fast. "It's good to feel hungry and we have a responsibility to do something about it," she explained. She decided to use fasting as both a time to reflect and a time to take action. During her fast she spends time praying and writing to politicians about the bombings. She has talked to several friends and relatives that have decided that one way to respond to show solidarity, "Sensenig said. In addition, Yoder mentioned that it is a reminder of those that daily experience hunger, as well as a good spiritual discipline. Although Yoder has spent time in several Muslim countries including Iraq and Afghanistan, he has also spent his time fasting to gain a better understanding of Islam. "Rather than read about the Koran, I have been reading the Koran itself," he said.

Professor Nancy Heisey is fasting during Ramadan and feels that it is a good time to show accountability to others. "It's a reminder that people are hungry and we have a responsibility to do something about it," she explained. She decided to use fasting as both a time to reflect and a time to take action. During her fast she spends time praying and writing to politicians about the bombings. Heisey finds it important to participate with Muslims because of the current anti-Muslim sentiment. "I share this world with Muslims. We need to find a way to talk to each other and respect each other," Heisey went on to say that she wants her fasting to be not only a statement of protest, but a prayer for peace.

Junior Heather Menzies decided to fast after hearing firsthand about the Muslim experience of Ramadan. Menzies went to India and Pakistan who explained the history of Ramadan, the fasting involved and why they practice it.

"Fasting has always been so abstract to me, so I figured this would be a good opportunity to see what it's like," she said. Menzies said she has had a very busy month and is using her time of fasting to reflect on God. She also is using it as a reminder of the disparity in the world. She explained, "It's good to feel hungry about their vocational journey.

The third area would focus on calling people to the ministry. They would like to work with the Mennonite Ministry Inquiry Program and the Pastoral Assistants to explore ideas of expansion in those areas. EMU also wants to allow for more practical experience in Youth Ministry.

However unaffected students may feel, this $2 million grant will most likely have an impact on each member of the student body. As Brubaker said, "We want to help students view their life work and vocation as coming out of a commitment to God."

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The Inside Scoop

Thursday December 6
• University Chorus concert at Park View Mennonite Church 7:30pm
• Kirsten Beachy Senior Theatre Show in the Discipleship Center 8:00pm

Friday December 7
• “The Muppets Christmas Carol” in SC 106. 12:30am
• Jazz Ensemble & Swing Sisters perform in CC. 9:00pm
• “White Christmas” in SC 106. 10:30pm

Saturday December 8
• First Year Student Improv Troupe Show in the Guild. 6:00 pm and 10:00pm
• “The Muppets Christmas Carol” in SC 106. 7:00pm
• “White Christmas” in SC 106. 9:00pm

Sunday December 9
• Senior Preparatory Music in Recital Hall, Lehman. 7:00pm
• German Club Weihnachten party in Park Cabin. 8:00pm
• First Year Student Improv Troupe Show in the Guild. 8:00pm

Monday December 10
• Ireland cross-cultural group speaks in Chapel. 10:00am
• Exam MWF2. 1:30pm
• Exam MWF1. 4:00pm
• Exam M10. 7:00pm
• First Year Student Improv Troupe Show in the Guild. 8:00pm

Tuesday December 11
• Exam MW3. 8:00am
• Exam TR1. 10:40am
• Christmas Buffet in Dining Hall. 11:00am-1:00pm
• Exam TR5. 1:30pm
• Exam TR6. 4:00pm
• Exam TT. 7:00pm

Wednesday December 12
• Exam MW4. 8:00am
• France/Ivoy Coast cross-cultural group speaks in Chapel. 10:00am
• Exam MWF5. 10:40am
• Exam MWF7. 1:30pm
• Exam MWF8. 4:00pm
• Exam W10. 7:00pm

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The second point will focus on learning about one's career within the context of a community. EMU hopes to have, as Brubaker says, “campus dialogue” about important issues such as faith, vocation and theology.

I know that students don’t like the word dialogue, but I just can’t think of a better word to use,” she said. They want to have a place, a permanent physical gathering place if possible in which students can come and talk about campus issues on an on-going basis.

“We’ve thought about a coffeehouse,” said Brubaker, “but we’re not quite sure yet.” EMU would also like to use chapel as a place to include one's career by having alumni come to chapel and share

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There are various reasons and motives people have for fasting. For junior Kristine Sensenig, showing solidarity between Muslims and Christians was a strong motivator. After spending three years in the North African country of Sudan during her preteen years, Sensenig learned about Ramadan from Muslim friends who were starting to take part in that facet of the Muslim faith. “It was kind of a rite of passage for my friends,” she recalled.

In addition to showing solidarity, Sensenig decided to fast and alter her normal routines to remember what is going on internationally. “It’s a good way to think about what’s happening, to have a reminder to pay attention to what’s going on in the rest of the world,” Sensenig said. “It seems more relevant, and I feel less isolated from the situation.” Support for Muslims was one of the reasons to fast for Professor Richard Yoder as well. "After all the criticism there has been of Muslims lately, I wanted to respond to show solidarity," he said. In addition, Yoder mentioned that it is a reminder of those that daily experience hunger, as well as a good spiritual discipline. Although Yoder has spent time in several Muslim countries including Iraq and Afghanistan, he has also spent his time fasting to gain a better understanding of Islam. "Rather than read about the Koran, I have been reading the Koran itself," he said.

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"Fasting has always been so abstract to me, so I figured this would be a good opportunity to see what it’s like," she said. Menzies said she has had a very busy month and is using her time of fasting to reflect on God. She also is using it as a reminder of the disparity in the world. She explained, "It’s good to feel hungry about their vocational journey.

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