

Ramadan begins today

By Memory Mcleod

Leader-Post

Saturday, September 23, 2006

Regina's Muslim community is set to take part in a month-long fasting period called Ramadan.

The fast, which is mandatory for all healthy adult Muslims, is to start today and was brought in with a prayer service on Friday night.

During the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar called the fasting month, a small meal prior to each morning's dawn called *sahur* is taken.

For the rest of the daylight hours the Muslim community abstains from food, drink and physical pleasures.

The fast is broken each day after sunset in a ceremony called *iftar* when, following Islamic tradition, dates are eaten, which are then followed by the foods normally eaten.

Ramadan is a time of giving honour to God and developing self-discipline and spirituality, and of looking toward the needs of the poor, said Kashif Ahmed, the communications director of Saskatchewan Muslims for Peace and Justice.

As part of the Ramadan celebrations this year, the Islamic community of Regina will provide a free hot meal at the Souls Harbour Mission, and collect donations of non-perishable items for the Regina and District Food Bank.

Ahmed said the interesting part of this year's Ramadan is that it will coincide with Yom Kippur, a Jewish holiday, and the feast of the Saint of Assisi celebrated by the Catholic church. The holidays coinciding together won't happen again for 30 years. Arrangements are being made for the three faiths to come together to share a sundown meal as part of a time to "acknowledge common Abrahamic roots," said Ahmed.

"It's significant in a time when there is so much conflict in the world. We want to promote understanding and build bridges between the three faiths," he added.

During daily evening prayer services, up to two chapters of the Koran are recited in Arabic until the entire book has been read out loud over the course of the month.

Services are to be held at the Islamic Centre and Mosque of the Islamic Association of Saskatchewan.

The end of the month of Ramadan will be marked by Eid ul-Fitr, or the Festival of Fast-Breaking.

Ahmed described it as a Christmas-like celebration, when Muslims meet for large congregational prayers and spend the day enjoying food, drink and the giving of gifts to the children.

Approximately 1,500 Muslims in Regina will be taking part. Ahmed estimates there are approximately 3,800 followers of Islam in the province.

© The Leader-Post (Regina) 2006