

Non-Muslims send help after mosque is damaged

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Muslim worshipers are reeling from an arson fire at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, but are grateful for an outpouring of support from the local and national interfaith community.

"All the support we get is very welcome because if you are going through a tragedy and you have a friend who is holding your hand, it means a lot," said S. Zaheer Hasan, a spokesman for the United Muslim Association of Toledo.

Perrysburg Township police ruled that the September 30 fire was arson. Surveillance footage from the mosque led to the arrest of Randolph Linn, 52, of St. Joe, Indiana, who was charged with hate crimes.

Mahjabeen Islam, president of the Islamic Center, said the suspect poured gasoline in the center of the main floor where men worship at the mosque. Women pray on the same main floor but in an area separated by a low divider.

"It was set in the men's prayer area, and the sprinklers turned out the fire. There is a lot of water damage from the sprinklers," Islam said. "The Islamic Center is uninhabitable for easily three months."

Steve Anthony, executive director of Toledo Area Ministries, said he and his organization which represents 125 Christian churches and nonprofit agencies are outraged by the arson attack and will do what they can to help local Muslims.

"Any attack on a house of worship, no matter what faith, is deplorable and should be condemned," Anthony said. "And there's no room for that in a pluralistic society. We should respect each other's houses of worship."

In addition, the Sojourners organization is calling on Christians to stand up against the hatred. Continuing a billboard and ad campaign that reaches from Wisconsin to New York City, Sojourners is erecting a billboard near the destroyed Perrysburg mosque that reads "Love Your Muslim Neighbors." —RNS