

ANGER ADDS TO TENSION

# Muslims receive threat

Many in Charlotte's Islamic centers say they condemn violence

By TIM FUNK  
Staff Writer

The finger of blame was pointed early.

Ninety minutes after two jetliners crashed into the World Trade Center in New York, the phone rang at the Islamic Center of Charlotte.

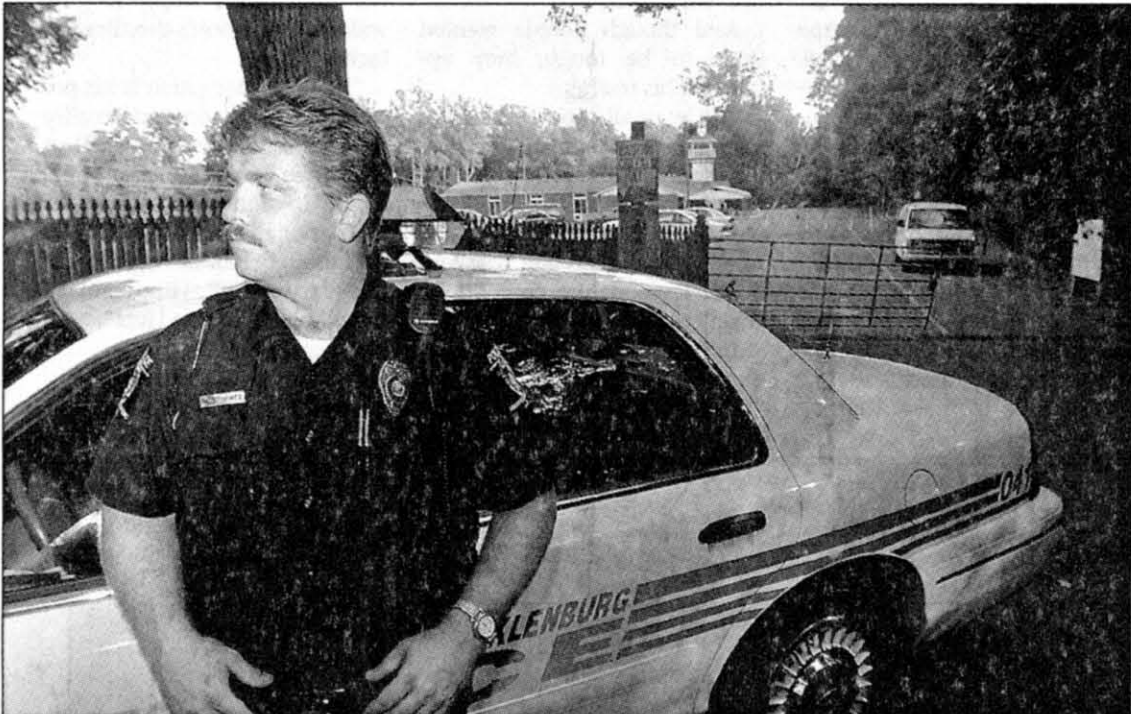
"We're going to get you," the caller said. "We're going to get you."

Now the FBI and Charlotte-Mecklenburg police are investigating, and police are on 24-hour guard outside the center, where many of the city's Arabs worship.

The 10:30 a.m. call was taken by the principal of Charlotte Islamic School, also housed in the center at 1700 Progress Lane. She called police, then closed the school and sent the 30 students home.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police Officer M.A. Nemitz, who was guarding the entrance to the center Tuesday afternoon, said a tape recording of the 10:30 a.m. call was turned over to the FBI. He said police will keep a patrol car at the gated entrance "24/7 until further notice."

Nemitz said the caller could be charged with a crime if his message is determined to be "a believable threat....Obviously, the principal thought it was believable."



Charlotte-Mecklenburg police Officer Mark Nemitz stands on patrol at the Islamic Center of Charlotte on Tuesday afternoon after the center received threats throughout the day. The center, the worship home for many of the city's Muslims, closed its school about midday.

Isaac Abushawriyeh, who fielded the center's phone calls after the school closed, said he also gave police information about three or four other callers who phoned to insult Islam and wish harm on all Muslims.

"One caller from Rock Hill said, 'I want to be on record: I hope the United States destroys the whole Islamic nation,'" said Abushawriyeh, a Palestinian who works as a mechanic. "Then he insulted the Prophet Mohammed and said he hoped everybody (who is Mus-

lim) goes to hell."

Charlotte is now home to an estimated 7,000 Muslims, including about 2,000 Palestinians. Arabs own many of the city's convenience stores. Students from the Middle East make up a significant portion of the international student body at Central Piedmont Community College. Many live in houses and apartments near the Islamic center. And on Tuesday, like the rest of America, they followed news of the terrorist attacks — on CNN and on Arabic

channels via satellite dishes.

Late in the afternoon, Abushawriyeh and about 16 other Muslims attended a worship service at the center, during which some prayed for the victims of Tuesday's terrorist attacks.

"If someone wants to fight, they should do it in battle, not go after innocent people," Abushawriyeh said. "What I saw on the TV was sad."

Like other Arabs and Arab Americans interviewed Tuesday, he said he hopes Americans don't

blame Islam even if it turns out that radical Muslims are responsible for the terrorist attacks.

"There are a lot of Christians who do bad things, but that doesn't mean Christianity is bad," he said. "Islam doesn't like this — in fact, it is forbidden."

A few blocks away, at Jerusalem Supermarket on Central Avenue, manager Walid Kader joined in the chorus of condemnation. But he added that it was premature to say that Muslims did it.

"That's what they said right after the Oklahoma City bombing," said Kader, a Jordanian. "You can't accuse anybody until you find out the truth."

Some customers at Cedar Land, another Middle Eastern grocery on Central, worried aloud that local Muslims could become targets of retaliation.

Ali, an interpreter for a local health agency who didn't want his last name used, said the agency cancelled its Muslim patients' appointments Tuesday for fear their traditional dress — including hijabs, or head scarves, for women — would identify them as Muslims and jeopardize their safety.

"We cannot control the feelings and emotions of the people out there who might be angry," said Ali, a U.S. citizen of Lebanese descent. "We hope the community will be understanding and let the government do their job."

"Whatever they come up with, we will support them."

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COMMENTARY



Tommy Tomlinson

## We respond because we know grief

JESUP, Ga. — It is Tuesday morning and normally I would be getting ready for work. Instead I am in south Georgia, getting ready for a funeral.

My first cousin died of a heart attack the other night. After my dad died 11 years ago, Don was the closest kin on that side of the family.

The best of my dad, the gentle strength, I saw in Don. Now he is dead at 57, and it feels like the last of my dad went with him.

My dress clothes are ironed, my tie laid out, when my mom hollers from the other room.

Come look at this.

Smoke makes a thundercloud over the World Trade Center. A plane has hit one of the towers. Nobody knows if it's an accident or an attack.

Then, on live TV, as we watch frozen on the couch, a second plane strikes the other tower.

Now everybody knows.

The night before, we had gone to visitation at the funeral home in Nahunta, one county over.

There were people I hadn't seen in 15 or 20 years, back when we had family reunions every summer at the home of Don's parents. Now his mom and dad are both gone. Not long ago the house burned down.

Grief comes in every shade. At the funeral home, some wept silently in the corners. Some stood outside and swapped old stories.

Don's daughter — I hadn't seen her since we were in high school — came up without a word and hugged my neck. We lingered there for a dozen deep breaths. There was nothing we needed to say.

She had flown in Sunday from Boston.

Now, on Tuesday morning, the TV says the planes that hit the World Trade Center were hijacked from Boston.

The news is impossible. Another plane crashes, and the Pentagon is on fire.

Close-ups of the World Trade Center towers show the buildings' charred bones. My mom and I wonder how any building could stand after being hit by a jet plane.

She gets up to fix her hair for the funeral.

While she is gone, the first tower collapses.

She comes back, disbelieving.

The second tower falls.

We are watching "War of the Worlds," except this is real. Hundreds of people, maybe thousands, are dead. Somewhere there are aliens, and the hardest part is that they look like us.

My brother arrives to take us to the funeral. We have a quick lunch, checking the TV the whole time, and I go off to get ready.

Just as I get started, work calls.

I know before we start the conversation that I will miss the funeral. I had a chance to grieve the night before, with the family and the friends and the open casket. For now that will have to do.

Tragedy strikes from all angles. Most of the time we never see it coming.

Sometimes it is the evil in this world, turning planes into bombs.

Sometimes it is the natural way of life, stopping a good man's heart in his living room.

We can't just stop the world. Somebody has to find the people responsible for this attack on our country. They must be punished, and on this day only death feels like justice.

We hunt the guilty because we remember the innocent. And because we know what it feels like when a part of us is taken away.

My mom and my brother can't wait any longer. They get in the car and leave for the funeral. For the last half hour it has been pouring down rain.

It doesn't look like it will ever let up.

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'JUST A COMPLETE WAR ZONE'

## Carolínians get firsthand look at devastation

Travelers attending conferences, meetings, called home the news

By JEN PILLA  
AND PETER SMOLOWITZ  
Staff Writers

First Union economist Mark Vitner, in Manhattan attending a conference Tuesday, called his wife after the first World Trade Center explosion to say he was OK.

Then came the second explosion.

"At that point, I started to panic, because I knew he was in that crowd somewhere, and debris was falling," Amy Vitner said.

But he called twice Tuesday afternoon with updates. She said he described:

"Dust everywhere — at times you couldn't see anything. Just a complete war zone."

As Carolínians gathered around television sets to watch news of terrorist attacks unfold Tuesday, many were eyewitnesses to tragedy in New York and Washington.

Vitner was one of the few to escape Manhattan, said Amy Vitner. He and others hopped on a tugboat, then he took a commuter train to Princeton, N.J., and showered at the home of someone he met on the train.

Vitner's hotel was in the World Trade Center complex, and he lost everything he had there: a laptop, cell phone and luggage he bought last week, his wife said. But he had rented a car and was driving home Tuesday evening, she said.

"He made it out," Amy Vitner said. "That's the important thing."

Brian Gullette, a founder of a Durham-based Internet marketing intelligence company, had just started his pitch for venture capital funding at a meeting in midtown Manhattan when a secretary interrupted.

"She actually said the top of the World Trade Center had been blown off. I thought she was joking," said Gullette, 37, the son of Mecklenburg County Commissioners vice-chairman Becky Carney.

"Then we went outside and we saw this gargantuan ball of white and gray smoke. And there was this mass of humanity coming up the street. People were crying and trying to get home."

Charlotte City Council member Lynn Wheeler was staying

with her son and daughter-in-law near Central Park West, many blocks from the catastrophe.

"There are military aircraft flying over the city. There are streams of people walking down the street," she said. "It's been pretty emotional here. There's been a lot of crying."

In Washington, Gene Blackwell, a retired three-star Army lieutenant general from York, S.C., was near the Pentagon when the plane crashed Tuesday.

"There's a sound when planes are coming down, and I heard it and knew it was trouble," said Blackwell who was in Washington on business for the week.

He was at the Army-Navy Club and walked onto the roof to see the smoke and fire that immediately engulfed the west side of the Pentagon — near his former office as the Army's deputy chief of staff for plans and operations.

Blackwell, who commanded the 2nd Armored Division in Iraq during Desert Storm, was to be the keynote speaker at a meeting Tuesday night of the Reserve Forces Policy Board. His subject was "Homeland Defense."

York County Council member Rick Lee had just gotten off his US Airways flight at Washington's Reagan National Airport Tuesday when he saw the fireball coming from the Pentagon and smoke billowing from the building. Lee said an acrid smell hung in the air long after the crash.

About 30 members of area chambers of commerce were meeting with local members of Congress in an office building, near the Capitol, when word came first of the catastrophes. They were told to evacuate immediately.

Jim Carpenter, president of the Union County (N.C.) Chamber of Commerce, looked past the Capitol dome and saw thick smoke billowing into the sky. The chamber members heard a second explosion, and Carpenter said he could smell the smoke.

"People were on cell phones, trying to call out," Carpenter said. "Pandemonium."

Monroe insurance salesman Jeff Bass went from listening to Sen. Joseph Lieberman deliver a speech to praying. Bass said the group wanted to get as far away from the area as possible. So did others, he said. "A lot of people just abandoned their cars and started walking out of town."

— DAN HUNTLEY, JENNIFER TALHEIM, JENNIFER ROTHACKER, DON HUDSON AND NICHOLE BELL CONTRIBUTED.

'IN YOUR ANGER, DON'T SIN'



UNCC freshman Kara Butner covers her face as she prays with fellow freshmen (left to right) Gretchen Vaness and Mark Beavers during a prayer service Tuesday evening at the Belk Tower.

## Faithful around Charlotte come together in prayer

Houses of worship open for hastily organized solace, efforts to cope

By KEN GARFIELD  
Religion Editor

Carolínians are taking their grief to God.

From Boone to Charleston, thousands of houses of worship are opening sanctuaries for hastily organized services and individuals in need of a quiet place.

Among the hundreds of Carolinas services planned today and beyond, WRCM Christian radio (91.9 FM) will host a service at 7 p.m. today at the Charlotte Coliseum. Donations for the Red Cross will be accepted.

Believers of all faiths are stopping at work and home to pray for the victims and the world.

Some say Tuesday's terrorism proves the sinfulness of man, and that it's a sign of Jesus' imminent coming. But most were drawn to sanctuaries for less complicated reasons. Overwhelmed by the tragedy, they searched for solace in the Scripture, hymns and sermons.

At the noon Mass at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Morganton, attendance swelled from the usual dozen to 50.

At Charlotte's Uptown Christ Covenant, assistant pastor Mark Upton prayed that hearts not turn bitter. "In your anger, don't sin," he told 100 worshippers. "Don't stereotype Islamic people. Don't long for revenge."

At First Baptist in Statesville, a

### Special Services

- 10 a.m. Mass today, St. Anne Catholic, 1694 Bird St., Rock Hill.
- Noon today, First Baptist, 2650 Union Road, Gastonia.
- Moment of silence 10:15 a.m. today, Watauga County, sponsored by Appalachian State student government.
- 6 p.m. today, First Baptist, 301 S. Davidson St., Charlotte.
- 6 p.m. today, Holy Trinity Lutheran, 805 South York St., Gastonia.
- 6:45 p.m. today, Central United Methodist, 801 S. Hayne St., Monroe.
- 6:45 p.m. today, Myers Park Baptist, 1900 Queens Road.
- 7 p.m. today, Christ Covenant, 800 Fullwood Lane, Matthews.
- 7 p.m. today, Covenant Presbyterian, 1830 Celanese Road, Rock Hill.
- 7 p.m. today, Mountain View Elementary School, 5911 Dwayne Starnes Road, Hickory, hosted by Christ United Methodist.
- 7 p.m. today, First Presbyterian, 114 West Main St., Lincolnton.
- 7 p.m. today, Harrisburg United Methodist, 4560 N.C. 49.
- 7 p.m. Thursday, Mount Carmel Baptist, 3201 Tuckaseegee Road, Charlotte, Mecklenburg Ministries and Clergy Association of Charlotte-Mecklenburg.
- 1:30 p.m. Friday, Ash-Shaheed Islamic Center, 2717 Tuckaseegee Road, Charlotte.

prayer gathering of 200 came moments after 220 people donated blood at the church. Forty had been expected.

At Fieldcrest-Cannon Stadium in Kannapolis, 250 people came to pray.

At UNC Charlotte, more than 30 students sat cross-legged in a circle near Belk Tower, holding hands, heads bowed.

At Myers Park Baptist, 20 pastors in the Clergy Association of Charlotte-Mecklenburg prayed for unity: "Though we are scattered in different places, speak different words or descend from different backgrounds, we are one human race."

Shalom Park, the Jewish complex on Providence Road that

was struck last month by vandals with spray paint, closed Tuesday morning on the advice of police. So did the Charlotte Islamic Center and school off Central Avenue.

Charlotte-born evangelist Billy Graham released a statement saying the calamity proves "how weak and inadequate we are."

Amid all the anger, Bishop William Curlin of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte implored people not to give in to revenge.

"From the cross," Curlin said in a written statement, "Jesus Christ looked down upon his murderers and said, 'Father, forgive them.'"

— STAFF WRITERS HELEN ARTHUR, MICHELLE CROUCH, KATE DERINGER, GREG LAOUR, GAIL SMITH-ARRANTS AND JIM WRINN CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ARTICLE.