

Christians Seek to Counter Church's Plans to Burn Quran

A Massachusetts Bible distributor says it will give away two copies of the Quran for every one a Florida church destroys Saturday during its "International Burn a Koran Day."

The Massachusetts Bible Society, also known as MassBible, said it would distribute the Islamic holy book at prisons, hospitals and shelters to counter what it calls "an act of hatred against Muslims and the Islamic faith."

"As people of the Book, we are joined to Islam and Judaism in a special way, and as an organization that has sought to put that Book into people's hands for 201 years, we cannot stand idly by while the sacred text of a sister religion is burned as our beloved Bibles once were," the group said in a statement.

MassBible said distributing Qurans "in no way" diminishes its belief that the Bible is the Word of God. "On the contrary, it is acting on the command within its pages to love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev. 19:18) and to do unto others as we would have done unto us (Matt. 7:12)," it stated.

Meanwhile, Florida-based Christian singer Sonia Vannest is organizing a vigil Friday outside Dove World Outreach Centre in Gainesville, Fla., where 200 Qurans are to be expected to be burned the following day to mark the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

In a message on her Facebook page, Vannest said participants are being asked to bring "God Is Love" signs and to pray around the church. "This is not about reacting violently but showing the world true Christianity," she wrote.

Terry Jones, pastor of the 50-member Dove World Outreach Centre, said he plans to proceed with burning the Quran despite concerns from Gen. David Petraeus, top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, that it could endanger U.S. troops and incite ant-American sentiment worldwide.

"How much do we back down?" Jones asked, according to the Associated Press. "How many times do we back down? Maybe it's time to stand up ... and send a message to radical Islam that we will not tolerate their behavior."

According to its Facebook page, International Burn a Koran Day is intended to "bring awareness to the dangers of Islam and that the Koran is leading people to hell. Eternal fire is the only destination the Koran can lead people to so we want to put the Koran in its place-the fire!"

Jones' effort has been widely denounced by Christian and U.S. government leaders. Both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Vatican have called the planned protest "outrageous." Carl Moeller, president of the advocacy organization Open Doors USA, said it could also heighten persecution of Christians in predominantly Muslim nations.

Samaritan's Purse founder Franklin Graham called on Jones to cancel the protest event, saying it's always wrong to deface or destroy any religion's holy writings. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religion Liberty Commission, called Jones' plan "appalling, disgusting and brainless."

Though Jones has given no indication that he will cancel the Saturday bonfire, he said he is weighing Gen. Petraeus' concerns about the move endangering U.S. troops and is praying for God's guidance.

On Thursday, White House spokesmen said there was talk of someone from the Obama administration calling Jones to ask that he cancel the planned Quran burning. Pentagon Press

Secretary Geoff Morrell said Jones indicated a willingness to listen to someone from the Pentagon, State Department or White House.