

National cathedral hosts Muslim prayer service

by [Harry Bruinius](#) in the [December 24, 2014](#) issue

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Prayer carpets for a Muslim Jumu'ah service were spread out in a transept wing of the Washington National Cathedral Friday, November 14, as religious leaders prepared to host the church's first-ever Muslim-led prayers.

The carpets were arranged diagonally to face Mecca, as is required for Muslim prayers, and now lie under the grand Gothic arches of the National Cathedral, which has a traditional floor plan in the form of a cross. The transept area consists of the two side wings of the church and includes chapels off to the side of the main altar.

The symbolism of Muslim prayers ringing out in America's symbolic spiritual center—a cathedral of the Episcopal Church in the nation's capital which has hosted presidential funerals, inaugural prayer services, and other nationally important spiritual services—is an attempt to heal the religious rifts that afflict the globe, organizers said.

Ebrahim Rasool, the South African ambassador to the United States, helped organize the event with Gina Campbell, the cathedral's director of liturgy, after the two worked together last December to plan a memorial service for Nelson Mandela.

The night before Mandela's memorial, as Rasool and Campbell were standing in the cathedral's soaring nave—the long central space of the cruciform church—Rasool told the Episcopal priest that the space reminded him of being in an ancient mosque.

"What struck me was how he could look at our building and see his mosque. That was a powerful moment," Campbell told the *Huffington Post*. "To realize we could be standing in the same spot in the same building and see our own prayer traditions."

The two became friends and discussed how to promote religious dialogue and understanding amid global turmoil often defined by religious conflict. They decided to conduct a Friday Jumu'ah service, which is the Muslim day of prayer, akin to Christian Sundays and Jewish Shabbat.

“This is a dramatic moment in the world and in Muslim-Christian relations,” Rasool said in a statement. “This needs to be a world in which all are free to believe and practice and in which we avoid bigotry, Islamophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Christianity and embrace our humanity and embrace faith.”

The service took place just after noon and was cosponsored by various Muslim groups, including the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Islamic Society of North America.

The Washington National Cathedral streamed the service live on its website. Rasool delivered the *khutbah*, or Muslim sermon, during the prayers.

Many churches and synagogues around the country host such Muslim prayer services, organizers said, but the venue in the nation’s capital holds special symbolic significance for the estimated 3 million Muslims in the United States.

“We want the world to see the Christian community is partnering with us and is supporting our religious freedom in the same way we are calling for religious freedom for all minorities in Muslim countries,” Rizwan Jaka, a spokesman for the All Dulles Area Muslim Society mosque in Sterling, Virginia, told the *Washington Post*. “Let this be a lesson to the world.”