

Muslims to Pray in D.C.

✖ A New Jersey mosque is spearheading a national prayer rally in Washington, D.C., that organizers expect to attract tens of thousands of Muslims to pray for the soul of America.

Describing the event as the first-ever of its kind, leaders of Dar-ul-Islam in Elizabeth, N.J., expect 50,000 Muslims from around the world to gather for the Sept. 25 rally being held on Capitol Hill.

Hassen Abdellah, president of Dar-ul-Islam, said the event, which begins at 1 p.m., will not include political speeches but will focus only on prayer.

"There are a lot of people who are Muslims who feel that the image of Islam has been portrayed very derogatorily, Abdellah said. "We believe that it's very important that the other side of Islam, the real reason people become Muslim, is portrayed as opposed to what people believe in the politics of Islam."

Mosque members secured a permit for the event in July and have been working since then to gain sponsors and spread word through e-mails, phone calls and a Web site, , that declares, "Our time has come."

Abdellah said participants will pray for salvation-for individuals, communities and nations-and "that people get along better, and move forward with more humanity toward each other."

"We're trying to illustrate the spiritual component," he said. " Because there's too much emphasis on other things in Islam, and that's the problem. Too much emphasis on the politics as opposed to the spirituality. You're not getting to heaven for your politics. The politics will get you in hell; spirituality will get you salvation."

Abdellah, who is African-American, said President Obama's words at his inauguration, describing the U.S. as a nation of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and nonbelievers, and his speech this summer in Egypt seeking to build bridges with the Muslim world led him and a New Jersey imam to begin discussing the idea.

"He's articulated a position that's consistent with the Constitution of the United States, that there would be no discrimination based on race, religion, national origin," he said. "That was inspirational. He used passages that are more Islamic-friendly than cause tension and intimidation."

Some Christians also are mobilizing to pray on that day. An email circulating virally calls for Christians to oppose what they see as Islam's growing influence on the U.S. through prayer.

"If ever we needed to be crying out for mercy for America, it is now," the email reads. "We must stand strong and speak Truth wherever we are and at every given opportunity. ... May there be multitudes come in to the kingdom of God while there is yet time."

Abdellah said he doesn't understand why Christians would object to Muslims praying. "What is there to fear about that?" he said. "Nobody's praying for any destruction? We're praying for reconciliation and that people get along."

But Nigerian minister Mosy Magdugba believes the Muslim prayer gathering is part of a spiritual battle for the soul of the nation. In an email, the leader of Spiritual Life Outreach in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, called on Christians to fast from midnight until the Muslim prayer event ends at 7 p.m.

"It is warfare time," Magdugba wrote. "Do not joke with this. If Christians fail to frustrate this game plan in the spirit, you will regret the outcome."

Florida resident Karen Leach agrees, saying she plans to fast and pray on Sept. 25 because she sees the event as a subtle form of “cultural jihad.”

“I’m very distressed,” Leach said. “I’m distressed when I read the statement, ‘We want to show America how we pray.’ ... I feel that any kind of prayer speaks into the heavenly realms. So I feel if they’re going to be speaking into the heavenly realm into the forces of darkness, I want to speak into the forces of light.”

Intercessors for America (IFA), which is based in the Washington, D.C., area included a notice about the Muslim prayer gathering in a recent newsletter. IFA President Emeritus Gary Bergel said Muslim have been holding Jummah prayers on Fridays in the Capitol building for several years now, and he understands why Christians would be concerned that those prayers are being made more public.

But he urged supporters to respond to event such as this not “in a spirit of agitated civil religion” but with a heart of compassion for their Muslim neighbors.

“An appropriate response would be to go in our prayer closet and fall on our face-realizing our own need for mercy, grace, forgiveness and our own redemption-and see how the Lord would direct each one of us to take up this matter in prayer to pray compassionately for our Muslim neighbors.”

“If we live the gospel and demonstrate the love of Jesus, then we can defend the truth,” he added. “Then we’ll get a better hearing, and we’ll get a better response. We won’t just trigger more angry reactions.”