

13 September 2002

Interfaith Service Remembers Victims of September 11 Attacks, September 11, 2002

(Imam Yahya Hendi speaks at 9/11 Georgetown U. service)

By James Fisher-Thompson Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The tolling of bells and "musical meditations" by student performers marked an ecumenical service held September 11 at Georgetown University in Washington to remember and honor the victims of the terrorist attacks on New York City, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon that occurred the year before.

More than 400 members of the faculty, staff, and student body of the university, founded by Jesuit priests more than two centuries ago, attended the Interfaith Service of Prayer, held on the school's grassy quadrangle in front of Gravenor Hall. They listened to readings by the interim Catholic chaplain, Father Scott Pilarz; the Muslim chaplain, Imam Yahya Hendi; the senior Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Harold White; and the Protestant chaplain, the Reverend Constance Wheeler.

University President Jack DeGioia also spoke at the service, which was set against a brilliant blue sky -- similar to the day of the attacks last year -- and interrupted occasionally by the sound of aircraft flying low over the campus prior to landing at nearby Reagan National Airport. Ironically, the hijacked passenger liner that plowed into the Pentagon, killing more than 100 people, also roared above the campus as it made its deadly approach last September 11.

Onboard that aircraft was popular Georgetown Professor Leslie Whittington, who was traveling abroad with her husband and two daughters when self-proclaimed Islamic extremists turned their fuel-laden aircraft into a deadly missile aimed at the headquarters of the U.S. military just across the Potomac River in Arlington, Virginia. At least 12 other alumni of the university died in the attacks, which killed more than 3,000 people from 91 nations.

Jesuit Father Pilarz set the tone of the memorial service as he told the gathering, "Life is best lived generously in the service of others."

Imam Hendi expanded on that theme when, in his reading from chapter 49:13 of the Koran, he recited in Arabic and English: "O mankind! I created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other not that ye may despise each other. The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two brothers; and fear God, that ye may receive mercy."

Rabbi White intoned Psalm 84 in Hebrew, which ends: "For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord gives grace and glory. No good is withheld from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, happy is the one who trusts in You."

Reverend Wheeler read from Philippians, Chapter 4:4-9, including the verse: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me -- put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Before lighting a memorial candle in honor of the 9/11 victims, University President DeGioia

said, "We will not let the horror vanquish us. We are sustained in our belief, in our faiths, in the tradition upon which this university is built. We believe the spirit is here, right here; now; has been; will be here -- a healing spirit, a forgiving spirit, a spirit of unity, a loving spirit.

He added: "One year later we are back; united together in our faiths; united in our commitment that together we can break the logic of evil. We are testimony to the power of memory. Our community suffered a deep and painful loss. Our nation a deep and painful loss. We are testimony to the power of hope. We do believe good triumphs over evil, knowledge over ignorance, justice over injustice, love over hate."

Musical "meditations" included a rendition of the hymn "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes by Joseph Jordan, the Georgetown alma mater by the legendary Georgetown Chimes student glee club, and a selection by the Georgetown University Gospel Choir.