

Worshippers unite in songs, prayers

*Diverse crowd comes
together for service
to remember victims*

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They sang "Oh God Our Help in Ages Past," and "God Bless America." They heard Catholic, Hindu, Protestant and Jewish and Islamic prayers.

At the altar Sunday night at Holy Spirit Catholic Church, four candles represented the jet airliners that extremist Islamic terrorists used in their attacks Tuesday.

The standing-room only crowd of about 1,200 worshippers of many faiths read in union such phrases as "We

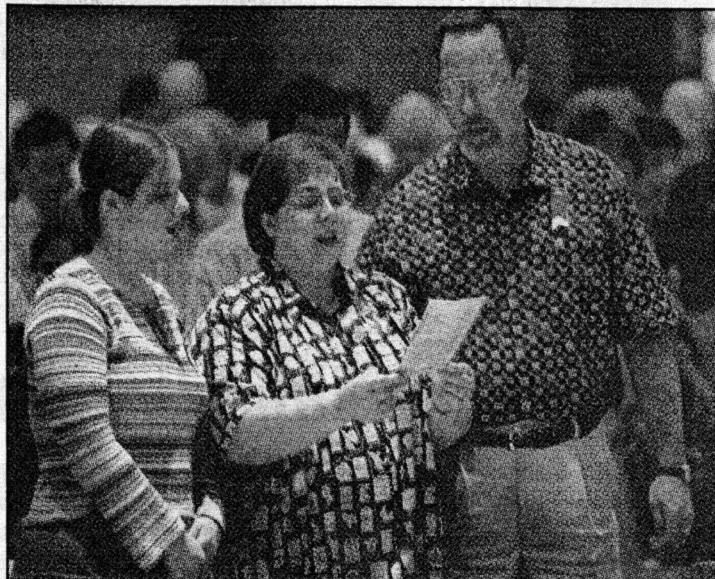
are here by grace, grounded in hope, united in our common faith," and "May we see the day when war and bloodshed cease, when a great peace will face the whole world."

They heard words of comfort from priests, ministers, a rabbi, an imam, a Hindu and a Baha'i lay leader.

And they held hands while singing "America."

"We've come together in a very crucial time in our country," said the Rev. Louis Giardino, the host pastor. "It is important we enter the next few months as one in unity."

The Huntsville chapter of the National Conference of Community and Justice, with the help of the Interfaith Mission Service, sponsored the service, possibly unprecedented in Huntsville because of its reli-



Carucha L. Meuse/Huntsville Times

At Holy Spirit Catholic Church, a family sings a hymn during the multid denominational service Sunday night to remember those killed in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

gious diversity and size.

John Callahan, local NCCJ board president who was born in St. Vincent's Hospital in the heart of New York City, told the packed sanctuary that

"This looks like a subway crowd with all the strap holders.

"I'm sure the people of New

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Different faiths come together for healing

Unite

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York would be very happy to know you've come out to pray for their comfort."

Dr. Mustafa Abushagur, imam of the Huntsville Islamic Center, called the attacks "immoral, unethical and inhumane." He said he was "grateful to the community for opening its heart" to Muslim residents and for those who sent flowers to the mosque and their homes.

"We are very touched and impressed by the kindness toward the Muslim people," he said after the service.

Last week, just after the attack, the Islamic Academy closed out of concern it might become a target of revenge, but it reopened Thursday, according to Fatima Abushagur, wife of the imam and school principal.

Muhammad Talukder, a civil engineer from Bangladesh, called the service "marvelous" and said it was "needed for the community because many Huntsvillians are not familiar with the Islamic faith."

Bulamd and Nina Mahmood, Muslims, attended the service with their teen-agers, Rizvan and Aisha.

They said they have not experienced any ethnic slurs or incidents as a few local Muslims have in the wake of the attacks. "We had calls from many people asking if they can go get groceries for us, but it hasn't been necessary," said Nina Mahmood. "We have not been scared at all."

Sharon Kunitz, a member of Temple B'nai Sholom, sang a stirring prayer for healing.

"It was truly an interfaith service this community needed," she said. "I thought the most important thing was the fact we must not let our feeling of hurt turn to anger at the Muslim community."

Interim Rabbi Bernard Honan of Temple B'nai Sholom read a statement from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism calling on Americans to "not allow the attack on America to divide Americans."

Priest Shivaram of the Hindu Cultural Center of North Alabama and Dr. Laj Utreja, a lay leader at the Hindu center, each briefly addressed the crowd. Shivaram performed a chant for peace and Utreja asked God to "protect us from evil like parents do for their children."

The Rev. Dr. Homer McCall of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church urged the worshippers to respond to the attackers by saying, "You may shatter our buildings, but never our faith and spiritual base — our trust in God."

Tim Tyson of the Huntsville Baha'i Community of Faith said: "We are all praying fervently for those souls who were claimed by the shameless acts of terrorism last Tuesday. We beseech God to comfort the hearts of those who have lost loved ones, and to strengthen our nation and its people to meet this challenge with faith, courage and unity."

Margaret Nell Parker of First Methodist Church summed it up this way: "I came with a real broken heart. It was a real healing not only for me, but for the community."