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Islam has special place at ceremony

Multidenominational service expresses common beliefs

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The face of Islam was female at a Billings all-faith prayer service on Wednesday commemorating the terrorist attacks on the United States a year ago by Muslim extremists.

That irony was not lost on Farrah Fazal and Tasneem Khaleel.

The two Muslim women represented their religion in a manner that is not the conventional image portrayed from Muslim countries.

While women are not supposed to lead prayer, that is what Khaleel did, reading in Arabic the "Prayer of the Lord, the perfect prayer."

"Without prayer in the past year," Fazal said, "I would not be here," describing how it was a refuge for her after the 9/11 attacks.

Khaleel, a professor of biology at Montana State University-Billings, and Fazal, a news anchor at KULR-8 television joined representatives of Christian, Jewish, Baha'i, Native American and Buddhist faiths at a Service of Comfort and Renewal held at dawn in the Town Square between St. John's Lutheran Home and Mission Ridge on Billings' West End.

As fingers of morning light spread across the south hills and the Pryor Mountains, about 250 people gathered on the green common to share their common beliefs. A jetliner lifting off from Billings Logan Airport provided a backdrop fitting for the moment. The common thread was peace in all the languages spoken — Hebrew to English to Arabic to Crow to Sanskrit.

Fazal said that while searching early Wednesday morning for



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Residents of St. John's Lutheran Home and Mission Ridge were joined by other Billings residents early Wednesday for a multidenominational service in the Town Square between St. John's and Mission Ridge.

something profound to say, she was struck by fact that the "words of prayer are alike to all of us."

While current Muslim regimes tend to push women into second-class status or less, both women noted that the Quran has the highest regard for women and that the word Islam itself translates to "peace or submission," submission to the will of God.

Khaleel said that the terrorists do not represent the true face of Islam, but that they are the manifestation of frustrated rationalization and extremism.

The media portrait of that extremism means "we are all painted with that brush," Fazal said.

"Just because one is born in the faith, does not mean they practice it," Khaleel emphasized.

Fazal said that it was the face of women that has represented the face of peace in the both the Jewish and Islamic traditions.

"It is to women that we go to seek counsel, to seek wisdom," she said.



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Tasneem Khaleel, left, and Farrah Fazal deliver a Muslim prayer at St. John's.

Khaleel said an Islamic proverb proclaims that one "will find heaven under the feet of your mother."

Fazal told the gathering, "We pray for you. Pray for us. May you be blessed."