

Faiths gather for thanksgiving service

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GRAND RAPIDS -- Young children wearing traditional garb chanted Hindu prayers of thanksgiving in Sanskrit.

A Muslim Imam recited from the Koran in Arabic at the pulpit of a Jewish synagogue, where later a Jewish cantor would lead a blessing in Hebrew.

They were joined by a Christian men's choir, a Gospel group and a rousing drum ensemble chanting Nigerian harvest songs.

Together their voices, each unique, gave the some 450 people who attended the eighth annual Community Interfaith Thanksgiving Service Monday night a sampling of the diversity of religious expression in the area.

"It was nice seeing all sides of religion and how they worship and for all of us to come together in one room and put our differences aside," said Hassah Shaaban of Cascade Township, who worships at the Islamic Mosque and Religious Institute in Grand Rapids. "It gives us hope for our future children."

Hope and thanksgiving in difficult times were recurring themes at this year's service at Ahavas Israel synagogue in Grand Rapids.

"In the times we live in, it is easy to be in despair, even overwhelmed," said speaker Michelle Loyd-Paige, dean for multicultural affairs and a professor of sociology at Calvin College.

As examples, she cited "wars or rumors of war, incident after incident of intolerance and racism" and natural disasters, along with economic problems where "we hear of prices going up and opportunities for jobs going down."



Press Photo/T.J. Hamilton

Members of the Bal Vihar Children's Choir sing a traditional vedic prayer of gratitude

"Yet this I will recall, therefore I have hope," said Loyd-Paige, quoting Lamentations. In the book of Lamentations, the writer lists a litany of woes but still has hope in God's "unfailing love and mercy."

during a Community Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on Monday night at Ahavas Israel.

Likewise, said Loyd-Paige, "in the midst of the bad news that seems to keep coming and keep coming, yet this I will recall. Every morning God's mercies are renewed. Every morning while I still have breath there is yet another opportunity for grace, there is yet another opportunity to work for justice, there is yet another opportunity to work for peace."

"Looking upon this congregation, how can I not have hope?" continued Loyd-Paige. "In these uncertain times, in times of failing leadership, of intolerance and loss of patience, these things I will recall, that God is still good. That God is still in control."