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**CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE**

Earlier versions of this story incorrectly reported that President Bill Clinton held his prayer service at the Metropolitan AME Zion church. It was at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. This version has been corrected.

## Variety of Clergy, Worship Program Reflect a Focus On Inclusiveness

By Michelle Boorstein  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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[President Obama](#) began his first full day in office yesterday with a broad collection of American faith leaders praying with him and for him at [Washington National Cathedral](#) in a worship service crafted specially to reflect his interest in religious diversity.

Rabbis in yarmulkes, Catholic bishops in magenta vestments, Protestant pastors in suits, and female Hindu and Muslim leaders in colorful garb -- 20 prominent religious leaders in all -- participated as Obama sat in the front pew flanked by his wife, Michelle, and [Vice President Biden](#) and his wife, Jill. The number and mix of clergy at this year's National Prayer Service might have been the largest and most diverse, historians said. The service dates in some form to [George Washington](#)'s inauguration and traditionally has marked the end of the ceremonies surrounding an incoming president.

The Rev. Otis Moss Jr., pastor emeritus of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland, delivered the opening prayer in a rich baritone, asking God to "teach us each day that we live in a nation of neighbors on an island commissioned to glorify your name, in a community that is global."

Obama appeared to listen intently, his left index finger pressed to his face.

The 3,200 invited guests included members of Congress, diplomats and other leaders. Choirs sang and psalms and biblical passages were read, but the service had a strongly nonsectarian feel, with many prayers mentioning no deity in particular. The sermon by Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Minister and President Sharon E. Watkins summoned Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Cherokee sources among others.

Although Watkins began festively -- " 'Mr. President.' Has kind of a nice ring to it, doesn't it?" -- she told Obama that the [White House](#) "will tend to draw you

away from your ethical center. . . . In the days immediately before us, there will be much to draw us away from the grand work of loving God and the hard work of loving neighbor. In crisis times, a basic instinct seeks to take us over, a fight-flight instinct."

The president tried during his campaign and inaugural events to be inclusive about religion and wound up annoying some supporters. Many Obama voters disapproved of his inviting evangelical pastor [Rick Warren](#), who has spoken strongly against gay marriage, to give the invocation at the inauguration. Obama made reference to "nonbelievers" in his speech Tuesday.

Yesterday's service was created by staff at the Episcopal cathedral, where [Ronald Reagan](#) and both Bushes held their inaugural prayer services. The Rev. Canon Carol L. Wade of the cathedral said she worked closely with Obama's inaugural committee and rewrote some of the responsive prayers from the Book of Common Prayer to highlight religious diversity more than in previous services.

Also new to the service were prayers drawn in part from Washington's 1789 inauguration prayer service and [Abraham Lincoln](#)'s 1865 inaugural address. That included the phrase "with malice toward none, with charity for all," which was said as part of the closing prayer by [Katharine Jefferts-Schori](#), presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church.

The service has changed over the centuries. In 1869, pastors began organizing prayer events with clergy from different schools of Protestantism, that era's definition of "interfaith." The prayer service tradition continued into the early 20th century but waned until Reagan restored it during his first inauguration in 1981 with a service at National City Christian Church. It has continued since at the cathedral, although President [Bill Clinton](#) held his at the historically black Metropolitan [AME Church](#) in downtown Washington.

Other religious leaders who participated yesterday were Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America; Uma Mysorekar, president of the Hindu Temple Society of North America; Rabbi Haskal Lookstein of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York; [Donald W. Wuerl](#), Catholic archbishop of Washington; Archbishop Demetrios, the New York-based primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America; and the Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell, senior pastor of Windsor Village [United Methodist Church](#) in Houston, who has a close relationship with former president [George W. Bush](#).

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