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Nutter leads pledge for peace in city

Interfaith event begins inaugural festivities.

By Vernon Clark
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Mayor-elect Michael Nutter launched his inaugural events yesterday with prayers and a pledge to promote peace in the city.

Before the hour-long service at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul, Nutter walked the aisles of the cathedral, greeting nearly every one of the estimated 200 people there with a handshake or hug. His wife, Lisa, was by his side.

"What better way to start a new endeavor" than to pray, Cardinal Justin Rigali said as he welcomed worshippers. "We come together as people of faith to pray for our new mayor and for our city."

The highlight of the gathering was Nutter leading the congregation in a peace pledge that he had written.

"We pledge as individuals," Nutter said.

"To promote peace in our homes and communities," the crowd responded.

"We pledge to work with others," the mayor-elect said.

"To eliminate the causes of hatred, to honor the dignity of all people, to lay down our weapons, and to find nonviolent solutions when tempted to hurt another," the crowd replied.

"We pledge to be instruments of God's peace," Nutter said.

"To make our homes and neighborhoods zones of peace, free from fear, filled with respect and marked by deeds of kindness," the crowd said.

Although politicians often make appeals at churches, yesterday's service was organized by the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia, composed of more than 20 members from various faiths.

The mood in the cathedral was low-key yet upbeat.

There were prayers. The pledge. And four songs, including "Let There Be Peace on Earth" and "America the Beautiful."

The prayer service was the first official public inaugural event for Nutter. Others are scheduled for Monday, when he is to be sworn in as mayor, and Tuesday, when he begins work at City Hall.

The interfaith service "is an incredible way to start what will be, for me, an incredible four-day period leading up to the inauguration," Nutter said after the event.

The service indicated that among "a number of different faiths, there may be different views and different opinions. But I think, with a commitment to a higher power and a higher being, that you can bring people together under any set of circumstances and especially on this issue of violence and having peace in Philadelphia," Nutter said.

Jennifer Crandall, a spokeswoman for Nutter, said the aim of the service was "to start the inaugural events on a prayerful note."

The council was formed in 2006 to unite religious leaders and offer a moral and spiritual voice on issues affecting the city.

Crandall said Nutter regularly attends Mount Carmel Baptist Church in the 5700 block of Race Street in West Philadelphia.

Offering prayers for the mayor-elect and the city were three co-conveners of the Religious Leaders Council: Cardinal Rigali of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia; Imam Anwar Muhaimin of the International Muslim Brotherhood Inc; and Rabbi David Straus of the Vaad Board of Rabbis.

"Deepen our love for our community and our desire to serve," Muhaimin prayed as he offered a closing blessing with Straus. "Let us work for justice and peace and compassion for all."

Straus added, "Bless us with the fruits of wisdom and understanding."



Among the clergy there was former Mayor W. Wilson Goode, who hailed Nutter as a man well suited to be mayor.

"Mayor Nutter is going to be an outstanding mayor." Goode said. "I like what he's doing. I like what he's done. I like his spirit. I like everything about him."

Goode said the prayer service would help bolster Nutter as he takes office.

"A spiritual ecumenical service of this nature, in my view, lifts the spirit and hopes and aspirations of the mayor and gives the mayor the confidence to go out there and do the tough job he needs to do."

Nutter said the service added to his optimism about the city and its future.

"I'm very pleased. I am very proud. I am very thankful, and I received a lot of prayers for myself, my family and, more importantly, for the city."

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