



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 22, 2018

## Catholic University Opens Controversial Muslim Prayer Room

St. Ambrose University, a Catholic institution of higher learning in Davenport, Iowa, has opened a prayer room catering to “students of the Islamic faith as well as students of other religions who prefer to pray somewhere other than Christ the King Chapel,” according to a recent [St. Ambrose press release](#). “The prayer space replaces a much smaller area on campus and is built to suit the specific needs of students of the Islamic faith.”



The special non-Christian prayer room is named in honor of Reverend Joe DeFrancisco, the late priest and longtime St. Ambrose professor of theology, who, according to the university, spent his nearly thirty year career at St. Ambrose promoting universalism rather than solid Catholic Christian faith.

“This is a truly appropriate way to honor Fr. Joe,” said Sister Lescinski, president of St. Ambrose. “His openness to all members of the Quad Cities faith community was a living example of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Former students still talk about the impact visits to temples and mosques had on them as members of his Comparative Religions class.”

The prayer room, which includes “sinks for ritual foot-washing,” along with “separate areas for male and female worshippers” (Islam requires gender segregation for prayer), was proposed last year by the university’s Student Government Association President Matthew Mahoney. “It’s uniquely Ambrosian,” said Mahoney, “and it just sort of shows our commitment to all different faiths.”

However, some observers have questioned the propriety of a non-Christian prayer space in the confines of an institution supposedly dedicated to reinforcing the Catholic faith to students. “A Catholic school preaching tolerance and compassion toward Muslim students is righteous,” wrote conservative columnist Paul Bois on DailyWire.com. “But a Catholic school giving Muslims a sex-segregated prayer space is basically a secular institution with a crucifix on it. Either it’s teaching students to become better Catholics or it’s teaching students to become good millennials; it can’t do both.” He added that a Catholic school such as St. Ambrose “should be committed to only one faith while preaching compassion for others. To do anything else is entirely unCatholic.”

Similarly, writing in the *Independent Journal Review*, columnist Tre Goins-Phillips noted that the special prayer space “flies in the face of the university’s apparent mission — bolstering the Catholic faith. While it’s entirely appropriate for a religious institution to advocate for tolerance and just treatment for everyone, regardless of their religion, installing a space specifically for Islamic prayer seems to be a step away from pluralism and toward endorsement.”

One Catholic organization, TFP Student Action, has gone as far as launching a [petition drive](#) to have the prayer space closed, noting that a “Muslim prayer room on campus contradicts ... Catholic tradition.”

The petition, signed so far by over 12,500 supporters, observes that “while Christians — including many



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Catholic priests and faithful — are being martyred for their faith in Muslim-dominated countries, St. Ambrose University in Iowa opened a special prayer room for Muslims.”

The petition goes on to ask: “What about fidelity to the One True Faith? Our Divine Savior is clear: ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me.’”

The petition urges the president of St. Ambrose, Sister Joan Lescinski, “to reverse this scandalous decision, as only Our Lord is ‘the way, and the truth, and the life.’”

*Photo of Ambrose Hall at St. Ambrose University by [Farragutful](#)*



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