January 18, 2015

Dear Duke Chapel Community,

You are likely aware of the events this week that focused on Duke Chapel, following an announcement that the Duke Muslim Students Association would begin a weekly call-to-prayer from the Chapel tower. The Chapel, along with other university departments, received messages of concern and of praise for this decision, which ultimately led to a modification that allowed the Muslim Students to offer the call-to-prayer on the Chapel quadangle.

During this past Friday’s call-to-prayer, there was a peaceful hush across the Chapel lawn as hundreds gathered in solidarity. The gathering was one of support and of recognition of the painful, stressful week that the Muslim community at Duke endured. It was also a reaffirmation of an aspect of the Chapel’s role at the university, as a place committed to creating community characterized by generous hospitality towards the diverse religious and cultural traditions of Duke students.

On this Sunday morning, we have gathered in this building in Christ’s name, as we do each week, to “lift up holy hands in prayer” (1 Tim. 2:8). There are, in fact, Christian prayer and worship services in this building nearly every day. It is my hope that the events surrounding the call-to-prayer will renew our own Christian call to pray. The mission of the Chapel, as stated in our recent strategic plan, is to stand as a beacon of Christian hope that bridges faith and learning on Duke's campus.

The events of the past week also raised questions about interfaith relations, sacred spaces, the symbolism of this Chapel building, and many other topics. Thoughtful, faithful people have agreed and disagreed with the various decisions made this week. In the coming weeks, the Chapel will seek opportunities for constructive dialogue about these complex and important subjects as we all strive for deeper understanding and greater faithfulness to God.

This morning we sing: “In Christ there is no east or west/ in him no south or north/ but one great fellowship of love/ throughout the whole wide earth.” May we continue to turn to the great love Jesus offers so freely to all.

In the peace of Christ,

Luke A. Powery
Dean of Duke Chapel