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Concordia to Stop Paying for Prayer Space

University Offers Conditional Loan to Muslim Student Group

CHRISTOPHER CURTIS — PUBLISHED AUGUST 31, 2010 | UPDATED JANUARY 9, 2011 | [COMMENTS](#)

By the time Concordia University stops providing a Friday prayer space for the Muslim Student Association, there will still be 10 days left of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting.



Photo Riley Sparks

"Our budget is so stretched right now," said Concordia University spokesperson Chris Mota. "We can no longer afford to rent a prayer space for the MSA."

Concordia provides the MSA with a room on the Hall building's seventh floor as a daily prayer space for up to 100 people. The university also rents a room at the Masonic Hall on Sherbrooke Street West for the nearly 800 students and faculty that attend Friday congregational prayer.

As of September, Concordia will no longer pay the \$15,600 it costs to rent the space each year.

"We've had a contract with the university since 2001," said MSA president Rasim Hafiz. "They've renewed our agreement about the Friday prayer space every year with no problem, but this year it got a little hostile. They just said no without hearing any of our proposals."

Concordia contends that there was never a contract between both parties.

"We had an understanding that renting the Masonic Hall was temporary until other arrangements could be made," said Mota. "There was no contract as far as I know."

In August of 2009, Concordia's Dean of Students sent a letter to the MSA warning them that their agreement with the university would expire in August 2010. The MSA along with members of Montreal's Islamic community began pooling their resources and fundraising to buy a building downtown. A building was found but the provincial government blocked its sale because they considered it to be a heritage site.

"When our people heard of that we decided to help them out," said Mota. "We sent them a letter on July 20 offering to advance the funds necessary to rent the Masonic Hall for an additional year."

Mota added that the loan would be given to the MSA on the condition that the association actively raised funds towards renting their own prayer space.

"We can't spend all our time fundraising," said Asma Omar, the MSA's VP External. "We're students, we're busy. Concordia needs to take the initiative. We would be willing to help but it's the university's obligation, it's a service they're supposed to provide."

The Concordia Student Union has thrown its support behind the MSA's cause.

This summer, former CSU President Prince Ralph Osei sent a letter to the university's administration requesting they meet with the MSA and the CSU to settle the prayer space issue.

"The university has an obligation to the 6,000 Muslim students and faculty at Concordia," said Osei. "\$15,000 isn't even a dent in the university's budget. Judith Woodsworth is making a pitch for students in India, Pakistan and China to come to Concordia. Most of those countries have large Muslim populations and those students must have their spiritual needs met."