

City Moslems have first mosque

After years of praying in private homes, rented hotel rooms and school auditoriums, Manitoba Moslems have their own house of worship or mosque.

The mosque is located at 247 Hazelwood Cr. in St. Vital and was opened in September.

Dr. Jameel Ali, a member of the Manitoba Islamic Association, the group responsible for constructing the mosque, said some minor finishing work remains to be done.

But he added that the work will likely be left until next summer.

The square stucco structure, located in the middle of a new residential development, has no minarets — the tall, slender towers that usually adorn a mosque.

The Islamic Association had grander plans when it first thought seriously about constructing a mosque, said Dr. Ali.

An architect drew up plans, complete with minarets, that would have cost the association over \$200,000 to build.

The present structure cost the Islamic Association \$116,000, which was more in line with what the group could afford, said Dr. Ali.

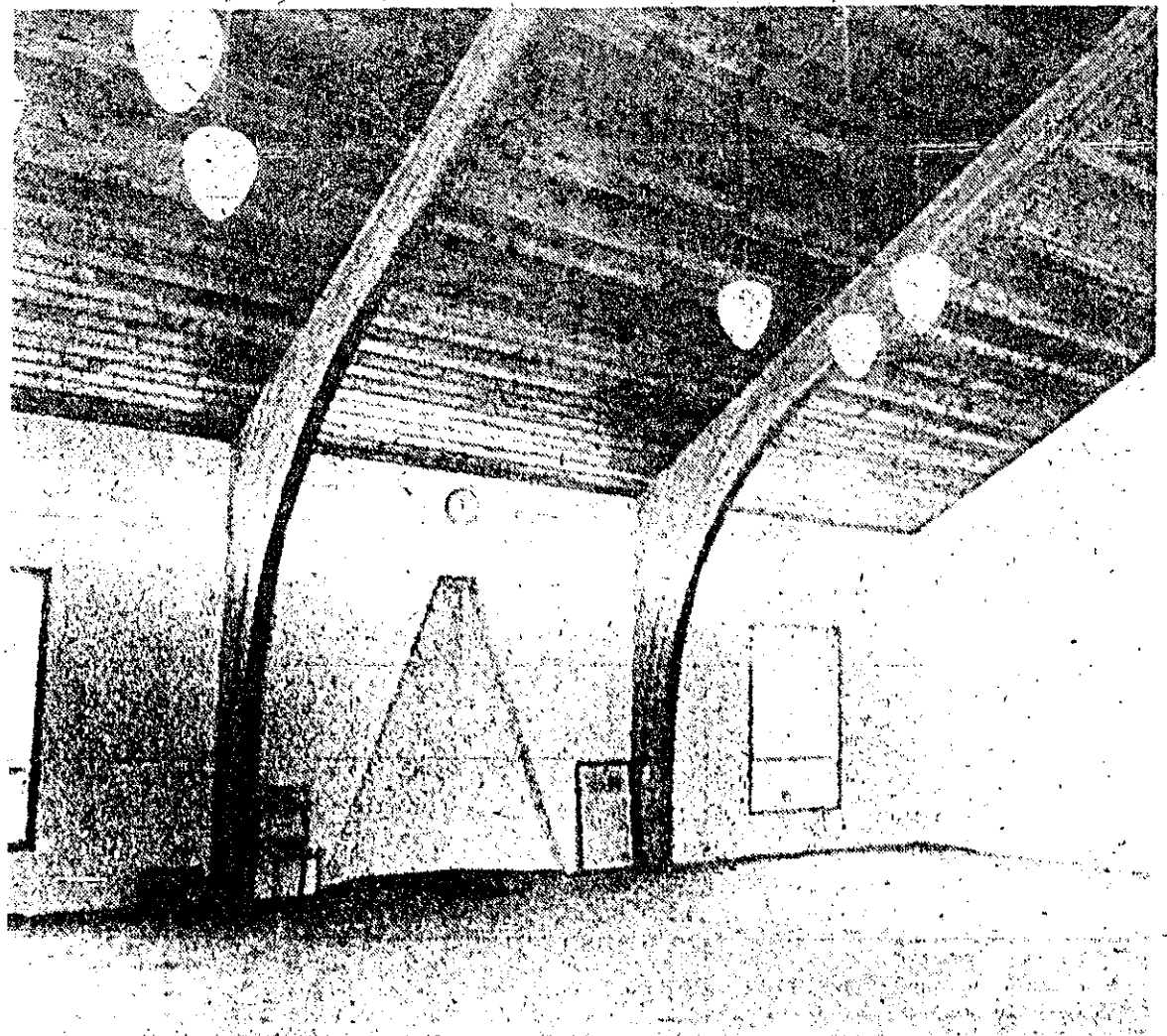
And minarets could be added onto the exterior in the future if they are required, he added.

The mosque's interior is simple with no adornments, which is in keeping with the Islamic religion.

The main floor holds a large prayer hall. The basement is divided up into washing areas, a kitchen and a large open space that will be used by a youth club and for various activities, said Dr. Ali.

The prayer hall is carpeted but is otherwise void of furnishings, alters or statues. Moslems kneel facing Mecca, their Eastern holy city, prostrating themselves in prayer.

Moslems may not require any furnishings but there is one other requirement. The



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ground on which moslems pray is considered to be holy ground, said Dr. Ali. Men and women who come to pray are required to remove their shoes.

The men's and women's wash areas or wuzus in the basement are for those who haven't washed before coming to mosque, said Dr. Ali.

Wuzu means absolution. And before prayer can be accepted, a Moslem must perform absolution, he said.

To accommodate those who would like to come to mosque, the building is open for a short time every day.

Friday is the sabbath day and a service is held at 12:30 p.m. But since many Moslems can't leave their jobs to

come to mosque on Friday, another service is held on Sunday at 12:30 p.m., said Dr. Ali.

Only about \$20,000 remains to be paid on the structure. About 250 Moslem families in the Islamic Association and other individuals have borne the bulk of the cost through contributions.

The Islamic Association also received a gift of \$20,000 from the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to help build the mosque, Dr. Ali said.

The Islamic Association was founded in 1960 by a group of university students. Moslem students who came to Winnipeg — a predominantly Christian community — had no religious place to

call their own, said Dr. Ali.

The students would pray in university classrooms, individual's homes and rent school gyms or hotel rooms for special religious holidays, when more Moslems would come to pray.

The association has grown over the years, but didn't have enough money until recently to construct its own mosque, said Dr. Ali.

The association was hoping to find a central location to build the mosque, but chose St. Vital because the land there was cheaper.

At first there was some opposition to the mosque's construction. Some St. Vital residents took up a petition to stop it from being built,

said Dr. Ali.

But there haven't been any problems since and residents nearby have been very co-operative, he added.

Dr. Ali believes the petition may have been started because people didn't know what to expect.

Many of the problems that arise between religions is due to a lack of understanding. But it will be one of the aims of the Islamic Association to promote a better understanding of Moslem people and their religion, he said.