

Edmonton faith communities come together in solidarity after Christchurch attack

Individual acts of humanity in the midst of mass murders thousands of kilometres away were honoured at Edmonton City Hall this week.



Momin Saeed, Vice President of Strategy with the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council, speaks at a solidarity gathering in Edmonton's City Hall on March 18. The event was organized in the aftermath of the deadly mass shooting at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Kyle Greenham, Grandin Media

Momin Saeed described the self-sacrifice and heroism of members of the Al Noor and Linwood mosque members in Christchurch, New Zealand – those who sacrificed their own lives for loved ones, or the first victim whose final words to the attacker were “Hello, brother.”

“We see in all of these attacks the similarities in the heroic acts of everyone there,” said Saeed, a vice-president with the Alberta Muslim Public Affairs Council (AMPAC), which organized a solidarity event at city hall March 18, three days after the Christchurch attack that claimed 50 lives. Representatives from faiths across the Edmonton area, including the Catholic, Jewish, Sikh, and Mennonite communities, turned out for the event.

“Whether it is in a church, temple, synagogue ... we saw that people came out valiantly trying to protect their fellow brothers and sisters and to take out these attackers,” said Saeed.

New Zealand was rocked on March 15 by the deadliest attack in that country's history. The shooter's manifesto paid homage to previous attacks on Islamic communities around the world, including the 2017 Quebec City mosque shooting.

The latest attack comes at a time when Statistics Canada reports that crimes targeting faith groups continue to increase, with attacks against Muslims in this country doubling in 2017 to 349.



Julien Hammond, coordinator of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations with the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton Julien Hammond, spoke on the importance of interfaith dialogue, particularly during times when religious discrimination has caused violence and bloodshed across the world.

Despite the short notice, nearly 100 people crowded a room at city hall for the solidarity gathering – a turnout that Faisal Khan Suri, president of AMPAC, described as a welcoming and encouraging sight.

Interreligious dialogue is particularly important during times when discrimination has caused violence and bloodshed across the world, said Julien Hammond, the coordinator of ecumenical and interreligious relations with the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton.

“When hate incidents arise, whether they be local, national or international, our collective response is not to compound situations by lashing out at one another with anger or vengeance,” said Hammond. “But rather to strengthen bonds between our faith communities for the greater good of all.”

Canada's Catholic Bishops also expressed their sympathy and support for the Muslim community in a statement on the day of the tragedy.

Saeed said the solidarity of faith communities is particularly powerful. He noted the goal of the gathering was to not simply react to tragedies like the one in Christchurch, but to take action to ensure these events do not occur again.

“We will only stop when everyone can peacefully worship in their house of God. Until they don’t need to worry about who’s standing behind them when they’re in their place of worship,” said Saeed. “It is not just a travesty for the Muslim community, but for the greater community at large.

“It shows we are all humans, we are all children of Adam. It was great to see the faiths come together.