

## Hundreds join Jewish community in mourning victims of Pittsburgh shooting

In a show of solidarity with the Jewish community, hundreds of Edmontonians packed a memorial service for the victims of a deadly anti-Semitic shooting in Pittsburgh over the weekend.

“The tragedy that struck our religion in Pittsburgh this past Shabbat shattered us,” Rabbi Zolly Claman said at the Oct. 29 memorial service in Edmonton’s Beth Israel Synagogue.

“The bullets hit 11 pure souls but were aimed at the 15 million Jews around the world.”

Eleven worshippers were killed when a gunman opened fire inside the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Witnesses told police he shouted anti-Semitic statements and began firing. The Oct. 27 shooting was immediately labelled a hate crime, and a suspect has been arrested and faces 29 charges.

Rabbi Claman said the Pittsburgh shooting is the greatest anti-Semitic attack in the history of North America, citing the Anti-Defamation League.



**Debby Shactor**

And the rise of violent anti-Semitism not only in North America but around the world is “deeply concerning,” added Debby Shactor, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

"The Jewish community is concerned with anti-Semitism not because it's offensive, but because it can be and often is lethal," Shoctor said.

In the shadow of that tragedy, more than 400 Edmontonians came to mourn with the city's Jewish community.

The turnout was "wonderful and heart-warming," said Dr. David Vickar, president of Congregation Beth Israel.

"It shows us that the haters are the minority," Rabbi Claman said.

According to Jewish tradition, a candle was lit for each of the 11 murdered men and women, who ranged in age from 54 to 97. The candles will burn throughout the seven days of Shiva (mourning).

Following a moment of silence, a rabbi led the mourners, including Mayor Don Iveson and leaders of Edmonton's Catholic, Muslim and Sikh communities, in the traditional prayer for departed souls.

"An attack on this faith community in Pittsburgh is seen as an attack upon all faith communities, to take nothing away from this particular hate that this perpetrator seemed to have against Jews in particular," said Julien Hammond, coordinator of the Archdiocese of Edmonton's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.

"This was an attack upon people of faith in a place of prayer."

The Pittsburgh shooting "touches too close to home" but Steven Shafir, president of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, said he's been comforted by the support of the Edmonton Police Service.

In the aftermath of the attack, Edmonton police increased its patrols of Jewish institutions in the city.

Insp. Nicole Chapdelaine told leaders of the Jewish community at the memorial that police protection will continue "wherever and whenever you require our assistance" .

"This horrific criminal event is evidence that sadly, there are still people in society who are motivated by hate," said Chapdelaine. "We must continue to remain vigilant, to work together to heighten our resolve to eliminate hate and acts inspired by hate."

Edmonton has not been immune to anti-Semitic attacks, said Mayor Don Iveson, citing swastika graffiti found in the southwest part of the city in July, and threats made to two synagogues in the past year.

"Groups espousing hatred somehow do operate here in our city," said Iveson, wearing a kippah, the small cap to cover his head in the synagogue according to the Jewish custom.

“However I am comforted as I hope you are as well, by how many Edmontonians have stood up refusing to give such groups any platform in our community,” he said. “This memorial is an opportunity for us to draw hope and strength from one another ... So let us focus on loving others and respecting differences and making peace in our communities, in our city, and in our world.”

The City of Edmonton lit the High Level Bridge blue and white, the colours of the Israeli flag, to honour the victims of the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting on the evening of the memorial.

An increase in violent acts against Jews specifically contributed to an overall three per cent increase in hate crimes in 2016, according to the [most recent Statistics Canada data](#). Out of 460 religious hate crimes, 221 targeted the Jewish population.

“Jews are consistently the most targeted religious minority by quite a wide margin, and those are absolute numbers. When you adjust for population, the numbers are considerably more stark,” said Shoctor.

Nevertheless, hate crimes make up less than one per cent of total crime in Canada, making the country one of the best places in the world in which to be Jewish or any minority, she noted.

Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith said in a letter to the Jewish community of Edmonton, that he is “deeply troubled that the racist attitudes that lead to anti-Semitism continue to exist in our society.”

“We condemn all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism and especially violence levelled at any time or from any source against Jews,” said Archbishop Smith.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops also wrote a similar [letter](#) to Jewish leaders across Canada.

In the end, Rabbi Claman told Edmonton mourners that it is love and faith in God that will win the war against hate.

“My help is from God who created heaven and earth, who does not let your foot slip. His guard does not slumber.”