

Masjid-e-Ali Mosque Hosts Vigil For Tree Of Life Synagogue Shooting Victims

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Community members of all faiths packed the Masjid-e-Ali mosque on Cedar Grove Lane for a vigil in support of the Tree of Life Synagogue shootings.

Nearly 200 people gathered at the Masjid-e-Ali mosque on Cedar Grove Lane Oct. 28 in a vigil for the victims of the Tree of Life synagogue shootings in Pennsylvania.

Organized by the Franklin Township Interfaith Council, the vigil featured comments from local politicians and faith leaders from throughout the township, state and Canada.

The vigil's purpose was to "reaffirm our commitment to reject any form of hate, bigotry and discrimination," said Alex Kharazi, president of the Interfaith Council.

"We are here to let everyone know that an attack and hate toward any innocent American, regardless of their faith or race, is an attack on all of us," he said. "We are here to let our Jewish friends know, especially the families affected by the shooting yesterday, that we share their pain."

"We are scared," Kharazi said. "Houses of worship used to be sanctuaries, a place of peace where one would go and pray and become closer to his or her creator. These days we have to

put fences around houses of worship, we have to hire security guards and look at any stranger with suspicious eyes.”

“Yet if any person wants to harm us, it appears he or she finds a way to do it,” he said.

“It is more important now than in any time in our recent history for us to come together to reject hate and bigotry in any form in public and in private,” he said. “We need to stand up for one another and fight for our shared values against hate and bigotry so that we can build a more peaceful, tolerant and united America for future generations.”

“We may be scared today, but together with love, respect and understanding we can make our nation a better place for our children,” he said.

“We’re all saddened by the tragedy in Pittsburgh,” Mayor Phil Kramer said. “Eleven people died for simply being Jews and gathering to pray.”

“It’s a breakdown in the fabric of civil society,” he said. “We live in an America where one can be the subject of violence because of their ethnicity, their religion, their gender identification or their civilly stated political views.”

“But we live in Franklin, and Franklin is an amazing place,” he said. “We are one of the most diverse communities in the entire country. We’re not just diverse, we do diversity well.”

Kramer praised the leaders in the mosque for working to bring together people of different faiths.

“I call on all of Franklin to follow their example,” he said. “If we fail, if we ignore the call, if we turn a blind eye, it can only get worse and Franklin may be next. But if we heed the call, if we follow the example of this mosque, if we stand up for good and right, and love and simple decency, then Franklin can remain safe as an example of how to diversity well.”

A visibly angry Rabbi Eli Garfinkel of Temple Beth El on Hamilton Street said people such as the man who killed 11 in the Pittsburgh temple are “ignorant losers, complete failures in life, dumber than a box of hair. Instead of looking to improve their lives, they look for someone to blame, and they always seem to find the Jews.”

“And when it’s not enough to blame the Jews, then they just get themselves a gun and start shooting,” he said.

“Each one of the innocent victims at Pitt Tree of Life Synagogue was a unique Jewish universe,” he said.

Garfinkel said mental health and gun control issues contribute to the violence, but there are other contributing factors.

“Those who want to murder, will find a way to murder,” he said. “Mental health and gun control are the talking head points that you will hear over and over. But nobody is talking about the real issue. The real issue is ignorance.”

“This ignorance generates lies, and so many people are telling such huge lies that we’re losing our social cohesion,” he said. “The lies spread and eat away at the bonds that connect one human to another. We have to attack this ignorance and replace it with truth.”

“If you’re not sure why you should care about what happened at the Tree of Life Synagogue, let me explain it to you,” Garfinkel said. “The monsters who came after us, will eventually come after you or someone you care about. We Jews are the canary in the coal mine. Whatever tragedy befalls us will eventually end up at your front door.”

Garfinkel said that Americans have to be more proactive to defend against hate and violence.

“When you hear a lie, you have to protest, otherwise the lie will grow and spread,” he said. “It is time for America to wake up. All of you in the room today are the alarm clock, and we are all the Tree of Life.”

Hatred comes out of ignorance, the Rev. Sharon Culley of the Somerset Presbyterian Church on John F. Kennedy Boulevard told the crowd.

“We stand with you side by side in solidarity, we hook arms and we pray together, that we stay together,” she said.

“As long as there’s breath in my body, you are my brothers and my sisters” she said. “If they do to you, they do to me.”

“I pray for us that this madness will cease to exist, that God will rise up a group of people to show that we are all made by God,” Culley said.

Also speaking were Muslim Imams from Piscataway, Newark and Canada, and Parvez Hamedani, the mosque’s president.

The Franklin Reporter & Advocate live-streamed the vigil:

Tree of Life massacre vigil at Masjid-e-Ali mosque.

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