

Hundreds attend Shelburne Vigil in response to mosque massacre

By Marni Walsh

Organizers of a Shelburne vigil, held in solidarity with the Muslim community in the wake of the Quebec City violence a week earlier, did not know what to expect last Sunday as they gathered at Trinity United Church for a contemplative service.

However, between 100 and 200 people attended each of two services to remember the six Canadians who were murdered, and the five seriously injured, in the shocking shooting at Centre Culture Islamique de Québec a week before.

Led by Rev. Candice Bist, interim minister for the Shelburne and Primrose United Church charge, the vigil included two Imams from Mosques in Brampton who travelled through wintry weather to share their reflections. Many members of their community accompanied them, joining in prayer along side Shelburne residents.

Bist invited the crowd to stand in solidarity with our Muslim neighbours, to say that we hold firmly in the belief that no matter what religion a person chooses to practise, or not, we know that the way forward is the way of compassion, solidarity with all people, and an understanding that each person on this earth is beloved and precious.

She said we must stand ready to open our eyes to the realities around us that allow hateful discourse to continue, young people to feel alienated, and communities to be shattered.

Imam Subedar, an accomplished Islamic scholar and leader of the new seminary in Brampton and Sheikh Umar Farooq Turab spoke to the crowd at the vigils. Students of the Mathabab Institute, both men spoke on diversity, which they said was created so that we might learn from one another.

They called the invitation to the vigil an honour for them and expressed sincere gratitude for the bridges that were being built between communities.

Bruce Ley, musical director of Trinity Church, led the Soul Singers choir, combined with pastoral charge choir members, to sing I Shall Be Released, featuring Russell Jones, as well as Lean on Me. Ley accompanied blues soloist Kim LeRiche in A Change is Gonna Come and soprano soloist Darcey Baker as she sang Somewhere from West Side Story.

Together the crowd sang Let There Be Peace on Earth. From the Muslim community, a young cantor sang from the Qur'an, and Malaika Qureshi a student of Islamic studies spoke to the crowd saying, I am hopeful . . . and will always cherish this moment of solidarity.

Former Shelburne mayor Ed Crewson reflected on the evening, as possibly the only political figure at the event.

We came together and expressed our unity in seeking peace and tolerance amongst all Canadians, he said. It was a powerful message delivered and received by many different people in many different ways. I was so happy that the Shelburne-Primrose Pastoral Charge hosted this event and so pleased that so many people came with such a strong desire for co-operation and mutual support in the face of such tragedy.

I was delighted to see the warm response from the Shelburne and area community, Bist said, but also the response of so many in the Muslim community who came both to hear their Imam's speaking and to be part of a unique gathering. Such warmth and appreciation from the Muslim community that made the evening for me to see our sanctuary filled with people from different faiths enjoying themselves together, eating and laughing and talking together.