

Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel Visits Beth Israel Synagogue in Edmonton, Alberta

Considering the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel's focus on multifaith cooperation, (left to right) Howard Starkman Q.C., Marvin Abugov and Sol Rolingher Q.C. explain the Phoenix MultiFaith Society For Harmony concept to Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger, as illustrated in the Beth Israel Congregation's 100th Anniversary Gala Booklet (see page 2).

Beth Israel President Michael Zabłudowski, who expedited the impromptu meeting, joins in on the discussion just prior to the Chief Rabbi providing his gala dinner address.



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phoenix multi-faith Society for Harmony



Phoenix Multi-Faith Society Signatories: L-R: Sol Rolingher (Beth Shalom), EPS Police Chief Mike Boyd, Larry Shaben (Chair, Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities), Howard Starkman.

On Halloween 2000, the Beth Shalom and Beth Israel synagogues in Edmonton were firebombed. At noon November 12, 2003, three college-aged youth threw a rock through the glass plate of the Muslim Community of Edmonton (MCE) mosque in Edmonton. These are but two examples of the hate incidents that the Jewish and Muslim communities have experienced over the years.

Both Edmonton Jewish and Muslim community leaders stood side-by-side and condemned these attacks. The perpetrator of the Beth Shalom incident, a 21 year-old male, was apprehended with the help of the Muslim community and was brought forward to apologize to the Jewish community - to make restitution and to face charges. The Beth Israel Synagogue and Muslim Community of Edmonton Mosque perpetrators were never found.

Over the years, incidents like these have caused concern and unease among the 5,000 members of the Edmonton Jewish community and the 35,000 members of the Edmonton Muslim community. From time to time, historical and current world events have tended to heighten tension and risk of hate-bias incidents against these communities.

The events of September 11th, 2001, created fear of a backlash against the Muslim community. Sol Rolingher and Larry Shaben, leaders of the Jewish and Muslim communities respectively stated that matters of Middle East concern, and indeed even those of 9/11 in New York City, should and would remain in those locales. Both Mr. Shaben and Mr. Rolingher, along with other church and political leaders such as former Mayor Bill Smith, publicly stated that there should not be any backlash or negative reaction against the local Muslim community as a result of the actions of others elsewhere. The outcome was that there were no significant incidents against the Muslim community in Edmonton.

In the years that followed, leaders from both the Jewish and Muslim communities have worked closely with the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) anti-Hate Bias unit to identify ways to foster harmony. (Incidentally, both the Jewish and Muslim communities fully supported the creation of the EPS Hate Bias Crime Unit and the Chief's Advisory Committee.) Through facilitated meetings from 2002-2004 common ground was identified leading to the creation of by-laws for a society that were acceptable to both sides. 2005 was spent fine-tuning the nature of membership that resulted in the inclusion of the Christian faith given the shared Abrahamic roots. Ironically, a graffiti incident at the Beth Shalom synagogue, Christmas Eve 2005, brought the whole issue to full focus when leaders of all denominations came together to denounce this event.

The incorporation of the Phoenix Multi-Faith Society for Harmony is signed by: Sol Rolingher, Larry Shaben, Archbishop Thomas Collins, Howard Starkman, Nashir Karmali, and EPS Chief Mike Boyd. Former Chiefs of Police including Bob Wasylshen, Fred Rayner, Darryl DaCosta were fully supportive of the concept during their tenure. The Society's objectives are:

- to create a forum through which dialogue and discussion can take place with a view to facilitating understanding and respect for all faiths; and
- to seek continued peaceful co-existence and positive relations amongst all faiths by fostering open communications, interfaith dialogue, education and participation amongst our community members and the community at large with particular emphasis on initiatives to address and eliminate intercommunity negative stereotyping, hatred, bias and prejudice.