

Interfaith service celebrates Edmonton's diverse cultures

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Whether you are Christian, Jewish or Muslim, December 2009 is a month to celebrate, with three major religious holidays falling within the same month for the first time in 30 years.

To mark the occasion, about 80 people gathered at City Hall on Sunday afternoon to sample Christmas and Hannukah treats and listened to Middle Eastern and North African music.

Edmonton's Interfaith Centre for Education and Action, and Phoenix Multifait Society for Harmony organized the event to continue to promote peace and understanding between all people, said Interfaith Centre co-ordinator and Phoenix



RICK MacWILLIAM, THE JOURNAL

Rabbi David Kunin, wearing a kippah, listens to Mayor Stephen Mandel while waiting for his turn to speak on Sunday at an interfaith service at City Hall.

Society treasurer Netta Phillet.

"I hope people come away with an

appreciation for diversity because that is what both organizations are

all about," Phillet said. "We mustn't just accept it, we must embrace it."

Rabbi David Kunin explained the history of Hanukkah, Maj. Larry Wright, a chaplain with the Canadian Forces, talked about Christmas, and Shaykh Zak Sheikh told the audience about Eid ul Adha and Hijira, which marks the Islamic new year.

An understanding and friendship between different religions is especially important in Edmonton, because it is one of the most diverse cities in Canada, Phillet said.

"We have to all get with the idea that we are all living together and we have to get along," she said.

Although it seems like the rest of the world is becoming more polarized, people from different faiths in Edmonton are in fact coming closer together, said Phoenix Society board member Marvin Abugov.

"We wanted to remind everybody that what built Edmonton was interfaith co-operation, not just between the three Abrahamic faiths, but all faiths," Abugov said.

Part of Edmonton's appeal is because the city has such a diverse population, said Mayor Stephen Mandel, who spoke at the event.

"We're blessed in this city to have so many different groups of people who have chosen Edmonton as their home so that we can thrive upon that and make it the kind of city the world will envy," Mandel said.

The University of Alberta's Middle Eastern and North African music ensemble, led by ethnomusicologist Michael Frishkopf, performed for the audience and people sampled treats such as sufganiyot, doughnuts traditionally served during Hanukkah.

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