



Dear Interfaith Community Leaders and Members,

My name is Rev. Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum and I am the Associate Pastor at *Holy Spirit Lutheran Church* - an inclusive and welcoming congregation of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*. My partner in ministry Rev. Trish Schmermund and I are writing to you to extend an invitation to join a letter writing campaign in support of our Muslim friends in Edmonton, Alberta.

As many of us have become aware, on January 25, 2019 members of a well-known hate group entered *Al Rashid Mosque* while the community was gathering for prayer. This was a serious act of intimidation and provocation that led the community of faith to rightly report the incident to the police. Then, on January 29, 2019 a second disturbance occurred at *Dar Al Sunnah Mosque* by two men. Again, the police were called to help the community to deal with the situation. These stories soon caught the attention of several news outlets – however no direct action has been taken thus far by police or the City to help the members of the Muslim community feel safe.

<https://www.thestar.com/amp/edmonton/2019/01/25/wolves-of-odin-visit-to-edmonton-mosque-prompts-police-investigation.html>

As leaders of a community of faith, we are horrified that hate / white supremacy groups think they should be allowed to enter a place of worship and disrupt those gathering in peace. It is even more heinous of an act considering January 29, 2019 marks the anniversary of the *Islamic Cultural Center of Quebec City* shooting, during which six worshipers were killed and another nineteen were injured –an act of terror that awakened many Canadians to the fact that “home grown” hate groups are alive and well within the country.

Upon speaking to members of the Muslim community in Edmonton, as well as Hate Free YEG and other concerned citizens, we have decided to start a letter writing campaign in conjunction with a call to action from within the Islamic community to make a difference in our city. Accordingly, attached to this letter you will find a call to action written by two Muslim community members who have asked for letters to be written to elected officials and law enforcement members calling for an end to hate groups and their actions of intimidation and violence in our city.

We hope that you will join their call to action in your community. We are asking that you would use the information provided to join your voice with theirs in hopes of creating a world where we can all safely live our lives and practice our faiths without fear of hate. Holy Spirit Lutheran Church will be holding a letter writing event called “Spread the Love” on Friday, February 15, 2019 from 7pm – 9pm. All are welcome to join us as we gather in hope to advocate for a community where we can all belong. Light refreshments will be provided. If you would like more information on this letter writing campaign or how you can help, please do not hesitate to contact me via email:pastorlindsey@holyspiritalutheran.ca

In peace, hope, and solidarity,
Rev. Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum
They / Them / Theirs
Associate Pastor Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Rev. Trish Schmermund
She / Her / Hers
Head Pastor Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

A Call to Action

Whenever I read a story of a hateful incident on FB, my first inclination is to choose the SAD emoji. I make a conscious decision not to choose the ANGRY emoji as hate and violence make me sad, not angry. I also believe that being angry will cloud our perceptions and we would react irrationally (much like the perpetrator of the hate).

Today, however, I chose to be ANGRY. Yesterday after our community's Friday prayers at the Al Rashid mosque here in Edmonton, the *Clann* entered my community's sacred space and confronted worshippers as they were leaving.

Our mosques are open spaces. You do not need an invitation to come to visit with good intentions. The *Clann* "exploration" of the mosque does not come from a good place. It has only whipped up fear in our community as our voices to stem the increase in hate groups gets swept under.

Whenever I raise the issue of hateful incidents that I myself have encountered or read about, the response almost always gravitates to "this is just a small group, the rest of Canadians are good people" - which I whole-heartedly agree with. Nonetheless, just as how the Muslim community has been held accountable for the very small minority in our fringe who cause violence (in words and action), the larger Canadian community and our politicians should ACT NOW to STOP these hate groups from flourishing.

Imagine the outrage if a handful of so-called Muslims with known ties to extremism entered a church here in Edmonton!

The irony does not escape me that yesterday evening I was at an event talking about fear and hate in light of the 2nd year anniversary of the horrific and tragic mosque shooting in Quebec City.

I talked about how bridge-building and allyship is so important to overcome fears on all sides; to ensure that our fears do not define us or our relationships, and how creating positive experiences with each other will help in quelling fears so that it does not ferment and fester into hate.

The good fight is not over. We can do more. We can do better.

For non-Muslims wanting to do something in solidarity with your Muslim friends, family and neighbours:

- Write to your elected officials at all levels of government to take right wing / hate groups seriously and actively implement programs for squashing them. The threat is not being taken seriously enough to warrant action and it needs to be made clear from folks from around Edmonton who have the privilege to leverage - that this is unacceptable.
- Tell them that you want them to put pressure on law enforcement agencies to take these groups seriously as a threat to public safety.
- Make it clear that this is NOT just a Muslim issue. It affects all of us.

- If you know Muslims personally, check in with them. Maybe they feel unsafe attending prayers or riding transit. Consider accompanying folks or giving rides. Run errands together. Most importantly be open to the ways they invite your support and care – always ask them for their suggestions rather than assuming you know how best to help your neighbor.
- Support groups like Hate Free Yeg, Black Lives Matter - Edmonton & Area Chapter and your local anti-racism activists/advocates.
- If you know anyone who runs a business or organization talk to them about taking their pledge to maintain a hate free space <https://hatefreeyeg.com/campaign-1/> . The more businesses and organizations that are educated and opposed to these people the less room they have to grow.
- Actually do this.

Yeah, demonstrations of solidarity with Muslim communities is fine but many folks know the vast majority of Edmontonians are not members of overt hate groups and if you're going to expend some effort, there isn't really much done by such demonstrations except liberal backpatting and media attention shifting.

Yeah, that's fine but it doesn't actually break up hate cells. The threat is not being taken seriously enough to warrant action and it needs to be made clear from folks who this doesn't affect and who have the privilege to leverage that this is unacceptable.

Mayor Don Iveson

The Honourable Don Iveson,
 Mayor of Edmonton,
 Floor, City Hall
 1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
 Edmonton, AB
 T5J 2R7
<https://coewebapps.edmonton.ca/contact>
 mayor/

**Hate Crimes &
 Violent Extremism Unit**

Sergeant Gary Willits
 Hate Crimes & Violent Extremism Unit
 9620 103A Ave NW
 Edmonton, AB
 T5H0H7
Gary.willits@edmontonpolice.ca

Ward Councillor listing

https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_organization/city-councillors.aspx

[Address of recipient]

[Address of Community and logo]

Dear _____,

I am writing to you today as a community member of Ward _____ and of _____ (faith community) in Edmonton.

We have learned this week that our neighbors and friends in faith at the *Al Rashid Mosque* and *Dar Al Sunnah Mosque* here in Edmonton were visited by a group of men who belong to a local hate group. These visits scared their community of faith during their time of prayers and has left us all wondering if we are safe in our community.

We belong to a _____ (church, mosque, temple, gathering place) that loves and welcomes all. We know that we are safe to worship, have fun, and gather together as a community of faith. This is something that has been put at risk for our Muslim friends at *Al Rashid Mosque* and *Dar Al Sunnah Mosque* this week - and that is not okay!

We are writing to ask that you do everything in your power to raise our concern that hate would not be allowed to make a home in our city. That law enforcement would take seriously any transgressions by known hate groups like the one that happened at *Al Rashid Mosque* on January 25, 2019 and at *Dar Al Sunnah Mosque* on January 29, 2019. We would also like to see increased police surveillance of the activities of such groups and possible regulations to curb them. We ask this so that all can feel safe to worship, gather, and grow with us here in Edmonton – without fear that they will have to defend their beliefs from hate groups in our city. Please do what you can to end hate and to stem the rise of hate groups like the *Wolves of Odin*, *Canadian Infidels*, and *The Clann* in our city.

We are counting on your support in making Edmonton a safe and welcoming community for us all!

Sincerely,

Member of _____ (community) in Ward _____

SPREAD THE LOVE

ANTI-HATE LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN

FEBRUARY 15TH 7PM-9PM



@ HOLY SPIRIT LUTHERAN CHURCH 11223 51 AVE NW