

Muslims, Christians unite in prayer against violence

By [Paul Woolverton](#)

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About 100 people gathered at the Masjid Al Madina mosque in Hoke County a week after the massacre in New Zealand.

RAEFORD — A week after a gunman killed at least 50 people worshipping at two mosques in New Zealand and injured dozens of others, Muslims and Christians prayed together at a mosque in Hoke County on Friday to show their solidarity in the face of terrorism.



Chris Stevenson, left, greets Muhammed Islam, right, in a line of visitors to Masjid Al Madina mosque during an interfaith prayer service on Friday, March 22, 2019. The service was held in the wake of the shootings in New Zealand, and as a time to denounce the acts and to honor and remember the victims and survivors. Stevenson says he had strong ties to Christchurch, New Zealand, and wanted to support his Muslim neighbors.

[Melissa Sue Gerrits/The Fayetteville Observer]

“We know that terrorists have no religion, they have no ideology,” said Muhammad Lodhi, a volunteer at the Masjid Al Madina mosque, to about 100 people gathered for the interfaith service. “They have no name also. They are just called as terrorists.”

Islam, Christianity and Judaism are all religions of peace and do not teach terrorism, Lodhi said. Pastors from three churches in Moore County and some of their church members attended. Several spoke to the assembly.



*Members of Masjid Al Madina mosque join for an interfaith prayer service on Friday, March 22, 2019.
[Melissa Sue Gerrits/The Fayetteville Observer]*

“We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for welcoming us here,” said John Arnold, a member of the Congregational Church of Pinehurst.

“Like everyone, we’re mortified, feel horrible about the massacre in New Zealand,” Arnold said. “And we hope and pray that somehow our world can come together, and we can understand that we are all God’s children. And that it makes no difference — we have different ways of believing — but we all worship the same God. And we all know that love is what it’s all about. And we hope and pray that we can share love for one another.”

News accounts say the man who killed the worshipers last week in New Zealand is a white nationalist who drew inspiration, according to a manifesto he wrote, in part from an American white supremacist who in 2015 killed nine people during a prayer service at an African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina.

“It is important for us to come and travel to be with you, so that you know that our hearts break,” said pastor Terry Yasuko Ogawa of the Congregational Church. She said she grew up in Charleston.



Terry Yasuko Ogawa, pastor of the Congregational Church in Pinehurst, hugs friends at the Masjid Al Madina mosque after an interfaith prayer service on Friday, March 22, 2019. [Melissa Sue Gerrits/The Fayetteville Observer]

“How horrible is it that somebody can come in where someone is praying and decide that that act is wrong.”

In a society that worships money and greed, “it’s a radical act to still gather and pray,” she added. “And how much more radical to gather and pray across the lines that society would tell us we should never cross.”

The Rev. Paul Murphy of Trinity AME Zion Church in Southern Pines said he was left speechless by the New Zealand massacre.

“In the midst of atrocity, God has reached out to you all to embrace me and all of us into his peace and into his sabbath, and I thank him for this gift,” he said.

Lodhi said the response from around the world in support of the Muslim people following the massacre has been overwhelming and heartwarming.

“Religious figures have come out and have said very frankly and very openly that they are against this type of prejudice and this type of supremacy of anybody,” he said.

After the service ended, members of the mosque warmly greeted their visitors, and some later had a meal with them.

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