

# Ottawa community stands together against hate crimes

BY JAMES MORGAN ON NOVEMBER 20TH, 2016

There was no room for hate when 600 people crowded into Ottawa's Congregation Machzikei Hadas on Saturday. The synagogue had been vandalized with spray-painted swastikas and other anti-Semitic messages the day before. It was one of a series of hate crimes that happened in Ottawa during the past week. Other Jewish facilities targeted were another synagogue and a small prayer center. A Muslim mosque was vandalized, and so was Parkdale United Church where minister Rev. Anthony Bailey and many members of the congregation are African-Canadian. Congregation Machzikei Hadas invited the community to attend a special Thanksgiving and Solidarity event during its regular Sabbath services.



Congregation Machzikei Hadas in Ottawa. Photo: James Morgan



Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson. Photo: James Morgan

Rabbi Reuven Bulka, a well-known and respected community leader, is the Rabbi Emeritus of Machzikei Hadas. He said "this is the face of Ottawa" in reaction to the overflow crowd of people from all religions and races who attended the event. Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, already in the city for a Liberal Party convention, attended and offered her support for the religious communities affected by the crimes. Mayor Jim Watson also offered his support. In a dramatic show of interfaith cooperation, Samy Metwally, Imam of the Ottawa mosque also spoke.

Police Chief Charles Bordeleau, whose force has been investigating the incidents, told the audience that officers made an arrest early Saturday morning of a suspect who was vandalizing the Soloway Jewish Community Centre near Carling Avenue and Highway 417. The suspect has made a court appearance and faces numerous charges. The suspect is also under 18 years of age and cannot be named under Canadian law. After the service ended, Chief Bordeleau said officers are investigating further connections between the suspect and the other incidents.

Mayor Watson said he's pleased there has been an arrest and is sure Ottawa residents are relieved, but hopes there are no "copycat" hate crimes following what has happened during the past week.



Kanata Mosque Imam Sikander Hashmi. Photo: James Morgan

Sikander Hashmi, Imam of the suburban Kanata Mosque, also attended the solidarity event at Machzikei Hadas said it was unfortunate the events of the past week took place but said "we've all got to stand together" as a community against racism and religious discrimination.

Rabbi Bulka founded Ottawa's annual Kindness Week back in 2008. The event

has gone national and is now part of an organization called Kind Canada that encourages Canadians to show kindness to each other. To help people spread kindness, the organization produces Kindness Cards which were being handed out at the event at the synagogue on Saturday. After a week of shocking and upsetting acts of hate in Ottawa, the cards are a small part of a big effort to show the community is united respect and tolerance.



Ottawa Chief of Police Charles Bordeleau. Photo: James Morgan



Kindness Card. Photo: James Morgan

A solidarity walk against the recent hate crimes in Ottawa is planned for Sunday.