

## TOMPKINSVILLE

# In wake of shooting, interfaith leaders gather in mosque

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Less than a week after two people unleashed gunfire in Jersey City, killing a veteran police officer and three people inside a kosher grocery store, community and religious leaders congregated at the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center in Tompkinsville to offer solidarity in the face of the anti-Semitic attack.

Rabbi Michael Howald, co-chair of the Staten Island Inter-Religious Leadership Coalition, called the meeting, which was held in a mosque, “symbolic.”

“It’s a statement that on Staten Island the community is united against this,” Howald said.

Leaders of various faiths and committees spoke to the importance of showing unified disdain for acts of anti-Semitism — a sentiment Howald echoed — however, the rabbi feels that incidents like the one in Jersey City are happening too often.

“To me, the importance is for us to gather together and affirm once again, unfortunately, that we stand together in our sorrows and that we are willing to work together to bring to the end one day — I hope — this scourge of anti-Semitism,” he said.

Imam Dr. Tahir Kukaj of the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center, said that the gathering was indicative that “we mourn, and we are in pain as much as our Jewish brothers,” and shows the world “that we are not only together when we eat and celebrate at religious festivities we have, but also we mourn together.”

The Rev. Dr. Victor A. Brown, of Mt. Sinai United Christian Church in Tompkinsville, said that the gathering comes beneath the “heavy cloud of senseless tragedy and awful calamity.”

“With heavy hearts we come with the question: When will enough truly be enough? How many more midnights of these vigils must we convene before the sun-lit day of universal peace emerges?” Brown said.

Congressman Max Rose, D-Staten Island/South Brooklyn, strongly condemned the attacks, noting, “Anti-Semitism is not something that we can act as if it is not happening.”

“Today we have to say if you play footsie with anti-Semites, if you support anti-Semites, if you believe that neo-Nazi movements should be ignored as they grow worldwide, if you think anti-Semitism and white supremacy has any role online on our social media platforms, then your thoughts and prayers are no longer welcome,” Rose said.

“I’m tired of hearing the same thing,” Rose added, “This is a problem that we have got to tackle head-on.”

Rose praised the work of law enforcement — specifically the NYPD, who had officers in attendance — and warned those who gathered Monday night to “not leave this occasion today thinking that your work is done, thinking that we have done enough.”

“It’s time that we call on anyone that purports to be a leader ... that wherever anti-Semitism rears its roaring head, we do everything in our power to reject it. And then we say separately, that when hatred rears its roaring head in any form, we do the same,” Rose said fervently.

Lori Weintrob, history professor and director of the Wagner College Holocaust Center, said that anti-Semitism begins with “small acts,” expressing a similar perspective to NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea, who, following the attacks, pushed back against any effort to downplay the severity of seemingly-minor incidents such as a “sign



**In the wake of a fatal shooting last week inside a kosher deli a community gathering was held at the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center. At the event, Congressman Max Rose condemned the attack.** Photos by Joseph Ostapiuk, Staten Island Advance



**Rabbi Gerald Sussman, of Temple Emanu-El, spoke during the gathering in Tompkinsville.**

etched on a window or transit,” saying that he sees a “relationship between those incidents” and the recent shooting.

“There’s an escalation,” Shea said. “There’s a common theme here, it’s ignorance and it’s hate.”

Weintrob spoke to the importance of addressing those issues. “You must stand up and fight against hate from the smallest first manifestation and not wait for it to grow,” she said.