

‘Every person deserves to rest in peace’: American Muslims raising money to repair vandalized Jewish cemetery.

By Colby Itkowitz, *Washington Post*, 21 February 2017



An American flag still stands next to one of more than 170 toppled Jewish headstones after a weekend vandalism attack on Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery in University City, a suburb of St Louis, Mo., on Feb. 21. (Tom Gannam/Reuters)

After the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in St. Louis over the long holiday weekend, an incident in which more than 150 headstones were toppled or damaged, two American Muslim activists started a fundraiser to help pay for needed repairs.

“Through this campaign, we hope to send a united message from the Jewish and Muslim communities that there is no place for this type of hate, desecration, and violence in America,” the fundraising page on the site LaunchingGood reads. “We pray that this restores a sense of security and peace to the Jewish-American community who has undoubtedly been shaken by this event.”

Within a few hours of going up Tuesday afternoon, the page had exceeded its goal of raising \$20,000.

Tarek El-Messidi, who created the campaign with fellow activist Linda Sarsour said when he saw the news about the vandalism at Chesed Shel Emeth Society cemetery in the St. Louis suburb of University City, he was reminded of a story about the prophet Muhammad, who had stood up when a Jewish funeral procession passed. When asked why, he said, “Is it not a human soul?”

“That story goes to show more than anything the humanity of the prophet. ... We should bring the story to life here and show every person deserves to rest in peace,” El-Messidi said. “This is a great way to show respect and honor for our Jewish cousins.”

Through his nonprofit, Celebrate Mercy, El-Messidi’s mission is to not only educate people about the prophet’s teachings but also to rally Muslims to respond to evil with good. A national Muslim leader in Knoxville, Tenn., he helped launch a Muslim-led fundraiser for the victims of the San Bernardino terrorist attack in 2015 that ultimately raised more than \$215,000. In 2012, after the attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi that killed

Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans, El-Messidi called on Muslims to write condolence letters to the Stevens's family and presented 8,000 of them to Steven's sister that Thanksgiving.

Since the rise of hate crime incidents after the November election, both Muslim and Jewish communities in the United States have been targeted, their institutions are threatened, their people bullied. It's a shared experience that is bringing them together in solidarity, El-Messidi said.

"This is really a human issue," he said. "But out of this horrible election cycle, something beautiful has come out of it and [Muslims and Jews have] bonded together to support each other and stand up to this hate. Politics can get in the way of our basic humanity; I hope this breaks through all those walls, no pun intended, to help bring us closer together."

To underscore this point, El-Messidi shared a message he received from a woman named Barbara:

You have helped to heal the pain in my heart. I live in Los Angeles but was born and raised in St. Louis. I have family buried in that cemetery and was heartbroken seeing the desecration of the final resting place of some of my loved ones. Your kind and loving spirit gives hope to me that we can have mutual respect and tolerance of our differences and shared humanity. Bless you.

El-Messidi said he has been communicating with the director of the cemetery who was going to send him an exact estimate of the damages, but he doesn't have that figure yet. If they raise more than is needed, he said they will keep a leftover fund that will be used to counter anti-Semitic hate.

Parliament Calls to Stand with Faiths Rising Against Hate

Parliament of Religions, 22 February 2017 https://parliamentofreligions.org/blog/2017-02-22-1416/parliament-calls-stand-faiths-rising-against-hate?mc_cid=8d659cef73&mc_eid=fe98ecef9b



The image shows a screenshot of a crowdfunding campaign page. The main title is "Muslims Unite to Repair Jewish Cemetery" with a subtext "donate to repair 100+ graves" and a link "LaunchGood.com/Cemetery". The campaign is located in University City, MO. The current amount raised is \$85,463, which is 427% of the \$20,000 goal. There are 3067 supporters and 26 days left. The campaign is partially funded and tax deductible. The hashtag #RestInPeace is visible at the bottom left.

University City, MO	Causes
\$85,463	funded of \$20,000 goal
3067	supporters
26	days left
PARTIAL FUNDING	This campaign will collect all funds raised by Mar 20, 2017 11:00 PM.
TAX DEDUCTIBLE	CelebrateMercy is a Registered 501(c)(3), Tax ID 274171311.

Hate has a history. And it extends into the present.

Hate has a religious history. And that religious history also extends into the present.

But hate has its challengers, too, both secular and sacred, both civic and religious, in the past and the present.

Recent and current political campaigns and political reigns have stoked the embers of hate, but some political leaders have also stirred the oracles of reconciliation and harmony.

All religious and spiritual communities, and individuals of faith and spirit, must now decide again, as the old hymn puts it, "which side are you on?"

Silence and inaction is not an option.

Thanks to what is most sacred for the communities of faith that historically have been the victims of hate for taking the lead in showing us all what it means to choose compassion, solidarity, and mutuality.

Thanks to the Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Pagan and all of our sister communities rising in love for showing us the way, not just with words but even more importantly with actions.

The Parliament of the World's Religions hopes these examples will provoke you to speak your own words and enact your own commitments in this time of heightened hate.

