

Religious leaders call for interfaith effort to reduce violence

By **Niraj Warikoo**, Detroit Free Press, 23 April 2014

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Rabbi Harold Loss of Temple Israel, left, Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit, and Rabbi Joseph Krakoff of Congregation Shaarey Zedek talk before an interfaith news conference at Second Ebenezer Church in Detroit. / Kathleen Galligan/Detroit Free Press



Rhonda Kennedy, FBI Community Outreach Specialist, left, and Bushra M. Alawie, FBI Office of Public Affairs, chat with Fr. Steve Pullis, secretary to Detroit Archbishop Allen Vigneron after the conference Wednesday.

U.S. Attorney Barbara McQuade joined metro Detroit religious leaders today to call for cooperation among different faiths to boost programs aimed at ending crime and violence.

“We...must join with one another to build a community of peace and compassion,” they said in a joint statement released at a news conference at Second Ebenezer Church in Detroit.

“We ask all the people in our community, not only to raise their voices in prayer, but to also do the hard work that building community and living in peace together demands.”

The news conference was organized by the Religious Leaders Forum of Metropolitan Detroit, which intends to hold about a dozen meetings in houses of worship in coming months to address the issue of violence.

Today’s event is the latest effort by congregations to combat tensions in the region after the beating earlier this month in Detroit of Steve Utash by a group of young men in what prosecutors call a hate crime. The incident has garnered national attention as a symbol of Detroit’s challenges and has prompted several rallies in Detroit churches calling for racial unity and peace.

The news conference was attended by the heads of some of the biggest Jewish, Muslim, and Christian congregations in metro Detroit. Rabbi Harold Loss of Michigan’s largest synagogue, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, attended, as did Imam Hassan Qazwini of the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn. Detroit Deputy Mayor Isaiah (Ike) McKinnon also spoke.

“We should respect one another...as agents of peace,” said Archbishop of Detroit Allen Vigneron, the spiritual leader of 1.3 million Catholics in southeastern Michigan. Vigneron said afterward that promoting family values is one way to help reduce crime and poverty in the region.

Bishop Edgar Vann of Second Ebenezer said his church and many others have been working on programs to help reduce violence. He said the coalition hopes to “build a nexus of ongoing programs” to reduce tensions.

“We open our doors all the time,” Vann said. “These houses of worship are resources for healing and stemming the tide of violence.”

McQuade said the U.S. Attorney’s office has been working for years with local faith groups on various programs that help youths and reduce gun violence.

“We’re all in this together,” McQuade said. When one person is a victim of crime, “we all feel the pain, we all feel the anger.”

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