

DMARC Memorial Service Statement – Ross Daniels, DMARC President

Today is the day I prayed would not happen during my short tenure leading the Des Moines Area Religious Council – the day that I would be called upon to futilely try to make some sense of a tragedy that is unexplainable to me – a tragedy that has claimed lives within the spiritual families of many in our own community – that is the very definition of a hate crime – a crime against all of humanity.

Raising money, developing organizational strategy, and assisting in the administration of DMARC's many critical direct service and interfaith educational programs seem so easy compared to this call, a call for which I feel so woefully unprepared.

Nearly 200 members of at least four of the world's greatest faiths perished in the violence last week in Mumbai. Jews and Muslims – Hindus and Christians – all faith traditions that come together in Des Moines both peacefully and respectfully to do the important work of our wonderful organization, realizing the value in accomplishing our work TOGETHER – that it is our unity makes us stronger.

I am not a member of the clergy, nor do I profess to be a theologian in even the weakest sense of the word, but I do not for a second believe that the holy texts of our faiths – the Torah, the Koran, the Bible, the Gita, Mahabharata and Vedas, sanction in any way the massacre of innocents such as we witnessed last week. On the contrary, the Koran teaches that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all – people of the book – cousins if you will, all descendants of Abraham. The Hindu Law of Manu contains the 5 rules of "right conduct", the "Niyama", that correspond so closely to the Ten Commandments familiar to most, if not all in this room.

The basic tenets of each of our faiths are in fact far more similar than they are different. So too are we all far more similar to each other than we are different.

As I believe that we each have the power of free will, the power to individually choose to act for good or ill, I believe that God weeps for all of us at times such as these. Conversely, I believe that God heals when we come together as a community at times such as tonight to celebrate our similarities, try to briefly put aside our differences, and recognize that we are all created in God's divine image.

The events in India last week affected me in a very personal way that I am still attempting to come to grips with. I currently have a niece studying in India, who has on several occasions taken rest in the very Chabad house in Mumbai that was one of the sights of the senseless slaughter. She knew Rabbi Holtzberg, his wife Rivka, and their children, having spent the Jewish festival of Passover with them two years ago.

My beloved wife Amy and I have spent over a month in India over the past two years. Our first trip included a pilgrimage to the holy Hindu Temple of Tirupati for the first birthday of a close friend's daughter. Last year, we were welcomed and treated as family for the wedding of a close friend in Vijayawada. In India as well as Israel and Europe I have been fortunate enough to stand in awe of Temples, Mosques, and Cathedrals holy to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. This week I have again found it incomprehensible that the same peoples capable of creating such beauty in the name of God, would also be capable of perpetuating such horror.

My personal belief is that tonight is our opportunity to grieve as one faith community, to begin to heal as one faith community, and to begin to move beyond mere tolerance of other faith traditions to mutual appreciation. Each of us ultimately desires peace for ourselves, for our families, and for our nations, however if this desire for peace were easily attainable, we would already have achieved it. It is because the pursuit of peace is so hard, that we must work towards it in small steps, and why I pray that we will begin to take those first steps together tonight, as one united faith community.

To each of you, I would like to offer you in Hebrew ōshalomö, in Arabic ōsalaam aleihumö, in Hindi ōshAntiö, and in English, ōPeace be with youö.

Amen.