

After terror attack, a 'heartwarming' show of support

Fundraising effort for new mosque to show Muslims they are 'loved, valued, and not alone'

MICHAEL STAPLES
THE DAILY GLEANER

Dr. Maher Alrawwaf's faith in mankind has been renewed.

A fundraising effort to help Fredericton's Muslim community build a new mosque has been launched as a way to show support after Sunday night's attack on a mosque in Quebec City, which left six people dead and at least 19 others wounded.

The results have been impressive.

"It is very heartwarming if this project goes ahead," Alrawwaf told the Daily Gleaner, speaking as a member of the Muslim community. "A bigger space [is needed], not [necessarily] a new mosque, but a new mosque would be a dream come true."

The small, former Anglican church on Lincoln Road was refurbished to serve the local Islamic community, but that community has outgrown the building in recent months.

"After the Syrian newcomers showed up, we would definitely benefit from a bigger mosque," Alrawwaf said.

The fundraising is spearheaded by employees of Salesforce.com's Fredericton office., who wanted to do something to support Fredericton's Muslim community in the wake of the attack on a Quebec City mosque on Sunday that left six people dead.



Dr. Maher Alrawwaf, a member of the local Islamic community, said he is proud and honoured that people have been donating to help build a new mosque. PHOTO: MICHAEL STAPLES/THE DAILY GLEANER

Launched only Monday night, a GoFundme page had raised nearly \$8,000 by Tuesday afternoon.

"Along with Canadians across the country, the terrorist attack at the Quebec City

mosque deeply shook employees of Salesforce.com's Fredericton office (as well as our friends and families)," the pitch on the fundraising website reads. "We wanted to send a strong signal of support for

the Muslim community in our area."

Ben Conoley, who works for Salesforce.com, said the original goal was to

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raise \$1,000. Within an hour they had \$500.

"I set it to \$5,000 before I went to bed [Monday] night and we just keep moving the target up," he said. "I think people realize that it's not enough to just sit around and talk to people about what's wrong, particularly with the way things have gone on in the States recently," referring to President Donald Trump's new travel restriction order that bars visitors from seven Muslim countries.

"It is important for us to show Muslims in Fredericton that they are welcome in our community, especially during this difficult time. We invite people from the Fredericton community to join us in showing our Muslim neighbours that

they are loved, valued, and not alone," reads the campaign's pitch.

Conoley said the effort has the potential to go beyond the goal of \$10,000.

"It's happening very quickly," he said. "When people from outside my circle learn about it, I think the potential is there."

Alex LeBlanc, executive director of the New Brunswick Multicultural Association, said he thinks the fundraiser is a wonderful initiative.

"It's a very concrete way that people in Fredericton can express their support and tell the Muslim community in Fredericton that they are welcome here and that they want to help them establish a new permanent, adequate home in our community. It's just a way people can plug in to this."

Maher said he would like to offer everyone who has donated to the cause "a big thank you and a big hug."

The gofundme website can be found at: <https://www.gofundme.com/fredericton-islamicassociationfunds>

Meanwhile, a candlelight vigil is planned at the mosque Wednesday night for victims of Sunday's attack.

Organizer Larry Kennedy, a retired federal civil servant, said it will be a quiet show of support.

Evening prayers at the mosque start at 8 p.m.

It was during evening prayers when a gunman walked into the Quebec City mosque and started shooting, Kennedy noted.

"Recognizing that, as they are heading to worship, [it shows] we support them."