

Response to mass shooting at California synagogue emphasizes shared humanity

“We are all created equal,” said the pastor of the Presbyterian church where the 19-year-old shooter is a member.

by [The Christian Science Monitor](#) staff and [Christian Century staff](#) in the [May 22, 2019](#) issue

After a 19-year-old gunman killed one and injured three at a synagogue in Poway, California, on April 27, neighbors sought to repair the rupture. Two Muslims and a Sikh quickly went to the scene to offer aid. A nearby Orthodox church opened its door to the victims. Another church organized a candlelit interfaith vigil.

In the shooting at the Passover service, Lori Gilbert-Kaye died shielding Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein from further harm. He was struck in his hand and lost a finger. Gilbert-Kaye, who was 60, was a founding member of the congregation, he said in a video circulated by news outlets.

“We are all created in God’s image; we’re all partners in creation,” Goldstein said of the community response. “No matter what faith or religion you’re from, we all have to make this world a better place.”

One of the people attending the Passover service, Shimon Abitbul, had traveled from Israel to visit his daughter and her family in southern California, the Associated Press reported.

“All of us are human beings,” he said. “It doesn’t matter if you are Jews or Christians or Muslims.”

Authorities arrested the suspect, who is a nursing student, and investigated him for possible involvement in an arson attack at a mosque in March in Escondido. The suspect and his family belong to an Orthodox Presbyterian Church there.

Zachary Keele, the church's pastor, spoke at a congregational meeting called the day after the shooting, *USA Today* reported. He led prayers for all involved and responded to the suspect's writings online.

"There is no superior race; we are all created equal," Keele said. "We are committed to loving all people."

The shooting occurred six months after [the attack at Tree of Life-Or L'Simcha synagogue in Pittsburgh](#) that killed 11 people.

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