Tēnā koutou katoa e hui hui mai nei
Ki ngā mate – haere, haere, haare atu ra
E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rakatira ma. Tena koutou
E ngā iwi – tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa.

As-Salaam-Alaikum
Peace be unto you all.

And thank you for joining together tonight.
Mihi mai, mihi mai, mihi mai rā.

Following the ghastly atrocities of last Friday in Christchurch, we are all still feeling a tumult of reactions and emotions – ranging from horror, anger and outrage through grief and anguish, to aroha, care and concern. It is the last few I want us to reflect on and to nourish.

There is no point in dwelling on the perpetrator. That only serves to validate him and his poisonous beliefs. We cannot help those who were killed. They are now in the care of the almighty.

It is those who are left – bereft in many cases of loved ones torn from you - who have to be strong, and whom we can help by offering our support, our fellow feeling and our assurance that you are us – as precious a part of our community as every other person and family. We can also assure you that our community is overwhelmingly safe, although I acknowledge that belief has been shaken to the core in all of us.

And we should examine some of the attitudes and undercurrents in our community and indeed in ourselves and ask what we might need to change so this cannot ever happen again.

Why did this person come from outside our country, to our community, with such evil intent? Why here? Why among us?

Perhaps he recognised that however imperfect we might be, for all that our city fabric can appear a bastion of colonialism, our community does have a strong sense of manaakitanga – of compassionate inclusion. The Dunedin community after all, entreated our government to designate this city a refugee resettlement centre so we could welcome some of those displaced by the conflict in Syria. Indeed, our nation is a nation of immigrants and refugees.

Our Muslim brothers and sisters bore the brutal brunt of the attack, but it was also aimed at our whole community and the values of manaakitanga, equality and inclusion we hold dear.

That is why we all need to redouble our efforts to embrace and include all in our community, particularly our Muslim neighbours, work-mates, schools friends and casual acquaintances, many of whom are escaping sectarian and ideological conflict.
We need to reassure them all that we are one community of equals. Some have just been here longer than others. And here is overwhelmingly a safe place for all of us.

We all have different whakapapa, but instead of finding fault with difference, we need to celebrate and value difference. We need to look inside ourselves and challenge any vestiges of superiority and cultural resentment.

We need to face down and have zero tolerance for, any even casual expressions of racist putdown, and hate – wherever it appears. Every unchallenged instance normalises and enables the ratcheting up of that abuse – and we know where that ends. This is the responsibility of us all – individuals, social media platforms, newspapers and radio commentators – all of us.

We need to be examples of inclusion for our children. They are not born prejudiced. They learn that from us.

But our overwhelming responsibility is to each other. We must push through mistrust and ignorance of difference. Reach out, one way or another, give your neighbour a hug – especially if they are different from you.

So to my Muslim sisters and brothers – go in peace. You are a precious part of us, as all the rest of us are of you. We embrace you with aroha. To our wider community – care for each other – all of each other. Go in peace also. Make peace with yourself and any cultural suspicions you have. Embrace difference.

To us all, if we don’t forge goodness out of evil – light out of darkness and friendship out of suspicion and enmity, then the forces of hate have triumphed and we will left an even poorer community.

Closing remarks

Thank you everyone for showing your support and solidarity tonight.

There are many people to thank and acknowledge for making this vigil possible – too many to name them all – but my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed.

The prevailing messages which have shone through tonight have been of togetherness, love and hope. There are number of things you can do to continue to support our Muslim sisters and brothers:

- Many of you may have donated to one of the collection buckets on your way in tonight. You can continue to donate to our local Muslim community via the Otago Muslim Association website or at the Dunedin City Council Customer Service Centre.

- Sign the remembrance book at any of the Dunedin libraries.

- If you have a Muslim neighbour or know someone who has been affected, ask if they would like some help. Look after yourselves and each other. We are one community and we all belong here.

- If you wish to volunteer, please contact the Dunedin City Council so that we can direct and coordinate that help where it is needed.

- And before you leave here tonight, turn to someone beside you whom you don’t know and let them know that you care.
We must ensure though that our support for our Muslim and wider community is ongoing and enduring. Give nothing to discrimination. Call out hate speech wherever you hear or see it, no matter how small or trivial it might seem.

I encourage you to celebrate Dunedin Race Relations Week at the night markets in the Octagon on Saturday, where there will be music, food and entertainment.

And next week is Neighbours Week – get involved in local events and get to know your neighbours. Every connection you have with your neighbours makes your community more friendly, fun and safe.

I would like to finish tonight with a quote from the late Dame Whina Cooper, the respected kuia who dedicated her life to improving the rights of her mokopuna:

“Take care of our children. Take care of what they hear, take care of what they see, take care of what they feel. For how the children grow, so will be the shape of Aotearoa.”