

Sikh funeral in Christian church denied

by NEIL CORBETT

Abbotsford News

Abbotsford's Sevenoaks Alliance Church has drawn ire from the Indo-Canadian community, after refusing to allow a Sikh funeral to take place there.

Jasmer Singh 'Sher' Braich, a successful farmer in Abbotsford for more than 45 years, and with extended family in the Abbotsford-Mission area, passed away June 4 after a stroke. He was active in the Mission Gur Sikh Temple, and a generous donor to many causes, according to good friend Charan Gill.

"He wanted to help people all the time," said Gill, a well-known figure in the Lower Mainland for his advocacy work on farm labour, and other social issues.

In a media advisory issued Friday, Gill criticized the church for not allowing Braich's funeral in its facilities. He described how the Braich family was unable to find a funeral home with the capacity for 1,700 guests. He said Sevenoaks Alliance initially took a booking, but withdrew the offer upon learning that Sikh prayers would be said during the service.

"We are very disappointed with the management of Sevenoaks Alliance Church who discriminated against the grieving Braich family," said Gill, the CEO of Progressive Intercultural Community Services in Surrey. "We are curious to know what kind of sermons are being preached in a church which does not value and accept other faiths to freely practice their customs

See 'FUNERAL' on page A3

'Unfair' label

FUNERAL / FROM PAGE A1

and prayers."

The story has been picked up by Radio India and other media outlets, Gill said.

The funeral was conducted at Cascade Community Church, run by the Salvation Army. It has seating for 700, so many attendees were forced to stand.

Pastor Lyle Magnus said the Sevenoaks Alliance was never booked, and the church informed the Braich family that the event "does not fit into our facility usage policy."

Magnus said the Sikh prayers alone were not the issue.

"It may have been part of it, but it's a bigger issue than that," said Magnus, who did not make the decision to deny the funeral.

"If I went to the Sikh temple and asked to do a Christian funeral there, what would the response be?" he asked. "It would be a flat-out 'no,' I suspect. To call us a church that is prejudicial is unfair."

Gill would like to mend fences.

"We might go with a delegation to meet with them. They should be helpful, rather than hurtful. If there's a big facility they have, why not share it, and charge reasonable rent."