

Israel Discourse Advisory Committee

Report to Board of Trustees

September 25, 2018

At its meeting of August 28, Rabbi Franken joined the Israel Discourse Advisory Committee (IDAC) for the first time and shared thoughts, and a handout, on the background of Reform Judaism and Zionism.

The committee had a wide-ranging discussion about the invitation to Durham Mayor Steve Schewel and City Council members to hear JRC's thoughts and concerns regarding the resolution on "rejecting militarization of the police force." The discussion centered on the best ways to assure that the October 4 event will be both productive and civil, drawing on lessons learned from the recent panel on this subject at the JCC. A principal focus was on the question of how to encourage the open expression of ideas while maintaining decorum and civility on a topic fraught with emotion for many. The group accepted Chair Norm Loewenthal's suggestion that Ziva Raney, Steve Simon and he meet, consider the many ideas expressed at the meeting, and develop a path forward for the Mayor's visit.

The committee responded positively to a proposal from Duke professor and JRC congregant Bruce Jentleson to offer a program that would foster a broader understanding of Middle East issues and thereby bridge diverse viewpoints within the congregation, a project that the Adult Education Committee has decided not to pursue this year. Although the thrust of the proposal would be to further IDAC's goals by providing a balanced historical perspective on Israel-Palestine, the committee expressed reservations about the suggestion that IDAC itself might serve as a programming entity in order to make this educational opportunity available to the congregation. The committee did support Rabbi Franken's suggestion that the program be offered under rabbinical auspices in some form, and Norm Loewenthal will work with Bruce and the Rabbi to develop an appropriate format.

The committee considered a request put forward both to IDAC and the Board of Trustees that JRC be designated as a "welcoming synagogue" to Jewish Voice for Peace. It was felt that taking such an action with respect to a specific group concerned with Israel-related views is unnecessary in light of the broad statement of inclusion and welcoming to all perspectives that is expressed at the outset of the Israel Discourse Policy.

The committee responded favorably to three preliminary programming possibilities put forward by the Adult Education Committee, each based on a potential presentation by a distinguished individual: Jodi Magness, Professor Of Religious Studies at UNC (program on archeology); Lesley Sachs, Executive Director of Women of the Wall; and Mark Levin, Founding Rabbi of Congregation Beth Torah in Overland Park, Kansas (program on Reform Judaism in Israel). The committee indicated that it would welcome formal proposals for these presentations as they are developed. The committee also gave its approval to the request from Rena Fraade, Director of Congregational Learning, to pursue the possibility of co-sponsoring with the JCC an event featuring Lesley Sachs of Women of the Wall on October 27, while Ms. Sachs is in the area through Hillel's aegis. This approval is separate from any budgetary considerations involved in the event.

The committee discussed at length a request that JRC join with other organizations as a “partner” in the offering of “Untold Stories of IDF Soldiers,” a program to be presented by StandWithUs Southeast at Meredith College on October 14. Concerns were expressed that partnering in this fashion could inaccurately suggest endorsement by JRC of the goals of StandWithUs, Voice for Israel (a principal sponsor of the event), or Christians United for Israel (one of the designated partners); these considerations somewhat paralleled points raised during the discussion of the Jewish Voice for Peace request. Concerns were also expressed about whether the content of the presentation would be consonant with the synagogue's Israel Discourse Policy. Norm Loewenthal indicated that he would seek additional information about that and report back to the committee. He also indicated that the program could be publicized in the “Community News” section of eNotices, which does not imply JRC's endorsement of the activity.

The committee will next meet on October 2 (in lieu of a September meeting) and October 30.

Submitted by Norm Loewenthal, Committee Chair