

Israel Discourse Advisory Committee

Report to Board of Trustees

November 20, 2018

Meeting with the Israel Discourse Advisory Committee (IDAC) on October 30 in the shadow of the horrific events in Pittsburgh, Rabbi Franken shared his thoughts, underscoring in the midst of the grief and anguish of the Jewish and non-Jewish community the importance of the civility that activities like IDAC's seek to foster. He announced that a Solidarity Shabbat service will be held at Judea for the whole community this Friday, November 2, at 7:30. A service in the aftermath of Pittsburgh was also held this past Saturday, October 27, prior to the Women of the Wall program. Both of those events were well attended (and the latter, featuring Lesley Sachs, Director of Women of the Wall, was described by IDAC members as dynamic and powerful, an important offering in the broad array of Israel-related programming occurring at Judea this year).

The rabbi announced that the guest speaker in the Scholar in Residence program he is hosting during his year with Judea will be Rachel Korazim, a prominent teacher of literature and consultant in curriculum development on Israel and the Holocaust, who will visit the congregation during the second weekend in May, 2019.

The rabbi search is progressing on schedule and a meeting of the search committee this Thursday, Nov. 1 will determine the two or three candidates (of the 13 interviewed by skype) who will be invited to visit JRC in person for interviews. Selected candidates will meet with IDAC, among many other groups in the congregation, and those meetings will occur during daytime hours yet to be announced in two or three of these date ranges: Nov. 12-14, Nov. 26-28, and Dec. 3-5. [Note that those date ranges have since been altered somewhat.]

The committee discussed the "Call for Civility and Respectful Discourse – A Letter from Rabbis and Community Leaders" that had been sent recently by Durham-Chapel Hill synagogue and Federation leadership in response to incidents of name-calling and slander occurring within the Jewish community. Although the letter seemed to IDAC members as somewhat vague and cryptic, it is hoped that through moral suasion and peer pressure it will have the effect of dissuading individuals from the behaviors in question. Though not identified with specificity in the letter, these behaviors apparently include incidents of harassment by Jewish persons towards other Jewish persons, sometimes relating to the workplace, because of political views on Israel or other matters. While it may be difficult or impossible to identify the perpetrators, the letter may serve as a helpful tool that maligned individuals may use on their own behalf in the workplace or other settings.

Reviewing the visit of the mayor to the congregation on October 4, the committee felt that the event had been largely successful by providing, as intended, an opportunity for congregants to express their views on the Durham police training issue and other matters to the mayor and to receive responses from him along with his own general perspectives. It was noted that all those who wished to speak were able to do so, in some cases more than once, that the mayor responded at length and remained longer than originally scheduled, and that all of this occurred within a civil and respectful environment. The committee recognized that there is frustration on the part of some congregants resulting from the fact that the mayor did not appear to change his position in response to the comments he heard, but

such an outcome was never presented as an expectation for the event. It was also noted that the mayor had encouraged the congregation to engage in internal dialogue on Israel-related topics (a central purpose of IDAC) and to involve more fully the middle of the political spectrum rather than to allow discussion to be driven by the extremes. It is hoped that the event will have served to forge useful relationships with members of the council who were in attendance. (The question of whether the congregation should formally seek a retraction or revision of the city council's statement on police training is a matter for the Board and is outside IDAC's purview of fostering dialogue.)

Plans for congregant Bruce Jentleson's presentation on "Why No Israeli-Palestinian Peace? An Insider's Perspective on the Issues," hosted by Rabbi Franken and scheduled for the morning of November 18, were reviewed. An important feature of the program will be structured discussion of the issues addressed in Jentleson's talk, facilitated by congregant Peg Carlson and possibly a colleague of hers within the congregation. This event is intended for members of the congregants though others who may wish to attend will not be excluded. A light breakfast (i.e. bagels and coffee) will be provided. IDAC chair Norm Loewenthal is coordinating plans for the talk and discussion with Bruce, Peg and the rabbi, and is working on logistics with Emily Young and Ray Jones. It was noted with regret, once again, that there is an unfortunate conflict with one of the class meetings of the Jewish Values course at the JCC that morning (an activity co-sponsored by Judea) but it was pointed out the the conflict was unavoidable due to various schedules, that relatively few Judea members will be affected, and that the effects of the conflict can be ameliorated to some extent by the fact that Jentleson's talk will be recorded and that there may be similar ways for those who miss the Jewish Values class to catch up on its material.

The matter of the ARZA opt-in on the membership application discussed at the last meeting was briefly reviewed but was found to be largely moot because ARZA is being dissolved and reference to it will be removed from the application. (It was noted that 36 JRC households currently opt in).

The next meeting had been scheduled for Thursday, November 29 at 7:30 p.m. in the Bossen Library., but has been changed to Wednesday, December 20 to accommodate the schedules of visiting rabbi candidates. At that time, at Ziva Raney's request, we will discuss the status and role of IDAC going forward.

Submitted by Norm Loewenthal, Committee Chair