

Israel Discourse Advisory Committee

Report to Board of Trustees

March 19, 2019

The Israel Discourse Advisory Committee met on February 14, 2019. Rabbi Franken opened the meeting by sharing some thoughts from a student about how Jewish “connectedness” will help to lead us in a positive direction with regard to Israel.

Norm Loewenthal provided an update on Bruce Jentleson's follow-up to his November presentation to the congregation, which will take the form of an informal brunch get-together with Next Dor, the synagogue's 20-30's group, at Monuts on 9th Street in Durham on Sunday, March 3. As the committee had discussed, this will allow Bruce to draw on his expertise and experience with the peace process in interacting with a younger group than occurred previously. Alex Peroff, who heads Next Dor, will use social media to invite members of other such Jewish groups in the area. Based on this experience, IDAC may explore ways for Bruce to connect with other age groups later on.

Rabbi Franken updated the group on plans for a talk at a Friday night service from a representative of Kids4Peace. While it is not practical for Father Josh Thomas, the head of K4P to visit, the rabbi, with Fr. Thomas' approval, has invited Rabbi Laurie Phillips, the chaplain of the organization and a colleague of Rabbi Franken's, to visit in May. The visit will require financial support only for Rabbi Phillips' travel, for which the rabbi will look to the Adult Education Committee.

Norm Loewenthal updated the group on his communications with Chip Carnathan, the co-chair of the Adult Education Committee with responsibility for Israel-related programming, about two potential projects which are in relatively early stages of planning. One would be based on the work of Technion and would highlight Israel's accomplishments in the area of medicine and technology. Chip has been in contact with Lana Dennis of the JCC about co-sponsoring such an event, but they are in agreement that the event, if it is to occur, should be a legitimate science-based presentation rather than essentially a solicitation.

The other potential AEC program would be based on a recent New York Times op-ed by Matti Friedman on the need to view the Israel-Palestine conflict in a larger geographic context, if an appropriate presenter can be found. Norm Loewenthal indicated that he had reminded Chip of the suggestions IDAC made at its last meeting about congregants who might be helpful in identifying a potential presenter for a program on this topic. The discussion of both programming possibilities provided an opportunity for Norm to review with Chip IDAC's charge to scrutinize all proposed Israel-related programs and also its suggested process of reviewing first a preliminary proposal and later a final version.

Rabbi Franken discussed ongoing plans for the visit of Israeli scholar Rachel Korazim for the scholar-in-residence program scheduled for May 10-12, sponsored through the Levin-Moscovitz Lectureship, and he reviewed possible topics for some of the sessions. The rabbi indicated that he would soon convene a working group to help with planning and logistics for the visit (including food and publicity); the group will consist of Arnie Lerman and Norm Loewenthal from IDAC, Chip Carnathan from the AEC, and possibly other congregants and staff. Dr. Korazim's overarching theme is “Israel

through literature,” but one of the three to five sessions of her visit will almost certainly be “Rachel Korazim 101,” i.e., “Connections to the Land.” That observation led Norm to mention that the last two sessions of the current Federation-led class on Jewish Values and the Israel-Palestine Conflict have been on the central issue of relationship to the land of Israel, both on the part of Jews who live there and those in the Diaspora.

On the subject of the status and role of IDAC going forward, President Ziva Raney indicated that, based on discussions at IDAC's previous two meetings and her consultations with the Executive Committee and both Rabbi Franken and Rabbi Soffer, she would extend the life of IDAC as an ad hoc committee guided by its current charge. She lauded the work of the group and the value it had added to the life of JRC despite the significant challenges the entire congregation has faced during the period of its existence and said that IDAC “deserved at least another 18 months” to continue its work. In response to Norm Loewenthal's question, Ziva indicated that she would formalize this affirmation in some appropriate way, such as through a communication with the Board of Trustees or a message on IDAC's website. She also said that IDAC's work should be recognized and celebrated in some fashion, perhaps at the annual meeting or by means of an Aliyah at a service.

The committee received further affirmation through the character of its discussion of current articles in the national media highlighting (and possibly exacerbating) the dilemmas facing the larger Jewish community in connection with Israel-Palestine, anti-Semitism, and related political matters. The conversation demonstrated that these issues can in fact be addressed in a constructive, non-adversarial manner, and pointed up the need for forums on the national stage through which such discourse can occur.

IDAC's next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 11 at 7:30 p.m. in the Bossen Library.

Submitted by Norm Loewenthal, Committee Chair