

BELIEFS Values

Jewish community responds to racial animosity

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

Their church was destroyed by an arson fire sparked by racial hatred. And in the wake of their devastation, members of Fredonia Missionary Baptist Church in Helena, Ark., soon discovered that their struggle to raise the \$75,000 to rebuild their uninsured church had not gone unnoticed in Oakland County. The plight of the 45-member African American congregation was aided by a \$15,000 donation from the Jewish community of Greater Detroit.

"We know what it is to be victims of racial or ethnic hatred, and when we see others in that same predicament, we want to help," said Maria Feldman of Bloomfield Hills, the Jewish Community Council's assistant director for domestic concerns. "We want to counter those actions of hate with actions of compassion and good will and generosity."

The lump sum was collected through the Arson Relief Fund established by the Jewish Community Council and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, both based in Bloomfield Hills.

The community-wide effort began last summer in response to media reports of an increase in racially motivated arson fires aimed primarily at African American churches, which have now reached 70 in number. "When it became known that there was a series of acts of arson against churches in the South, we had a spontaneous feeling of wanting to be involved," said Allen Zomol of Beverly Hills, Jewish Community Council president.

Advertisements in The Jewish News, based in Southfield, and letters to 40 area synagogues pleading the cause evoked a constant trickle of funds from individuals and groups representing a broad spectrum of the Jewish community.

"We had checks sent before we even started the fund-raising,



Community effort: David Gad-Harf of West Bloomfield and Allen Zomol of Beverly Hills played a key role in mobilizing money donated by the Metro Detroit Jewish community to aid in the rebuilding of an African American church in Arkansas ravaged by an arson fire.

with letters saying that we needed to get involved in this," said Feldman, who coordinated fund-raising efforts. "It was a grassroots community response from people who really cared and wanted to do something."

Once the money accumulated, the Jewish Community Council identified a specific congregation as a recipient with help from the National Council of Churches, an organization of Protestant and Orthodox Christian churches involved in a national campaign to aid burned-out churches. "We wanted to channel it into a single church and make sure that church was one that was extremely needy," said David Gad-Harf of West Bloomfield, executive director of the Jewish Community Council. "No other effort was being undertaken on their behalf, so we decided that was the church for us."

"The \$15,000 gift was presented to members of Fredonia Missionary Baptist Church on Dec.

29, by representatives of the Jewish Federation of Arkansas and the Arkansas National Conference of Christians and Jews, who worked in tandem with the Bloomfield Hills-based council.

The Fredonia congregation, which lost its church last September, was moved by the gesture, said Feldman, and out-of-state representatives involved in the project "were delighted to be our eyes and ears and hands in Arkansas."

Local and national fund-raising efforts for arson-related church fires were undertaken by Oakland County synagogues, the Southfield-based Anti-Defamation League and Detroit-based initiatives like Project Restoration. "We weren't the only game in town," said Gad-Harf, from his office at 6735 Telegraph in Bloomfield Hills. "But unlike other groups, we did identify a church. Our purpose in doing this was to try to solidify the bond between the Jewish com-

munity in Arkansas and the African American church. New links have been created there."

Aiding those in need on a local, national and international level is an ongoing commitment for the council, which focuses on safeguarding and unifying the Jewish community. The staff of eight is supported by 200-plus volunteers and 225 affiliated organizations.

"The Jewish Community Council was founded in 1937 as an umbrella organization designed to be a spokesman and forum for numerous Jewish community organizations, both religious and non-religious, to provide a voice for people to express themselves," said Zomol, an attorney who joined the council board three years ago.

"An important part of our role is to be a connecting point with the community at large and with other racial, ethnic and religious organizations," added Gad-Harf.

Samaritan Counseling Center extends outreach program

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

Since opening its fourth branch office at Southfield Presbyterian Church, the Farmington Hills-based Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeastern Michigan has put outreach high on its agenda.

In an effort to become acquainted with clergy and religious professionals in Oakland County, the center's new branch is hosting "The Art of Referral counseling."

The program will explore the why's and how-to's of effective and successful referral — from the signs of emotional distress signaling a need for counseling to the methodology of making referrals.

"This is a way for people of different denominations and faiths to be introduced to the Samaritan Counseling Center," said Dr. Joseph Shook, pastor of the host church. "So often, we don't know how to refer individuals to a particular counselor."

The two-hour workshop will begin at noon on Thursday, Jan. 30, at Southfield Presbyterian Church, 21576 W. 10 Mile in Southfield. Attendees are asked to bring their own lunch.

Leading the session will be Wesley L. Brun, D. Min., L.P.C., founder and executive director of the Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeast Michigan. A former pastor who has been involved in the counseling field since 1974, Brun has played host to a similar program in Chicago and Birmingham. "It's always been favorably received," said the Farmington Hills resident.

Participants can expect an interactive program with a great deal of discussion and



In spotlight: Wesley L. Brun will lead a workshop designed to introduce people of different denominations to the Oakland County-based Samaritan Counseling Center.

sharing. Handouts, including a list of referral resources, will be available for the taking.

The Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeast Michigan was organized in Oakland County by an ecumenical group of a dozen churches in Farmington, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield. Brun was hired by the board of directors to oversee all aspects of the thriving pastoral counseling center and its branches, which treat the body, mind and soul of 150 individuals, couples or families at any given time.

"What we try to do is work within the religious value structure of the counselee," explained Brun, who heads a staff of eight counselors of various faiths. "Along with psychological and psychiatric theory and practice, we add the dimension of religious

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Christ, will be an effective witness drawing others to a new awareness of the love of God for them.

This theme also reminds us that, as a church and as local churches, God is seeking to accomplish God's divine and good purpose through us.

The passive tense of this invitation "be reconciled" presents God as the active agent of reconciliation. Reconciliation is preeminently the work of God, often through His church.

We are called to accept this divine reconciliation, and then to be ambassadors that continue this reconciling activity in our world at this time and place.

No one would question the need for reconciliation and healing in our world today. Some seek, and hopefully seek, reconciliation with God, whom they have omitted from their lives. Others need help in reconciling with one another.

Effective following of the divine directive toward reconciliation would help in many families, neighborhoods and communities.

Often churches, uniting together, can facilitate efforts to respond to this need and help to bring healing to individuals,

families and communities.

The fact that we cannot accomplish this perfectly should not be a reason not to do what we can. This is one of the principal missions of the church.

This is one of the main reasons we exist. Reconciliation is promoted through an intentional and prayerful process that includes, at the very least, recognition of a break of relationship, repentance through word and deed, and efforts toward the restoration of harmony.

Ecumenical groups can be particularly well suited for this process.

Ecumenical groups and efforts can help to cultivate an open, respectful atmosphere in which people of many faith traditions and ethnic backgrounds meet and grow to trust one another.

Hopefully, observances such as Christian Unity Week help all of us to strive to ensure that differences among us do not become obstacles to this all important ministry of reconciliation at all levels of our society.

Timothy F. Babcock is pastor at St. Andrew Catholic Church in Rochester. You can reach him at the church: (810) 651-3950.

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