

Israel Mission tour connects teens with their Jewish roots

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

The most impressive moment of Talia Salai's teen mission trip to Israel came when she hiked to the mountain-top fortress of Masada, where a community of Jews in 73 C.E. chose suicide rather than deny their faith.

"It takes 25 minutes to climb to the top," recalled the North Farmington High School junior. "The sun is rising. You feel so accomplished. And you look around and see all of Israel."

The Farmington Hills teen says the five-week excursion undertaken by 237 of her metro area peers in 1996 is something she could talk about forever. "You become more independent and you come to know more about what you feel about your Jewish identity," she said. "Going to Israel with a group of 300 kids and experiencing it with friends is something that you can only do once in a lifetime."

For Annie Lefkowitz of West Bloomfield, fond memories revolve around the relationships she made with the *madrichim* (counselors) and Israeli teens.

"Our mission is to give teenagers a reason to get active in the religious community and to stay active in college, and later become active adults in the community," said the Bloomfield Hills Andover High School senior. Once she returned to Oakland County, Lefkowitz took the mission to heart by working as an intern for the Southfield-based Agency for Jewish Education with follow-up post-mission experiences. "We all felt a lot more spiritual," the 17-year-old, who has set her sights on the rabbinate. "That was obvious just by the number of students that started going to *shul* (synagogue) every week."

The upcoming Teen Mission 2 Israel, scheduled June 25 through July 30, promises five weeks of stimulating physical and intellectual activities in Israel. Teens, grades 10 to 12, get the opportunity to go hiking, snorkeling, rappelling, floating on the Dead Sea and participating in an archaeological dig. Tours include stops in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, a Sabbath observance with a host family and a celebration of the 50th birthday of the state of Israel. Also on the agenda are visits to The Knesset (Israeli Parliament), Tower of David Museum and the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Amy Horning, 15, of Beverly Hills is one of 240 teens already registered for the Teen Mission 2 trip. "I think it's a good way to get in touch with your Judaism," said Horning, who will be visiting Israel for the first time.

Teen Mission 2 Israel is sponsored by the Bloomfield Hills-based Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and its Michigan-Israel Connection in cooperation with the Agency for Jewish Education, Metropolitan Detroit congregations, the Southfield-based Jewish News, the Fresh Air Society, the West Bloomfield-based Jewish Community Center, community foundations and donors.

"It's always been important to send teens to Israel. It formulates their Jewish identity far beyond their Jewish years," said Susan Levin of Birmingham, who is coordinating the trip. "I'm passionate about the cause. I went as a teen to Israel and I gained a feeling of being home in a place you've only read about and heard about. It's concrete once you get there. You're no longer a minority for the first time in your life... and you know you're home."

Teen Mission 2 Israel is open to Michigan teens in grades 10 through 12 as of the fall of 1998. The price of the trip is \$2,995 and the registration deadline is Jan. 6. For details and a deposit form, call Susan Levin at the Michigan-Israel Connection at (248) 645-7878 or e-mail to slevin@jimd.org.

BELIEFS & Values

Expansion marks 79th year at St. Paul United Methodist Church

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

In the entrance leading to the new greeting center at St. Paul United Methodist Church, beneath the names of every pastor who has served the 79-year old congregation, is a brick etched with the name of Doris Held.

"She used to greet everyone every week," recalled longtime member Dick Johns of Troy. "When she died, a brick was donated in her memory. Doris is still greeting us as we come through the door."

"Greeting people during the service is part of who the congregation is all about," continued Johns, who chairs the building committee. "The old entrance was basically a door. We're happy to have something that looks so open and inviting."

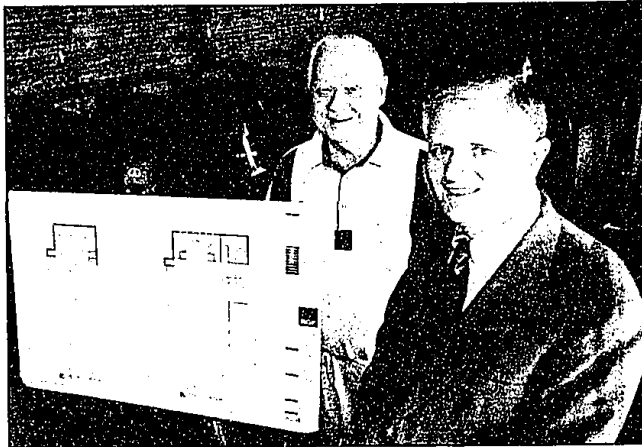
The individual bricks that compose the interior entrance wall of the Oakland County church were donated by members and groups for inscription in their own memories or in the memory of others. The \$9,000 generated from the fund-raiser was applied to the \$800,000 expansion and renovation project recently completed at the Bloomfield Township church.

Bishop to visit

Bishop Donald Ott of the Detroit Conference of the United Methodist Church will consecrate the new wing at 11 a.m. Sunday, January 4. A noon reception in the fellowship hall follows the consecration service. The event is open to the public.

"It's an occasion to celebrate what's been a 30-year plan," said the Rev. James Greer II, pastor of the 200-member congregation. "You hear the expression, 'My church home.' People take that very seriously here. Just like they want their own homes to be comfortable and inviting, they want their church home to be comfortable, accessible and inviting for people to come. We built, not only for ourselves, but for the stranger who would walk in the door and choose to stay."

The new addition houses an enlarged entrance, greeting center, parlor, elevator, nursery, six



STAFF PHOTO BY JOE KIELER

Expansion project: Building committee chairman Dick Johns and the Rev. James Greer II, show off plans for the newly completed addition at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Bloomfield Township, which will be consecrated January 4.

classrooms, administrative offices and full-accessibility main level restrooms. Built with modern-day appeal, the wing maintains a connection to the church's historic roots through the memorial wall and the parlor's stained glass window of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, which was preserved from the original church building on Wilson Street in Pontiac.

The work also included a paved parking lot on the lower level of the two-story structure and renovations to the parsonage next door. The project was designed by Rochester-based Roy G. French Associates, Inc. and built by Troy-based Roy Seelbinder Construction Co.

Plans for the expansion began five years ago with a congregation-wide survey allowing members of all ages to voice their needs, dreams and concerns for

the future. Once the goals were set, a three-year building campaign was launched, which raised \$180,000 for the project. A second campaign to be kicked off in January is expected to draw similar support.

"There's a core of the congregation who is getting older and realizing that our slogan or motto is, 'St. Paul for generations to come,'" said Greer, who joined the staff two years ago. "The older generation wants to make sure the congregation is here for future generations."

Roots in Pontiac

St. Paul United Methodist Church was originally incorporated in 1918 as Wilson Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Pontiac, where it thrived for 40 years. In 1958, members purchased the property at 165 E. Square Lake Road and utilized the old Hickory Grove School

until the current structure was erected in 1965. The old school was then imploded. The name change occurred in 1968 to better reflect the new Oakland County location, which draws residents from Auburn Hills, Bloomfield Hills, Pontiac, Rochester Hills and Troy.

"When we moved here, Square Lake Road was a two lane dirt road. Now, 10,000 cars pass our church in a 24-hour period," added Greer. "We're the smaller neighborhood church accessible to subdivisions and surrounding areas in a busy sprawling metropolis. Here you can come and have a meaningful worship experience, get to know the members if you choose to, and the pastor and the staff by name. As the church continues to grow and change, we see more and more people from the surrounding community and less from our Pontiac ties."

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