

Hills woman on Israeli mission when terrorists struck

Eighty members of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit were on a mission in Israel when the terrorist attacks on America occurred. Here Jeannie Weiner of Farmington Hills recounts that day.

was with a group of Michigan citizens on a solidarity mission in Israel on Sept. 11, the day terrorists changed the face of America. Being away from home at the time of this horrific crime was both surreal and painful. However, cell phones connecting us to friends and family and the overwhelming love and support from Israelis provided us a tremendous level of much needed comfort. Terror has become a way of life

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Jeannie Weiner
Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit

in Israel. Every day prior to and during our stay, terrorist attacks occurred causing either death or injury. Usually these attacks occur to ordinary citizens going about their business. Just prior to the Sept. 11 terrorism in New York and Washington, a kindergarten teacher and a former tour guide driving in Israel were shot to death in their car.

Like those in Washington, D.C., New York and Pennsylvania, their fate was based on being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

On Sept. 11, our two buses had stopped at a junction on the way to the central Galilee near Nazareth. We were having an ice cream break prior to a visit to the Partnership Region. Israelis in the Galilee were preparing a festive picnic with entertainment. They were welcoming us as Americans showing solidarity to Israelis who have been subject to constant terror in the past year. The terror has resulted in the near stoppage of tourism to Israel. Christian, Jewish and Muslim holy sites are quiet. Each Israeli we saw

stopped to tell us that they deeply appreciated our coming at this difficult time.

At the junction on Sept. 11, a woman driving her car on the highway happened to see our buses. She turned around and got out. Stopping a woman from our group she asked what we were doing in Israel. When she learned that we had come from Michigan in solidarity with Israel she thanked us and began to cry. Fifty minutes later, Israelis were telling us as the news came from a television set carrying CNN live.

By the time we reached the planned celebration in our Partnership Region in the Galilee, the shock and sensitivity of the Israelis demonstrated the irony of a world turned upside down. The welcoming event went on but it was subdued. The music was changed to include songs of peace and offers came from everyone for the use of phones to call the U.S. Israelis understand the need to speak with friends and family at times of terror.

The next day, the Israeli government called for a day of mourning. Somber music played

on the airways and flags flew at half-staff.

Israelis also know about living life in spite of terrorism. Israeli life is an example that events proceed in spite of threats and daily terror. We felt safe and we were safe in Israel. Citizens there are vigilant. Packages are not allowed to be left unattended. Unattended packages are picked up and blown up, if necessary. Bags are checked prior to entering shopping malls. Airports, airplanes and passengers are carefully checked. Businesses are open, weddings and vacations occur each day.

Lessons for all

The need for "business as usual" is important and it is a lesson for all of us. Terrorists want to cause fear, destruction and a change in lifestyle, but we cannot allow them to change us. We must continue to fly, take our vacations and proceed with our lives; but we should do so carefully by watching out for each other, by being vigilant and allowing security measures that make us all safe.

The strength of America has always been its ability to persevere and respond to adversity. We are a boisterous nation but we have been naive. Terrorists have told us that they would wage war on "western culture" but we didn't pay attention. The cost of getting our attention has been too high, but allowing them



Jeannie Weiner

to cause us to live in fear would be higher yet.

At times, we cried on this trip to Israel. But we witnessed the strength of community and friends who care for each other. We observed a country at war with terror but unwilling to bend in fear. Coming home we were touched by the El Al attendant who welcomed us to a silent and closed Kennedy Airport. When we landed prior to the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath and High Holy Days, the attendant announced through the loudspeaker, "Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to New York. Shalom. (Peace). God Bless America!"



En route: Buses take the Michigan group to the central Galilee near Nazareth.

Farmington Unitarian Church gets a new pastor to lead flock

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Alexander Riegel will be installed officially as pastor of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Farmington at 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, but recent events have already put him firmly at the helm.

He arrived from Boston on Sept. 1. Over the past week, he participated in an interfaith community service to mourn victims of the terrorist attacks and last Sunday, he led his own congregation in a memorial service that included members placing small white flags on church grounds.

Worldwide losses

"They're white flags because they represent the loss of citizens from all over the world," he said.

A banner nearby proclaims a quote by a 13th century Sufi mystic "to show solidarity with peace loving Arabs throughout the world," he said. And children in the Sunday school program created a wreath that is also part of the display along Halsted north of Grand River.

The Farmington church, which has 220 adult members, is the third Unitarian congregation the minister will shepherd. The first two were in Massachusetts, where he also obtained two master's degrees in divinity and the-

ological studies from Harvard Divinity School. He's currently working on a doctoral thesis from Andover-Newton Theological School, pursuing the question of religion in the 21st Century.

A native of Saline and graduate of the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, he and his wife, Kim, also a Michigan native, wanted to come home. The family also includes stop-daughter Ariana, 11, and son Preston, 2.

Friday at 7:30 p.m. Riegel will give a lecture at the church on Just War Theory.

"I have a personal interest and background in the theory of justice of force between nations," he said.

"It's not clear that another nation was behind this (terrorism). The theory stands to be challenged here. It's good to discuss that."

The lecture will be followed by a question and answer period.

The Farmington Unitarian Church draws from a wide geographic area, he noted.

"We have no creed. We get Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Humanists," he said. "Here there is predominantly a Humanist philosophy that focuses on essential human goodness. It doesn't look to transcendental sources to solve human problems."

Riegel admits to a strong mys-

tic bend to his Humanism.

"In New England, it was a large Jewish contingent, with more a theistic God image. Here, that doesn't tend to be the case."

For a better understanding of Universal Unitarianism the church has a Web site: www.uufarmington.org.

There are two Sunday services, at 9 and 11 a.m., each with Sunday school.

Services include a musical prelude, a message for children—who are dismissed after 20 minutes to their own Sunday school, a reading, moment of silence and then a sermon, which Riegel characterizes as "the vast majority of the focus. We're very sermon oriented."

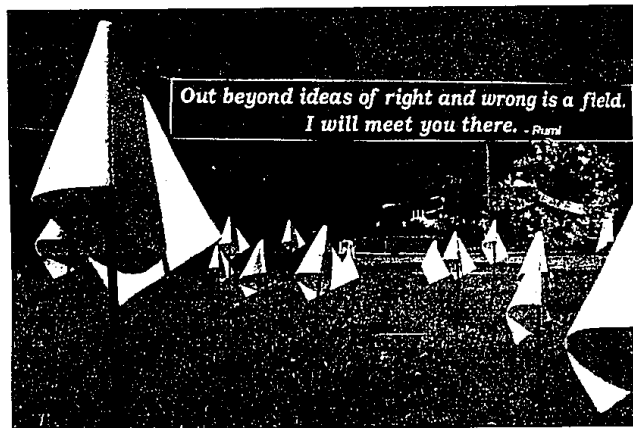
High attendance

He said attendance has been "quite high, partly because I'm new and because of the crisis."

The church has a Social Concerns committee and in January, there will be a new adult religious education program. Next Sunday, he will speak on forgiveness.

"Can we forgive and retaliate? Why do we forgive?" he said, adding "Unitarian Universalism allows freedom from the pulpit. A minister can speak his or her conscience."

Currently the church offers services from September through



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREDER

Field of dreams: White flags, a peace wreath and this banner are in front of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Farmington.

June, but Riegel said he will move toward year-round ser-

vices. The church staff includes an administrator and a director

of religious education. For more information, call (248) 478-7272.

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