

Building Bridges Between the Church and Israel

Members of Resurrection Church in Loveland, Colo., understand the hesitancy an Israeli or American-born Jew might experience when visiting a church whose name celebrates the empty tomb of a crucified Hebrew carpenter named Jesus—and yet the church has become a place where all Jews are welcome.

Resurrection Fellowship first opened its doors to a religious Israeli Jew almost 14 years ago, when Eliezer Braun, a descendent of Holocaust survivors, urged 3,500 Christians to financially support the ministry he founded in 1998.

Today, the welcome mat remains for Braun and other Jews, regardless of their opinions about the Messiah of Israel.

“At times it feels like Israel doesn’t have this many friends in the whole world, and here I happen to find them all in this one room,” Braun told Resurrection Fellowship members on Holocaust Remembrance Day in April.

The author of *Bridging the Divide: The Journey of an Israeli Jew into the Christian Evangelical World*, Braun is one of several Israel-based ministry leaders with a standing invitation of welcome from leaders of the northern Colorado church.

The friendship between Braun and Resurrection Fellowship began in March 2001, when then-pastor John Stocker did something he hadn’t done in 20-plus years of ministry at the church: gave an entire week’s offering to Shuva Israel, a ministry founded by Braun at the behest of Samaria’s governor.

“Eliezer, it was simple. I heard from the Holy Spirit, and God moved on my heart,” Stocker told Braun at the time.

So began a legacy at Resurrection Fellowship to support Israeli and Messianic Jews that continues with the next-generation leader at the church, Jonathan Wiggins.

April is full of observances and memorials in Israel and the U.S., including days of observance for victims of the Nazi Holocaust, Israel's Independence Day and Yom Hazikaron, or Memorial Day, in the Jewish state—and such observations are a part of life at Resurrection Fellowship.

This month, the Loveland church is awash in pro-Israel events, including a speech by a Holocaust survivor; a visit from a Messianic pastor in Israel; a mission trip to Poland, Prague and the Czech Republic to remember Jewish victims of Nazi atrocities; and a talk on the modern history of Israel.

When city, university and college sponsors of a Holocaust Remembrance event from Greeley, Colo., asked the church to host a presentation by a survivor of Nazi terror, the church eagerly welcomed the prospect of reaching outside its building to raise awareness about the event.

“Bridge-building between this congregation and the Jewish community in this area provides us an opportunity to make friends with outsiders,” says Wiggins.

So Eric Cahn, a Holocaust survivor who was a toddler during Hitler's reign of terror, traveled from Denver to Loveland to share his story of escape from Europe's extermination camps.

Like Resurrection Fellowship, King of Kings Community Church in Jerusalem frequently opens its doors to outsiders, including the Israeli Defense Forces and other secular Jewish community groups at one of its facilities, The Pavilion, built with financial support from the Loveland church.

“There's only one church we go to visit every year—Rez,” says Wayne Hilsden, who with his wife, Ann, pastors the Jerusalem church whose ministries include an assistance program, a 24-

hour prayer tower, schools of media and art, and a counseling center.

As Messianic Jews, the Hilsdens are among other visitors to “Rez” this spring receiving friendship, finances and prayer from their friends in Colorado.

Nancy Newman, of Polish descent, will pray for Israel and Jews while placing Israeli flags in concentration camps during a Resurrection Fellowship–sponsored, 10-day mission trip to Jewish ghettos in Warsaw, Krakow and Prague later this month. Team members will visit extermination camps Majdanek, Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland and Terezin in the Czech Republic.

A nurse and Resurrection Fellowship member, Newman’s previous mission trips involved medicine but, as she prayed about this one, she says the vision became clearer.

“This trip has to do with being immersed in the realization of the horrific crimes done to Jewish, Polish, Catholics and other groups that suffered during World War II and the Holocaust,” Newman says.

Love for Jewish people is the primary motivation for the mission trip and other pro-Israel events at the church Newman calls home.

Rounding out the monthlong series of events, pastor emeritus Stocker will speak on the history of modern-day Israel while seeking to generate interest in a fall tour of the Holy Land he conducts annually with his wife, Linda.

The Stockers, along with other pro-Israel sponsors of Shuva Israel, are highlighted in Braun’s book. Braun’s website is [www.shuva.org](#).