

Christian Community Rallies Around IDF Soldiers

Hundreds of prominent Houston community members attended the Friends of the IDF (FIDF) Texas Chapter Gala earlier this month at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Houston. The gala hosted former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier Gilad Shalit, who was held captive for five years by Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip before being freed.

Among the leading guests were Pastor Randy White of First Baptist Church in Katy, Texas, and Pastor Becky Keenan of Gulf Meadows Church in Houston, representing the local Christian community and its support for the State of Israel and the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces.

Prominent Houstonians Vicki and Andy Bursten, Kisha and Jason Itkin and Nicole and Glenn Lowenstein served as gala co-chairs.

"I am always thrilled to go to the Friends of the IDF annual banquet, and bring a table of Christian guests," White said. "As Christians, we believe that God is fulfilling His promises to the Jewish people through the nation of Israel. For me, there is no better tangible picture of the truthfulness of Hebrew prophecies than an IDF soldier.

"In addition to the religious significance, the IDF is the most moral, courageous, and ready defense force in the world. America needs a strong IDF. I hope more of the Christian community will join me in future support of FIDF."

The FIDF gala, also featured former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Dan Gillerman, who delivered the keynote speech. Gillerman, the 13th permanent representative to the United Nations, spoke of "the crucial bond" between Israel and

the United States.

“The brotherhood that these countries share is demonstrated by your presence here tonight, and by the mutual respect and assistance their armies have fostered with one another,” he said.

The gala raised nearly \$475,000, which will support the wellbeing of the brave men and women who serve in the IDF. Of the funds raised, \$96,000 is specifically earmarked for seven FIDF IMPACT! scholarships.

The FIDF IMPACT! Scholarship Program provides IDF combat soldiers, who have completed their mandatory military service but cannot afford the cost of higher education, with academic scholarships to study and pursue the next chapter in their lives. The remainder of the funds will go toward supporting IDF soldiers and their families through a variety of unique and innovative programs.

“The evening had an electrifying aura about it, and we all sat together in expectation wanting to hear Gilad Shalit, the son of all of us: Jews, Christians and parents all over the world,” Keenan said. “Released from captivity after 1,940 days, he looked healthy and smiled shyly as he spoke from his heart. I thought of what five years means in someone’s life, especially a young soldier, and realized with all present we were experiencing the miracle of freedom.

“The men and women of the IDF serve knowing the many hazards that could befall them and yet do it for love of country, life, freedom and I daresay, the civilized world. We owe all of them a debt of not only gratitude but of support—and the FIDF provides the best way to do exactly that in a tangible and most efficient way.”