

FIRM Conference Aims to Pierce Hearts of Youth for Israel

For various reasons, the typical audience at pro-Israel rallies and conferences have tended to consist of white, anglo-saxon gray-hairs who have long supported the Jewish state. Millennials, especially high school students, are a rare commodity at such events.

The recently formed Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries (FIRM) has set out to change all of that, beginning with the ministry's launch at the Israel Summit at Resurrection Fellowship Church in Loveland, Colorado, on Feb. 4-6.

More than 500 high school students, along with approximately 90 students from Youth With a Mission (YWAM) are expected to attend the three-day conference. With anti-Semitism spreading worldwide at an alarming rate, FIRM Co-Founder Wayne Hilsden says reaching young people with the biblical truth of Israel has become crucial.

"The whole aura or image of the gathering is going to be very young, with young people even emceeding the sessions," says Hilsden, the senior pastor at King of Kings Community Jerusalem in Israel. "Our conference is especially geared toward younger believers.

"We will be pointing these young people to existing ministries—such as International Christian Embassy, Eagles' Wings, Jewish Voice Ministries International and Chosen People Ministries—that also have a focus on young people and are young adult driven."

Speakers during the three-day event including Pastor Jack Hayford, Jewish Voice Ministries International's Jonathan

Bernis, Michael Brown, George Morrison, Sandra Teplinsky and Calev Myers. Worship will be conducted by Paul Wilbur, Jamie Hilsden, Kelanie Gloeckler and Kaitlyn Scott.

FIRM's vision is multi-faceted. The ministry hopes to not only awaken in the people of Israel a desire to know a mutual Messiah, but also to awaken the body of believers to "tap into the nourishment of the olive root from which we have sprung, to reverse the erosion of our common Judeo-Christian values and to experience blessing promised to those who bless God's chosen people."

"This is a message to our students that your time has come," said Tomas Sandell, a FIRM board member and the president of the European Coalition of Israel. "This is so important for our youth because there has been a tendency in the body of Christ to reduce the narrative on Israel. It's our fault that this generation is missing the message completely. We need to get our hands dirty and really be in the thick of it. We need to appeal to a new generation of believers."

FIRM has been spreading the word about the conference for approximately six weeks, and more than 1,200 people have registered in addition to the high school and YWAM students who will attend. Resurrection Fellowship seats 1,400, so Hilsden says FIRM officials have been debating about whether to seek a larger venue for the event. Registrations are still being accepted.

"Frankly, if we had formed FIRM a year ago, we would have expected these types of numbers," Hilsden said. "But FIRM is a new initiative. The response has been absolutely overwhelming."

FIRM's website will go live on the conference's first night, simply visit this address: www.firm.org. The Christian Broadcasting Network is sending a crew to cover the event as well.

FIRM officials don't expect the Israel Summit to go off

without opposition. Charles E. Carlson, a self-proclaimed “pro-peace” activist and founder of an organization called We Hold These Truths, penned a letter to FIRM board member and Resurrection Fellowship Lead Pastor Jonathan Wiggins on Jan. 16 to inform him that he and others will “hold a vigil for peace, life and justice” during the three-day event at Resurrection Fellowship.

Carlson, who refers to Israel as a war-maker, told Wiggins that the demonstration would be “orderly and legal, and the police would be notified of each appearance.”

“We will stand FIRM in the face of people who don’t share our views,” Wiggins said. “But we will also have bottles of water for them, granola bars and other things. We may even bring out a heater to make them more comfortable. I want our young people to see the way we believe Jesus would treat these people. The Bible says that perfect love casts out fear, and we want these people to know that we love you and that Jesus died for you too.”