

Jacob's Hope for the World

Jeff Friedman grew up in a Jewish family, attended an Orthodox Jewish synagogue every week and lived in the city with the world's largest Jewish population: Brooklyn, N.Y. The brief encounters he had with Christians left him with a negative impression of the faith during his first 26 years of life.

"Christians offended me; they turned me off," Friedman says. "I basically hated Christians."

One day in 1980, after he moved to Miami for his job as a government pharmacist, Friedman went to get a haircut. Mitzi, the hairstylist at the salon, was Jewish and attended an Assemblies of God (AG) church.

"She challenged me as a Jew to study the Jewish Scriptures as they pertain to the Messiah," Friedman recalls. "She spoke to me in a way that made sense." A week later, Friedman came to faith in Yeshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus). He immediately sensed a calling, realizing that the majority of Jews never hear the gospel presented in a culturally relevant way. "I have a desire to see fellow Jews come to know this blessing I know," says the enthusiastic and energetic Friedman.

He became a licensed AG minister, graduated from the AG seminary and was an AG U.S. missionary for 17 years, while also serving as rabbi of Beth Emanuel, a Messianic synagogue in Philadelphia. During a ministry trip in eastern Europe, Friedman saw Jewish people living in physical and spiritual poverty and was motivated to broaden his vision.

After visiting with L. John Bueno, AG World Missions executive director, Friedman discovered that no global outreaches to Jews existed in the AG. He devised the concept of Jacob's Hope (), as the first AG World Missions effort to engage the worldwide Jewish community.

"It's latent in [the AG] that people want to do something for the Jewish people," Bueno says. "This is our only ministry to reach Jews throughout the world."

"A lot of people are supporting Jewish ministries that are not run by Christians," Friedman says. "Those groups provide humanitarian aid. But the gospel is not shared, so people aren't being evangelized."

Jacob's Hope assists both Jewish and Messianic congregations in a variety of practical ways, including feeding Ukrainians, clothing Israelis, providing teaching materials to Belarusians and operating a farm to employ Ethiopians. Friedman is assisted by his wife, Vixie, and three other missionary couples. Last August, Jacob's Hope teamed with Convoy of Hope and distributed a 40-foot container in Israel with the help of Messianic Jews there that included medical supplies and clothing. The ministry also teamed with HealthCare Ministries in January in a visit to the Ethiopian Jewish community.

Jacob's Hope has three compassion-ministry distribution centers in Israel and also has been active in Germany, Poland, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine with efforts that include operating a soup kitchen, repairing homes, building medical clinics, conducting job training and providing funds to dig wells. As the ministry grows, Friedman says, there will be opportunities for AG laypeople to take missions trips to distribute goods, work in coffeehouses and construct buildings.

"We need to bring the Messiah to everybody, to the Jews with as much passion as we do with any other people group," he says.

"I feel greatly blessed that we finally have a full-fledged ministry reaching Jewish people wherever they are," Bueno says.

AG General Superintendent George O. Wood also endorses the

ministry: "This is the first time that Assemblies of God adherents have a chance to invest in humanitarian, evangelistic and discipleship efforts to reach Jewish people around the world."