

The Crucial Element in the Ongoing Battle Against Antisemitism

The seventh day of the week in the Jewish calendar, Shabbat is a time for peace and rest, but that peace was broken recently on a Saturday as reports circulated nationwide of an ongoing hostage situation during Shabbat services at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas.

My heart sank upon hearing the news. Yet another synagogue, a holy place of gathering and worship, had fallen victim to an act of evil.

As a former reporter who lives near Colleyville, I couldn't stand idle as this crisis unfolded. My first instinct was to spring into action and do what I could to help. I went to a parking lot that was close to the synagogue and remained just outside the perimeter the authorities had established. I was surrounded by reporters and news equipment; we all waited with apprehension outside the perimeter, keeping our eyes and ears open for any developing news.

I started speaking with one of the reporters as we waited there in the frosty winter weather. Her teeth were chattering and her eyes were watering from the sharp cold, but while we spoke, she echoed the pain and uncertainty resonating across the Jewish community that day. This community was deeply impacted by the crisis because of how beloved the synagogue and Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker are to Colleyville.

I have seen firsthand the beauty and significance of the Jewish community while working at Passages, a nonprofit organization that aims to build bridges of understanding and friendship between Jewish and Christian communities and sends students to Israel every year to learn about the foundation of

the Jewish and Christian values.

For centuries, Jewish people have had to fight for everything they have. From wars waged to defend their own ancestral land, to combating violence directed at them simply being who they are, people of the Jewish heritage have faced tremendous adversity yet continue to stand strong.

But in recent years, the world has seen an increase in antisemitism that is testing Jewish resilience yet again. Here in the U.S., one report found that 1 in 4 American Jews has experienced antisemitism in the last year, almost doubling the number of antisemitic incidents from 2020.

This rise in antisemitism needs to be addressed. The Jewish community should receive the same degree of respect that any other culture and community receive. At Passages, we have always striven to listen and learn from our Jewish friends for this very reason.

Ever since we started taking students to Israel, we have been dedicated to building the bridge of friendship and allyship between the Jewish and Christian communities. At a prayer vigil the night of the hostage situation, Scott Phillips, executive director of Passages, noted why it was so important that we show a strong sense of community and support for the synagogue and the other members of the Jewish community across the country. "This is something that we do at Passages; we stand with the Jewish people," he said. "That's what we're here to do, and we'll always stand with the Jewish people. Unfortunately, this has occurred too many times in America and around the world, and it's been happening for thousands of years for the Jewish community. We're here as Christians to say that we will stand with the Jewish people."

We weren't the only ones sharing that sentiment, though. In his statements, U.S. Rep. Marc Veasey, D-Texas shared his personal connection with Congregation Beth Israel's beloved

leader, Rabbi Cytron-Walker.

"I know the rabbi; I know his wife very well," said Rep. Marc Veasey. "Our kids used to play together when they were young on Saturdays at playdates. So, a really great family. Really praying this is resolved peacefully. Charlie's a great guy, a really down-to-earth guy. His wife works at the Multicultural Alliance, which is an organization that works to bring people of different faiths together."

While the situation ended with a favorable outcome for the hostages, the tragedy and the residual trauma are undoubtedly etched on the minds and hearts of many. Though authorities are stating that the incident was not focused on the Jewish community specifically, it should not be lost on us all that this still did happen to the Jewish community. And Jewish communities across the nation and world are unfortunately no strangers to these kinds of attacks.

As authorities continue to investigate the hostage situation and the Jewish community in Colleyville reckons with its impact, we grieve with the people of this congregation that they had to experience it at all, and we grieve with the Jewish community at large, who knows that crises like these are anything but isolated or random.

It's time we do more for our Jewish friends. Situations like these bring communities together, but we need to remember not to wait for tragic situations to take place for that to happen.

It's important to remain proactive in finding understanding and peace across communities. That can mean doing anything from a simple act such as getting coffee with someone of a different faith to taking time to hear more about their lives and experiences, or even immersing yourself in their culture in a deeper way. Bringing an end to hateful acts against the Jewish community is no easy task. But there are many steps we

can take to learn more about each other and build the bridges necessary to end this vicious cycle of hate. {eo}

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