

You Won't Believe What Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church Is Doing Now

Houston's massive Lakewood Church will host a significant portion of the Jewish community for their High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Joel Osteen and his church, which meets in the former Compaq Center, volunteered to host the Congregation Beth Yeshurun after its Meyerland, Texas, facility sustained water damage from Hurricane Harvey.

Lakewood learned of the need when U.S. Rep. John Culberson asked the church to consider providing space for Beth Yeshurun during this important season.

"My immediate response was, 'Of course,'" says Jackelyn Viera Iloff, senior advisor at Lakewood Church/Joel Osteen Ministries. "It was a wonderful opportunity for us to do something for Beth Yeshurun. We have always been close friends with the Jewish community, and we have a wonderful relationship with Denis Braham [senior advisory board member of Beth Yeshurun]. We are honored they would consider us to replace their facilities for the special holiday coming up."

Lakewood is also making church volunteers available for the High Holy Days gatherings.

"Joel and Victoria want to ensure that our sanctuary is as comfortable and familiar as possible for the Beth Yeshurun congregation," Iloff says. "The Lakewood family—staff and volunteers alike—are very excited about this and are looking forward to the High Holy services. Everyone wants to help and be a part of it."

Iloff says Lakewood believes bringing another congregation onto its campus is "doable."

“Details were relatively easy to iron out because we have a team in place,” she says.

After Hurricane Harvey passed through the area in late August, Lakewood “sheltered about 450 Houstonians at one time,” Iloff says. “Now all of our shelter guests have moved on to other accommodations. As our guests transitioned, we worked with the city and county to help those needing long-term shelter and housing assistance.”

Iloff expects future opportunities to open up for the church to interact with the Jewish community as a result of assisting Congregation Beth Yeshurun, led by Rabbi David Rosen.

“I cannot thank Joel Osteen enough for his sensitivity and his encouragement,” said Rosen in a KHOU report. “It’s a reaffirmation of the beautiful spirit of collegiality and interfaith conversation we have here in Houston.”

Iloff noted that the Osteen family has “a great love for Israel and a heart for the Jewish people.”

“We interact quite a bit with members of the Jewish community already,” she says. “In fact, we are glad that they felt comfortable enough to approach us in the first place. They know that our hearts and our arms are always open to our Jewish brothers and sisters.”

Congregation Beth Yeshurun practices Conservative Judaism and serves more than 2,000 families in the Houston area.