



JAMIE FELDMAN

Countering HATE

Event at Holocaust Memorial Center brings community together in wake of violence in Charlottesville.

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The invitation to join Rabbi Dan Horwitz at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus appeared as a post on Facebook. Yet it was not just a post; it was a spark that mobilized the Metro Detroit community to discuss and process the uprising of hate groups and anti-Semitism in the United States.

An email followed, “Given this past weekend’s events in #Charlottesville, coupled with the New England Holocaust Memorial being vandalized twice in the past 6 weeks, it seems appropriate to process with community.”

The community agreed.

On Wednesday, Aug. 23, approximately 200 people gathered at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills. Reflecting on the event from the call to action to the occasion itself, Horwitz said, “In a relatively short period of time, we were able to organize and execute a content-rich, meaningful program that attracted a diverse crowd and provided people with the opportunity to process



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TOP: Docent Toni Babineau leads a group around the museum. About 200 people attended the event. **MIDDLE:** Rabbi Dan Horwitz and Isaak Gazman. **BOTTOM:** Eli Zucker and Rev. Kenneth Flowers.

the events of the previous week with community. It was heartwarming to see so many people make the time to be with us and particularly moving to see members of the Muslim and Christian communities with us as well.”

The evening activities took guests in small groups on a circuit through the Holocaust Memorial Center. At each stop, exceptionally informed docents shared the history of events prior, during and after the Holocaust.

Docent Michael Leibson said, “At a molecular level, race does not exist. Nonetheless, racism is real ... based on a falsity.”

Eli Zucker, a master’s of social work student in the Jewish Communal Leadership Program at the University of Michigan, came as a facilitator. Zucker stressed the importance of the evening and

discussed Charlottesville and the wave of recent hate crimes targeting Jewish communities bridging the past and present. He said it is important for people to recognize how Jewish identity operates across time.

After the center tour, guests filled a hall to listen to speakers as well as form small discussion groups. Among the speakers, Rev. Kenneth J. Flowers of Detroit’s Greater New Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church brought the audience to its feet as his booming voice filled the room with a message of the importance of strengthening the coalition between the Jewish and African American communities.

Rabbi Rachel Schmelkin of Congregation Beth Israel in Charlottesville, Va., joined the event via Skype. She shared her first-person account of the day’s violence. She also spoke of the strain on her congregation to come up with funds for additional security measures and how she worried whether to relocate the congregation’s Torah scroll that had survived the Holocaust to avoid possible vandalism.

In closing, Horwitz reflected why it is especially appropriate to meet at the Holocaust Memorial Center for this event. “Thank goodness we have these museums and support them so that they can reach as many people as possible,” he said, “because in a country of roughly 330 million, only a few hundred Alt-Righters made their faces known in Charlottesville. Imagine the thousands upon thousands who might have shown up absent the efforts of these core communal institutions.”

The closing message for the evening was Olam Chesed Yibaneh. Horwitz called on the community to together “build a world filled with lovingkindness.” To never be bystanders. To be a part of the solution. 🌻