

In the face of evil, Chicago Jewish community mobilizes

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JUF NEWS

By CINDY SHER, Staff Writer

Chicago's Jewish community is doing its part to help Americans heal, physically and emotionally, from the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks - to assist people in New York and Washington, D.C., as well as console citizens right here in Chicago.

"When something like this happens, we don't have any words," said Rabbi Karyn Kedar, director of the Great Lakes Region of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). "You sit there in front of the television and you say, 'Oh my G-d, oh my G-d.' But, as leaders of the Jewish community, we have to find the words. We have to find the words that acknowledge pain and fear and grief. We have to find the words that will inspire people to root out evil and terrorism where it may exist."

Immediately after the attacks, the local Jewish community organized memorial services at many area synagogues as well as participation in interfaith vigils throughout the city.

Anshe Emet Synagogue, located in the Lakeview neighborhood, held "A Service of Sorrow" the day after the attacks. Sponsored by the Chicago Board of Rabbis in cooperation with JUF's Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), the memorial drew a crowd of 700 mourners, each hungering for consolation and a venue to grieve with community.

"I was looking for some public healing and remembrance," said Michelle Cutler of Chicago, who attended the Anshe Emet service. She said that she'll be forever changed by the tragic events of Sept. 11. "I'm more scared now," she remarked. "I'm really worried and definitely feel that there's more evil in the world and that we're no longer invincible."

In between communal recitation of psalms, several Chicago Jewish spiritual and institutional leaders spoke to the packed sanctuary, offering their introspection on the tragedy.

"We think of those who got up and went to work, those who got on subways and went to work, those who got on elevators and could never have expected the kind of wanton hatred and terrorism that they faced," explained Michael Siegel, senior rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue. "All of us are mourners today. We all stand together as one community today, one community of Americans, one community in pain."

Besides memorial services, synagogues throughout Chicago added special psalms and prayers to their regular service as an expression of comfort and hope.

In addition to these services, the local Jewish community has mobilized efforts in many other

forms:

Out of respect for the attack victims, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago postponed its annual meeting, which had been scheduled for Sept. 12, the day after the attacks. For the same reason, the United Jewish Communities (UJC) and the Federations of North America canceled the IsraelNow and Forever Solidarity Rally, which was to have taken place in midtown Manhattan on Sept. 23.

Synagogues and other Jewish institutions participated in a security seminar on the week of the attacks to learn about ways to enhance building security, particularly with the High Holidays approaching. Coordinated by the Jewish United Fund in cooperation with the Anti-Defamation League, the seminar provided dozens of synagogue and Jewish organizational leaders with expert advice from security and law enforcement officials.

Jewish community leaders have also supplied religious schools with educational curriculum to help explain the tragedy to children in the classroom.

The Jewish Federation has instituted a Terror Relief Fund </relieffund/> for contributions to aid the rescue and relief efforts in New York City and Washington.

Many survivors of the attacks are in critical condition and will require blood in the coming months. To donate, JUF, in partnership with its affiliate Mount Sinai Hospital, is holding a community blood drive on Monday, Oct. 8 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Mount Sinai Hospital, on California Avenue at 15th Street. To schedule an appointment, please call Rose Ann Cope at (773) 257-6969. You may also call 1-(800)-GIVE BLOOD or 1-(888)-LIFE SOURCE for more information on how to donate blood.

The Jewish community is providing professional counselors to talk with community members about the tragedy. To speak with a trained professional from Jewish Family and Community Service, Jewish Children's Bureau, or Council for Jewish Elderly, please call JUF/JF's EZRA Helpline at 1-(800)-248-1818.

Local government representatives are passing legislation to assist the victims and to ensure precautions against another atrocity of this magnitude. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-10th District) called for action to increase national security and to establish a Global Alliance against Terrorism with allies in NATO, the Middle East, and Asia.

Chicago Jewish community member and U.S. Rep Janice Schakowsky (D-9th District) imparted these words on the House floor: "If the purpose of this despicable attack was to deter our commitment to freedom and our support for our democratic allies, like Israel, it has failed," she said.

The consul general of Israel to the Midwest eloquently captured the feeling of American citizens during his address to grievors in the Anshe Emet sanctuary: "The United States, Israel, and other democracies," he said, "will emerge victorious from this struggle because our cause is just, and the dawn always vanquishes the darkness."

