

May11, 2017

Dear Religious Leader,

Since the fall of 2003, every Sabbath morning around 9:30 a.m., a small group of anti-Israel protesters have positioned themselves in front of Beth Israel Congregation on Washtenaw Avenue. Known early on as the Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends, they now go by Witness for Peace.

Thirteen –and-a-half years is a long time. They have been relentless, and their signs and messages have grown increasingly anti-Semitic. The group's blogs and emails attempt to not only deny the holocaust, but also ridicule those who speak of it.

Many who are not Jewish have lost track of this group and its affront to the Beth Israel community. True, some of us drive by the synagogue, but unless it's between 9:30 and 10:15 on a Saturday morning, we don't notice what Beth Israel has had to deal with Sabbath after Sabbath. If you are looking for a model of patience, this is it. While being confronted with so many falsities and insults, the congregation has shown respect for the laws that protect free speech, and have chosen to take the high road over these many years.

As an interfaith organization, we have supported Beth Israel in the past, and are now wanting to show the congregation again that we stand with them. We respect the way they have dealt with this violation of sacred space, and find the tactics of Witness for Peace inappropriate, offensive and non-productive. We repudiate the picketing of a place of worship, whether a synagogue, temple, church or mosque.

In spite of many conversations with this group, a resolution of support for Beth Israel passed by the Ann Arbor City Council in 2012 and many other attempts to reach a more effective solution to this intimidation and harassment, the protests continue. Please join us in reassuring the synagogue and Rabbi Dobrusin and Rabbi Blumenthal that they not only have our support, but that we denounce the methods used by this group to marginalize and demonize a congregation and its Jewish identity.

Cooperating together,

The Interfaith Round Table of Washtenaw County