

Confronting Acts of Hate in Our Community – Remarks 2/4/2024 Cantor Harriet Dunkerley, Temple B'nai Chaim, Wilton, CT

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward us. Manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

This is the working definition of Antisemitism that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance developed in May of 2016 which has been adopted by over 48 countries, organizations and states including the US.

Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity and is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong," and is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

What does Antisemitism look like?

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews or the power of Jews as collective — such as the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms or intentionality of the systematic torture and murder of 6 million Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism such as claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Comparing contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Criminal acts are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because

they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews. According to the Anti-Defamation League, the largest domestic organization dedicated to fighting all forms of antisemitism, bias and hate, those kinds of antisemitic acts are up by a staggering 400% over this same time last year. It is everywhere – on college campuses across the country, in blue states, in red states, in cities large and small, all over social media, and in our own backyard.

Antisemitism has invaded our bucolic corner of Fairfield County with a vengeance. What does it look like? At my synagogue, Temple B'nai Chaim, right down the road at the intersection of Wilton, Redding and Ridgefield, it looks like the FBI coming to sweep the building after an emailed bomb threat – on more than one occasion. It looks like \$1,000s and \$1,000s of unplanned dollars spent on police security and armed guards to ensure the safety of all the children and adults that enter our building – a house of worship and study whose doors must remain locked at all times. It looks like endless conversations with upset parents whose young child has been told by a peer on the school bus that he will go to hell because he is a Jew who doesn't celebrate Christmas, or another whose older daughter was told to watch out because she was going to be sent to the gas chambers just like her great grandparent were, or the parents of HS Seniors or current college students who suddenly aren't sure if their child will be safe on campus because all those "liberal" schools that we thought shared our ethical and moral values are suddenly hotbeds of Antisemitic rhetoric, protests and even violence against the Jewish student body. Jewish students at many of these institutions don't feel safe going to class or walking on campus displaying any openly identifiable Jewish symbols! In America in 2024! It looks like consoling a terrified congregant who came to me in tears confessing she was thinking about which neighbors she could turn to and ask them to hide her and her family if it got to that point and was that wrong to think that way.

In Wilton – the town where I live – it looks like Israel yard signs being vandalized – just this morning someone found their sign defaced with the word Genocide written across it in big black lettering – or those same signs being stolen. It looks like blue ribbons being taken down repeatedly despite being displayed with permission from the town and property owners, homes displaying Israel flag signs being vandalized with eggs thrown at the house and the signs. It looks like individuals in Wilton spewing antisemitic hate speech and vitriol online through various social media platforms, Jewish Wilton HS students having property vandalized with swastikas, parents wondering if they should keep their children out of school, students being targeted, harassed and bullied because they are Jewish... all of this and more is happening right here in Wilton, and I am aware it is happening in many of the surrounding towns as well.

We are better than this my friends. This absolutely cannot stand, and the only way to stop it is to come together as a community, to realize that we have so much more in common than that which divides us. We must take a stand and realize that we are so much stronger together. Antisemitism isn't a political issue – it's not blue or red or

purple – it's a human issue. Antisemitism may be the oldest form of hatred, but as you will see from my fellow panelists, it is certainly not the only form, and if we allow one incident of bias, hate, othering or discrimination to take hold, it simply strengthens the field for more to follow. This is why we are here today. We must come together, all of us, and raise our voices to say unequivocally enough is enough! We must take action to strengthen our communities together and rid our neighborhoods of hate.

Ellie Wiesel, the great Jewish author and Holocaust survivor said,

“We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

I entreat you – please do not remain silent in the face of antisemitism or hate in any form. Our children, our neighbors and our community demand and deserve our collective voice for humanity, decency, love and respect for ALL people. Why would we accept anything less in our own homes. Please, join us....