

# Beth David Synagogue

## Neo-Nazis coming to Greensboro?

August 26, 2009

### A Letter to the Greensboro Jewish Community

from Rabbi Eliezer Havivi, Rabbi Fred Guttman and Marilyn Chandler

Dear Friends,

Yesterday we attended a meeting with civic and religious leaders to discuss what our reaction ought to be to the media reports of the National Socialist Movement (aka Nazi) plans to meet in Greensboro on August 29. Police Chief Bellamy reported that it was unclear where or exactly when the meeting was going to take place. The Chief also stressed his department's desire that there not be confrontation between the NSM and other community groups or protestors.

The meeting, chaired by Dr Anthony Wade of the chair of the Greensboro Human Relations Commission, considered questions like:

- Should we have a reaction?
- Should it be on that day?
- Should it be a demonstration of some sort?
- Would a demonstration serve the purposes of the neo-Nazis by attracting media attention? (Perhaps any reaction on that day to the meeting would call more attention to it.)
- If there were to be other "non-establishment" groups who come and demonstrate anyway, perhaps a planned gathering would channel their energy into something more productive?
- How could we get our message - "Not in our Town" across?
- Should we stand outside the meeting in a silent protest?
- Should we put an ad in the paper encouraging citizens of Greensboro to not welcome people who preach hate and inequality of different human beings?
- Should we find a way to highlight instead all of the positive human unity and tolerance aspects of Greensboro - NCCJ, Anytown, the Piedmont Interfaith Council, Impact Greensboro, Other Voices, our own interfaith dialogue, the Federation and ministers' interfaith trips to Israel, etc?
- Perhaps we should ask Ministers, Priests and Imams to set aside that weekend to speak about inclusivity and diversity and tolerance?

Several people were opposed to "just" a reaction to the meeting. Our city, they said, has problems which run much deeper and those issues need to be addressed. In their view, planning a reaction to the neo-Nazi meeting would only serve as a distraction to addressing the bigger Greensboro city issues of the racial and economic divide,

poverty, education, etc.

Representing the Jewish community were Rabbis Guttman and Havivi, Marilyn Chandler, Deborah Kintzing and David Marker. At various times, each of us offered our opinions, sometimes agreeing, sometimes differing on strategy and direction.

In the end, this is what the group decided:

1. We should react.
2. We should say that we are a city that embraces diversity, and although we cherish the freedom of others to offer their opinion, the prevalent spirit of the People of Greensboro is that we also cherish our diversity, and believe that all of us are created "b'tzelem elohim" - "In God's image."
3. We will ask clergy (Imams, Priests, Ministers and Rabbis) to speak on that weekend on the theme of inclusiveness and embrace of diversity.
4. We will reconvene a gathering to discuss how we might use this event and the interest that it has generated as a way of addressing deeper issues in our community.
5. There will be an ad and/or an op-ed piece in the local media and on websites on that weekend stating our commitment to fairness and equality and embrace of diversity. This piece will also contain a resolution against bias, bigotry and racism which will be on line and to which anyone can add their name as a sign of agreement. We will not sponsor a demonstration or event on that day, confronting the meeting of the National Socialist Movement.
6. Instead - we will ask the people of Greensboro - men women and children, to make their commitment to tolerance and opposition to bigotry known through a simple act - wearing a ribbon of some sort, of some color or colors, on their lapel throughout the weekend. We are hopeful that people will wear these ribbons while in prayer, shopping, dining out, playing tennis or golf, etc; in short everywhere for the entire weekend. This is something that parents can do with their children, and a way that people can identify with the message - "No hate in our town!"

In light of these events, we especially urge you to attend Shabbat services this weekend. Our response to such evil in our midst should be that of our coming together as a community to affirm our pride in our heritage, Israel and the diversity and freedom for all which has been the hallmark of this great country since its inception. The teachings of Jewish tradition on tolerance, the worth of every human being and the commandment to "Love our neighbor as ourselves" serve as a basis for whom we are and what we affirm. We cannot think of a better response than our coming together as a community in our houses of worship this weekend. It is also a good time to invite our non Jewish friends to worship with us.

Ribbons with pins to wear will be available at the Beth David Synagogue and Temple Emanuel on Thursday (at the evening lecture), Friday, Shabbat and Sunday. Of course, you can make your own at home.

Please join us in wearing a ribbon this weekend as a way of saying - "You may be meeting in my town, but I sure do not agree with your message. I believe that all human beings are b'tzelem elohim, and equally sacred.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Eliezer Havivi  
Beth David Synagogue  
Federation

Rabbi Fred Guttman  
Temple Emanuel

Marilyn Chandler  
Greensboro Jewish

**This statement was sent to all Religious Leaders in Greater Greensboro from Rev. Dr. Mark Sills of FaithAction:**

No doubt you are aware that this coming weekend the National Socialist Party (Nazis) will be holding a regional conference in Greensboro. Perhaps they have chosen Greensboro this year for their meeting because this is the 30th anniversary of the November 3rd shooting. For whatever reason, they are coming and they will be spreading their message of hatred and exclusion.

**A coalition of religious leaders will join with leaders from the business and civic sectors to proclaim that our city is a place of welcome, of inclusion and justice. We reject the message of hate.**

We urge all clergy of our city to use this opportunity to defy hatred through the proclamation of messages of love, inclusion, equity, and justice. Let's use this time for positive witness. Let's use this time to call on our people to confess our own sins of inequality, racism, and injustice. Then we can renew our commitment to work together to build a society that is fully inclusive and just, where all people of good will are welcomed and allowed to employ their God given talents in service to others.

This weekend during sabbath services, we encourage you to focus your message on unity, equity, and justice for all.

We also encourage your congregation to provide multi-colored ribbons for everyone to wear as a public witness for unity and inclusion and equity.

Let's drown out the messages of hate and exclusion with a peaceful witness for unity and justice.

Thanks!

The Rev. Dr. Mark Sills,  
FaithAction Executive Director