

Torah

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been the site of a concerted effort to reestablish a strong Jewish population.

Maavar reached out to Rabbi Haim Beliak, the U.S.-raised son of Holocaust survivors, who runs Friends of Jewish Renewal in Poland, which supports the 10 small Progressive – the Polish term for Reform and Conservative – communities there.

These congregations, in places like Warsaw, Gdansk and Wroclaw, have been growing from *havurot* – groups that meet informally for Jewish study, worship and celebrations – to full congregations. Together, these congregations constitute Beit Polska, the umbrella organization of Progressive Jews in Poland, which in turn is associated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Beliak was thrilled with the prospect of another Torah going to Poland. “The physical presence of the [Torah Scrolls] helps us to crystallize and stabilize the sense of belonging and investment in Jewish life,” he said.

“The connection to congregations creates a sense of fraternity that Polish Jews rarely feel from other Jews,” Beliak added.

The journey of the Torah from Norwood to Warsaw involved another Boston-area synagogue, Temple Beth Elohim of Wellesley.

Because Beilak was about to attend the Central Conference of American Rabbis convention in Atlanta, he wondered if there were a Reform rabbi in Boston who would also be going.

Rabbis Joel Sisenwine and Philip Sherman, who led a group of congregants to Poland last year, quickly



PHOTO COURTESY CAROL CLINGAN

From left, Rabbis Rachel Safire, Joel Sisenwine, Haim Beliak and Philip Sherman with the Torah Scroll

agreed to take the precious cargo with them.

“The Synagogue Council was delighted to make this *shiddach* between two of our member congregations and a burgeoning Polish Jewish population,” said David Bernat, its executive director.

“We have been so pleased with the success of Maavar in its first year, thanks to community support,” he added.

On the first morning they were in Atlanta, Rabbis Sisenwine, Sherman and Rachel Safire met with Rabbi Beilak for the sacred handoff.

Just four days later, on Erev Shabbat, the Torah was dedicated at a ceremony in Warsaw, completing its journey from one community, and indeed continent, to another.

Noted Marek Jezowski, president of Beit Polska, in an email, “Enamored with it, a priceless gift

for one of our resurgent communities of Poland.

“A huge Thank You to the donors, their entire community,” Jezowski wrote.

The donors in Norwood are equally pleased.

“As we close Temple Shaare Tefilah, we of course remain connected to the larger community of the Jewish people,” Turkewitz said.

“We liked the idea of our synagogue having a more global legacy,” she added. “It’s wonderful to think of our [Torah Scrolls] invigorating congregations in four different countries overseas.”

Thus, a sacred Torah found its way from a synagogue in Massachusetts founded by immigrants from Eastern Europe to a synagogue in Poland, where many of those immigrants were born.

Milton

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March to design a program to engage parents and students at home.

“We want every family in Milton to sit down and have a conversation with their child about these issues: mutual respect and how do you handle when somebody says something bigoted towards another person,” Rabbi Benjamin said. “We wanted parents to have that age appropriate conversation in the home.”

They reached out to the Anti-Defamation League New England for materials, but Spaulding said the organization had “nothing that we were envisioning.”

Using materials from the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance program and some ADL resources, Rabbi Benjamin and Spaulding spearheaded, “It’s Time to Talk about Hate: A Family Centered Initiative.”

The program consists of three age appropriate guides: preschool, elementary/pre-teen and teen. All include four sections: recommendations for getting started, voices from the field, conversation starters/activities and tips for parents.

“[The curriculum] will not only serve to prompt a conversation, but lay down some groundwork and educate for the long run,” Spaulding said.

The Milton superintendent of schools distributed the materials via email to all families with children in the town, including those who attend religious and private schools; the town is encouraging everyone to participate.

“It’s not a religious document; it’s about being a decent human being and helping teach our children how to be decent human be-



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**– Rabbi Alfred Benjamin
Congregation Beth
Shalom of the Blue Hills**

ings,” Rabbi Benjamin explained. “It means a lot when the non-Jewish community is outraged, and that’s the culture of this town.”

Spaulding and Rabbi Benjamin shared the curriculum with ADL New England and SPLC, in the hopes that it could help other communities facing similar challenges. An employee at SPLC told Spaulding that she would share it with her colleagues, while the person they contacted at ADL was not immediately available to look over the material, Spaulding said.

“People now will have something to use if they think it’s worthwhile,” Rabbi Benjamin said. “They won’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

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