

## January 2020 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

It's now three weeks later, and I'm still walking on clouds over how beautiful and successful our mental health event was on December 8. Thank you to everyone who came out to join us. Thank you to Sisterhood for helping set up the Elaine Hirsch Simcha Room for dinner. Thank you to those who contributed dessert offerings and drinks and plates and cups. Thank you to Shira and Rachel for helping cook the falafel dinner. And thank you to the [Board of Trustees](#) for supporting the event so willingly.

As I revisit the evening, there are a number of reasons I believe it turned out to be so meaningful. Without a doubt, [That Way Madness Lies](#) is an exceptional film. And of course having Sandra Luckow, the creator and narrator with us in person to give personal perspective on everything that went into this project was quite an honor. As well, giving audience members the chance to see what was in many respects their own stories on the screen – and then being able to discuss it with others who inherently understood – was moving beyond all expectations. But to me, the single most important ingredient to the event's success was the fact that it took place in conversation with others from the larger faith community beyond the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey.

Having the chance to hear Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives (as well as a strictly clinical perspective, too) is what tied the evening together with such passion. Truth be told, were this film to have been screened in a strictly secular setting, it still would have opened the curtains to show that those of us who live with the realities described in [That Way Madness Lies](#) truly are **not** alone. It is a far more familiar story than we may think, which means that yes, there are others who understand our experience. But our event was **not** held in a secular setting. Our event quite consciously took place in a building of faith, with an audience of faith. And because of that, our event managed to bring the three Abrahamic religions together in common purpose, because even though some of the details presented by our faith-based panelists differed from Judaism to Christianity to Islam, the core reality remained the same each time:

*Because every person is created in the image of God, every person, no matter how ill or healthy, is worthy of the same respect from all.*

It seems like a simple enough point, but a quick look at the world around us suggests that “simple” doesn't always mean “easy-to-accomplish.” With so much hatred and distrust among those of differing theologies, having the opportunity to hear from the panelists, unequivocally, that we all agree on the sacred nature of each human being was, for me, the absolute greatest takeaway of the evening.

One of the faith groups that joined us, led by its new pastor, Reverend Diana Ortiz-Bracy, was the community of [Mount Pisgah AME Church](#). How wonderful it was to build even further on the friendships we have been establishing over the past few years with our friends “down the street!” Though we have been doing a wonderful job

coming together over time, having the opportunity to dig together into such a deep, meaningful, and personal issue as mental health was valuable beyond measure.

On that note, **January 17 and 19, the Friday and Sunday of Martin Luther King, Jr., weekend, will mark the 4<sup>th</sup> annual weekend of joint worship services between our two communities.** In keeping with our established tradition, Reverend Ortiz-Bracy will preach from the bima during Shabbat on Friday, and I will preach in the church during morning worship on Sunday.

I urge all of us, especially given the scourge of anti-Semitic attacks that took place during Hanukkah, to come together with our friends from Mt. Pisgah AME Church to honor Dr. King's legacy by saying that people of good faith will always have reason to be together. Let's not shut ourselves off. Let's stand tall and be unafraid. Let's celebrate who we are and share ourselves with others, especially others who also know how it feels to be vulnerable and marginalized in society. As I see it, Dr. King hit the nail on the head when [he said to an audience of students at Cornell College in Mount Vernon Iowa in October of 1962](#) that he thinks people "hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other, and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other."

*L'Shalom*

Rabbi Dubin

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