

What Is Project Renewal and What Is It Doing In Charlotte?

By Simon Estroff
Project Renewal Chairman

Good question! In Israel there are over 300,000 Jews who live in social and economic isolation.....where helplessness and uncertainty are part of every day life.....where the promise of an equitable Jewish nation has not yet been kept.

Project Renewal is the means to the end; the method that links one community in Israel to either one or a group, called a cluster group, in America.

Since 1948 Israel has had a wonderful "ingathering" of our brethren; over a million of our people have come to build this wonderful and beautiful nation. Many have come as refugees, with very little in material possessions, and many with customs that are literally thousands of years old. The Government of Israel and the Jewish Agency have literally performed miracles, stretching every available

dollar to provide housing and educational opportunity as well as medical treatment, job opportunity etc. But, for many, it has not been enough. Huge social and educational differences separated different groups of immigrants. Many were unable to learn the language, and many could not adapt to the demands of Israeli society, and they gradually "fell back." The continuous war and inflation that together have racked Israel since its independence disrupted the efforts to completely absorb many people into Israeli society, and many distressed neighborhoods developed, both in the urban areas as well as the countryside. Many of these people had large families who married and the cycle was continued. There were far too few professionals to help lift these people up, and there were far too few community centers, playgrounds, day care facilities etc. The school drop out rate was high, fami-

ly disintegration was becoming worse. People could not enter the workforce; they did not possess the basic skills. There arose in Israel a second class of citizenry, the so-called "other Israel." A new approach was needed to break down these barriers, to reach out and touch these people.

Project Renewal was born. At last the solution was discovered: To link a city in Israel with a city (or cluster) and have these two communities work hand in hand, to solve the problems; to have a co-operative venture, to make the dream come true, for these approximately 300,000 Jews, of which 200,000 are children; to reach out and say, "we hear you, brothers and sisters, and we are going to help you. Yes, we will accept the biblical quote; yes, we are our brothers keepers."

Project Renewal works. It has been in place for five years. The proof is there to

see. I had the good fortune to visit two Project Renewal cities when I visited Israel in February. I saw for myself one that is practically completed. The five year project is almost done. It is Yehud, a suburb of Tel Aviv.

It is linked with Atlanta and the State of Georgia. It was surely one of the highlights of our visit. We also visited Charlotte's linked city, Upper Nazareth, or Nazareth Illit, as it is called in Israel. Here was an example of what needs to be done. Here is a community that is just beginning to receive funds in order to make it truly a part of the Israeli dream. Here is a community with needs that must be met. Here is a community that is reaching out to us, in Charlotte, as well as other cities in the Carolinas and Virginia, as well as Tennessee. Here is a community that is ready to do its part. But here is a community that needs funds. This is the background of Project

Renewal. Here is the challenge of Project Renewal.

In the months ahead I hope that you will read and learn more about our "sister city." I hope that I will learn much more that I can tell you about. I pledge to you that I am going to do my part to see that the people of Nazareth Illit will feel blessed that they are linked with us, and that we will fulfill our sacred obligation to them. I earnestly hope that during the months ahead we will do what we have to do, and that by this time next year many of the needed social and educational projects will be moving along, and that we will be able to have one or more of our brothers and sisters come to Charlotte and say proudly, "thank you."

I look forward to sharing with you all that I can in the months ahead.

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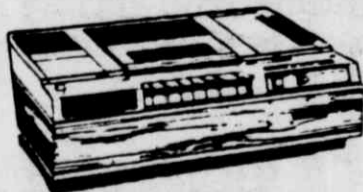
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