

**THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS**

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**Editorial**

**A Test for Community**

By Michael Minkin  
 Executive Director  
 Charlotte Jewish Federation

The controversy in Israel over "Who is a Jew" and its impact on the Diaspora has tested our very existence and unity as a people. Born out of a chaotic and unpredictable system in Israel, we find ourselves responding to political and religious leadership who are jockeying for power and position. Religion and politics have become one, and the true victims of this travesty are Jews throughout the Diaspora.

The Charlotte Jewish community has not been exempt from the turmoil. Though I had hoped that we would escape the destructive nature of the political miscalculations that have occurred in Israel, the reality of our feelings came through. Why should we be different? Why should we be above the human experience? Why should we be insulated from the emotional upheaval of a bitter controversy that has been raging for over 40 years, yet has come into the spotlight because votes were needed to form a government in Israel?

My dismay and disappointment brought me to reflect on the beginning of my residency in Charlotte. Eighteen months ago when my plane touched down at Douglas Airport I began to hear about the accomplishments of the Charlotte community. I didn't let on that I had heard about Charlotte from my colleagues. They had told me of a small southern city which had brought Jews together...orthodox, conservative and reformed, involved and uninvolved, affiliated and unaffiliated, so that they could build a community, a place that transcended religious, ideological and organizational differences. A place that was for all Jews. A place called Shalom Park.

I am saddened that the strength and courage that built the complex could possibly crumble under the pressure of political and religious maneuvering that is taking place thousands of miles away. I hope we can withstand the onslaught of controversy and rise above it so that we, as a community, can maintain our dignity and work toward unity. I know it won't be easy.

The Charlotte Jewish Federation sponsored a community dialogue; letters of explanation were mailed. Phones in the Federation office were ringing off the hook with people expressing their concern. Bobbi Bernstein, president of the Charlotte Jewish Federation, spent hours trying to respond to those concerns. I was frightened and concerned, for at times, I felt the dream of Federation...the meaning of Federation...was slipping away. Though most people expressed their anguish in positive ways and looked to foster open communication so that the Charlotte Jewish community could preserve itself, others were adamant to the point of using threats. We were under the test of withstanding the pressures of the outside. All of Charlotte has been given the challenge of preserving the unity of our community as we continue to struggle so that all can maintain their identity as both an individual Jew and a community member.

Federation, must above all else, be preserved for the entire community. We in Charlotte must continue to be a beacon for the rest of the country who wondered how this small Southern city accomplished "our miracle." We must continue to let them know that it was through hard work, patience and most of all the understanding and acceptance of all Jews that made this "island" off Providence Road a reality. In the spirit of Shalom Park, we must continue to be caring Jews, to support the Federation, to cement better relationships between all denominations. Whether we are Lubavitch, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist, we are all Jews!

**The "State of the Union" Address**

By Bobbi Bernstein  
 President, CJF

As I complete my first year of service as president of The Charlotte Jewish Federation, I have to admit to you that it has been an even greater challenge than I could ever have anticipated. I call it my x-rated year; exciting, exasperating, exhilarating and exhausting. I have been given the opportunity to work with wonderful people and to represent

the Federation in a variety of ways: in community meetings such as the President's Council, in accepting the Schroder Award at the General Assembly in New Orleans, and in addressing our own 50th Anniversary Celebration of The Charlotte Jewish Federation. It has been a privilege and a responsibility that I cherish. I am extremely grateful for the serious commitment of my executive committee whose intelligent approach

to problem solving reflects concern for the total community. I am amazed at the energy level of our Executive Director, Mike Minkin, who is always working, planning, organizing, and thinking ahead to ever greater challenges. He will not let me rest.

One year ago, I stated: "The mission of my tenure as president of The Charlotte Jewish Federation is to develop a sense of community — Klal Yisroel — in which unity and participation are key to fulfilling the financial and human service needs of our constituents both here and abroad."

I believe we have tried to be true to that mission through the following accomplishments:

Our first goal of full board participation has been almost 100 percent realized. Each member of the Federation board has generously devoted time, effort, ideas and hard work, and in doing so, has helped promote a sense of common purpose and unity. We have transcended our differences in order to build a strong and caring Jewish community and we can be proud of our achievements.

Our second goal of reactivating our many standing committees has been a direct result of full board participation and shows what can be accomplished through effective action.

The Leadership Development Program has successfully recruited 42 eager participants and has begun an intensive 18 month program under the leadership of Bobbi Damsky.

The Allocations Committee, headed by Shelton Gorelick, has developed a new two-tiered approach, involving more than 50 people in the allocation process. A much more in-depth scrutiny of each request has been instituted and hundreds of hours go into evaluating these requests.

The Community Relations Committee, under the leadership of Bill Ashendorf and Moses Luski, in addition to cosponsoring our Soviet Jewry Rally and the 50th Anniversary of Kristallnacht, has presented three provocative forums on issues many other communities have been afraid to tackle. I am extremely proud of this committee's faith in our community's ability to deal with differences. These insightful people realized that the Charlotte Jewish community is strong enough to withstand diversity; is indeed made stronger by our ability to disagree on issues and still retain our strong sense of concern for community.

The latest forum, 'Who is a Jew,' brought 450 people to Shalom Park — the largest attendance in my memory to a Federation program. Because of the strong feelings generated around this issue, there was some question as to whether or not the Federation should or would con-



**Letters to the Editor**

**In Appreciation**

"Happy Birthday!" Charlotte Jewish News. Ten years of hard work, service and dedication!

Thanks so much!

— Alan Cathey III

Editor's note: Thank you Mr. Cathey for your very kind words and for your

most generous contribution which will be added to our special "CJN" fund. Monies contributed to this fund will be used to purchase needed equipment such as a light-table.

We encourage our readers' viewpoints. Letters should be submitted typewritten and double-spaced and signed. Please include your address and phone number. We reserve the right to edit.

**The Poor and the Panhandler — A Jewish View**

By Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum

How should we regard the needs of genuinely poor people in our streets? With generosity, compassion, and cheerfulness.

That is a central teaching of biblical and rabbinic ethics, and that obligation to relieve poverty, both personally and communally, should be the moral framework for dealing with the real problem of phony panhandlers.

No one in his right mind would advocate encouraging scam artists and professional hustlers. But most people, I believe, are reasonably intelligent, and are capable of judging who is really poor and who is a flimflam beggar.

Withholding charity from the phony beggar should not become a license for withholding aid from the truly needy.

That is not simply a do-gooder's sentimentalism. If you study biblical and rabbinic ethics, you will know that nothing is more basic than the moral obligation of tzedakah, which means both

"charity" and "doing justice."

The Talmud declares in fact that alms-giving — aiding the poor and feeding the hungry — is equal to all the commandments of the Torah.

The rabbis dramatize the point by saying, "He who has no pity upon his fellow creatures is assuredly not of the seed of Abraham, our father."

In Jewish communities from biblical times to the present, there was free and generous giving of alms to all who were in need.

There was also much systematic and careful relief through established charitable institutions, such as the tamchui, or the public kitchen, and the pushka, or alms box.

But the highest degree of charity, Maimonides reminds us, is to help a person get work and thereby achieve dignity through self-support and independence.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum is director of international relations for the American Jewish Committee.