

Why a Rabbi Cares So Much About the Vandalizing of a Crèche

By RABBI DOUGLAS SAGAL

First, in the name of honesty, a disclaimer. I am one of an apparently dwindling number of people who believe that crèches and menorahs and other religious symbols belong on church and temple property, not in the public square.

Call me an old-fashioned "out of touch" liberal, but I believe our Founding Fathers were right to be concerned about the establishment of a state religion, and the appropriate place for religious display is in homes and houses of worship.

The public square belongs to all residents, not just those of certain faiths, and I suspect that the display of particular religious symbols on commonly held property violates a precious legacy bequeathed to us by the Founders. I understand that many disagree and that forthright (even aggressive) representation of religious symbols is becoming more the norm.

That being said, I was outraged when the crèche displayed on public land near the north side parking lot was defaced with the repugnant swastika. This, following the theft of the infant Jesus from the crèche at a local church. (It has since been returned).

I was outraged enough to draft a letter to *The Leader* and get signatures from fellow clergy. I was outraged enough to speak about the matter from my pulpit on the Sabbath. I was outraged enough to speak of it during the community Martin Luther King service.

You see, I believe that we are all

children of the same loving God and Creator, and a swipe at one faith is a swipe at all faiths. The fact that the crèche belonged to a Catholic organization or that the swastika is particularly hateful to Jews should not deter all people of faith from standing together against hatred and intolerance.

I have always held this view. Years ago, while serving a small New England pulpit, my tiny congregation raised one thousand dollars during a single service to help a little child, a neighbor of the temple, seek medical treatment for a rare illness. Her family were active members of the Catholic church, but are we all not one family, have we not one Father?

I was surprised to hear later that some townsfolk uncharitably commented that this Irish Catholic family must be secretly Jews, for after all, people only help their own. The child's religion was no doubt confirmed for these doubters a year later during her wake and Mass of Christian Burial.

Similarly, when a local Congregational Church was robbed of all her silver, my parishioners contributed to replacing the cherished items.

Recent years have seen an increase in sectarian tensions and a lessening of dialogue and good will among faiths. Let the recent vandalism be an opportunity for us to speak to one another about the virtues of love, tolerance and mutual respect.

Rabbi Sagal is Senior Rabbi at Temple Emanu-El, located at 756 East Broad Street in Westfield.



A SUNSHINE DAY...Dr. Andy Eichenfeld, physician for Camp Sunshine, a summer camp for terminally ill children based in Casco, Me., accepts a check for \$1,000 from Sanofi-Synthelabo, Inc. on behalf of the camp. The presentation was made January 9 at the First Congregational Church of Westfield, which honored its youth volunteers and advisors who gave their time to the camp. Church member and Sanofi-Synthelabo employee Lisa Riedell coordinated the donation. Pictured, from left to right, are: Dr. Eichenfeld's wife, Nancy Cincotta, camp Director of Psycho-Social Services; son A.J.; Dr. Eichenfeld; the Reverend Pamela Gilchrist, and fellow advisor Carol Devine.

Side-By-Siders to Entertain At 12 O'Clock Club Meeting

SCOTCH PLAINS - Cranford's Side-by-Siders will entertain the 12 O'Clock Club with show tunes and old-time favorites at the club's Tuesday, February 8, noon luncheon and meeting at the Willow Grove Presbyterian Church in Scotch Plains. The luncheon cost is \$4.

Additionally, members of the community are invited to attend the church's free Stretches for Health exercise program on Tuesdays from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., and may stay for the luncheon and program afterwards. The church is located at 1961 Raritan Road.

Persons interested in attending the luncheon are asked to make reservations by Sunday, February 6. To make a reservation or if transportation is needed, please call Barbara Couphas at (908) 322-7892.

Mount Saint Mary Launches Fund Drive For Firefighter

AREA - The Mount Saint Mary Academy (MSMA) community in Watchung has launched a fund drive on behalf of New York firefighter Eugene Stolowski and his wife, Bridgid.

With no other means of escape, firefighter Stolowski and five of his colleagues recently jumped from the fourth floor of a burning building in The Bronx. While he suffered no brain damage, his arms, legs, neck and pelvis were broken in the jump and his

lungs were burned by fire inhalation.

Described as a friend to many at Mount Saint Mary, firefighter Stolowski has been in intensive care since his escape from the blaze. He is the father of a two-year-old, Brianna, and his wife, Bridgid, is expecting twin girls in June.

So far, employees, Sisters, students, parents and friends have raised more than \$4,000 in response to the injured firefighter's plight.

The outpouring of donations and promises of prayer came after Sister Lisa Gambacorto, Directress of Mount Saint Mary Academy, emailed the Mount Saint Mary community concerning the seriousness of firefighter Stolowski's condition.

Contributions can be made through Sister Lisa Gambacorto, Mount Saint Mary Academy, 1645 Route 22, West, Watchung 06069. Checks may be made payable to MSMA, with "Eugene Stolowski" indicated on the memo line.

Seminar to Address Urinary Incontinence

MOUNTAINSIDE - Brighton Gardens of Mountainside will host a free seminar on strategies for coping with urinary incontinence on Wednesday, February 9, from 7 to 8 p.m.

Dr. Jonathan Agins, a urologist, will present the program, sponsored by Overlook Hospital in Summit. It will take place at Brighton Gardens, located at 1350 Route 22, West, in Mountainside.

Interested persons are asked to respond by calling Yolanda Andrews, Director of Community Relations, at (908) 654-4460. Walk-ins also will be welcome.

Calvary Lutheran Church To Hold Series on Bullying

CRANFORD - The Calvary Lutheran Church, located at 108 Eastman Street in Cranford, will present a three-session focus on bullying awareness and prevention during its Adult Forum on Sundays, February 6, 13 and 20.

The Adult Forum is held from 9:45 to 10:45 a.m. in the lounge of the Education Building, located behind the Sanctuary Building.

These sessions are part of a community-wide effort in Cranford to raise awareness about the problem of bullying and to discuss ways to prevent it. No longer viewed as just part of growing up, bullying is now recog-

Willow Grove to Hold 'Tales in the Grove'

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Willow Grove Presbyterian Church, located at 1961 Raritan Road in Scotch Plains, will offer its "Tales in the Grove" storytime program on Sundays, February 6 and 20, starting at 7 p.m.

Each session lasts 45 to 60 minutes. While geared towards children age two to five, older or younger siblings also may attend. Participants may wear their pajamas and bring a snack or beverage.

The program, which is free and open to all, will continue the first and third Sundays of every month. Two congregation volunteers will run each session - one reader and one greeter. Parents will be asked to stay for the duration of the storytime to help redirect "wanderers" to the story circle.

For more information about Willow Grove, please call the church office, Monday through Friday, at (908) 232-5678, e-mail wilgrv@netzero.com or visit www.scotchplains.com/wgpc.

Clergyman to Give Talk On Neighborhood Center

WESTFIELD - The United Methodist Women of the First United Methodist Church of Westfield are inviting all women and guests to their general meeting on Saturday, February 12, at 10 a.m. at the church.

The Reverend Timothy Humenuik of the Camden Neighborhood Center will be the guest speaker. An urban outreach agency of the United Methodist Church, the Neighborhood Center, Inc. meets the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of Camden residents through a variety of pro-

grams for youth, adults and senior citizens.

A soup and sandwich luncheon will follow the presentation. A \$5 donation per person is requested to help defray the cost. The church is located at One East Broad Street.

Reservations are encouraged and may be made at a table at the First United Methodist Church narthex on Sunday, February 6, before and after the 10:45 a.m. worship service or by calling the church office at (908) 233-4211.

nized as leaving a lasting impact on children and adults.

On February 6, the guest speaker will be Stewart Green, founder and Director of the New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention.

The speaker for February 13 will be Ann Marie Francis, character education coordinator for the Cranford Public Schools, who will focus on how the schools and community are addressing this problem.

On February 20, members of Calvary's Outreach and Christian Education Ministries will lead a discussion on what individuals can do to support the anti-bullying effort.

All members of the community are invited to attend. Materials and resources for adults and children will be available at each session. For directions to Calvary Lutheran or for more information about the program, please call the church office at (908) 276-2418.

Westfield Area 'Y' Sets Screenings and Lecture
SUMMIT - Overlook Hospital personnel will be at the Westfield Area "Y," 220 Clark Street in Westfield, on Thursday, February 10, to conduct free blood pressure screenings from 6 to 8 p.m.

Additionally, a lecture entitled "Rise and Shine Breakfast for Your Day" will be presented from 7 to 8 p.m. It will address foods that provide people with the appropriate energy to get started in the morning.

No appointments are necessary and no fees are required. For more information, please call the Westfield Area "Y" at (908) 233-2700, extension no. 251.

Children's Christmas Eve Breakfast With Santa Considered Success

MOUNTAINSIDE - James "Jimmy" Giannakis, Chef and owner of Sheffield's Restaurant and Catering on Route 22 in Mountainside, had an idea. He wanted to have a Christmas Eve breakfast with Santa Claus for under privileged children.

He asked the Rotary club of Mountainside for help. Jimmy is a member and the club meets at his restaurant at noon on Mondays. The president-elect, Gloria Dickerson, contacted the Salvation Army of Plainfield.

Approximately 50 people were transported to Sheffield's to participate in the breakfast. This included members of the Salvation Army, their Chaplin and the children with their parents.

The cost of the breakfast was donated by Jimmy and his chef, Fito, donated his time to cook the breakfast. Other residents of Mountainside heard about the endeavor and volunteered to help.

Anthony Barbera of Mountainside purchased gifts for all of the children. Gary Whyte donated pineapples and

bananas. They were placed on the tables during breakfast and then were taken home by the participants.

The serving help consisted of members from the Baldassare, Wells, and Ostrowski families as well as members of the Rotary Club.

The Rotary Club also raised money to help pay for the cost of the presents, batteries and dessert. Joe and Rose Sinisi provided Santa with a nice new suit for the occasion.

Parkinson's Group Posts Next Meeting

WESTFIELD - Persons with Parkinson's disease and/or their caregivers are invited to attend the next meeting of the Westfield Parkinson's Disease Support Group on Monday, February 14, at 1:30 p.m.

The meeting, which is free of charge, will be held in Assembly Hall on the lower level of the Parish House at The Presbyterian Church in Westfield, located at 140 Mountain Avenue. Light refreshments will be served.

Sandra Frank of the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs will provide a "creative break" for caregivers by conducting an arts program focusing on dance. During this time, persons with Parkinson's will participate in a separate RAP session, discussing issues of concern.

The group regularly meets on the second Monday of each month. For more information, please call Barbara Ringk at (908) 322-9214 or the church office at (908) 233-0301.

Caregivers Group To Meet Monday

WESTFIELD - A support group for those caring for elderly or chronically ill loved ones will meet on Monday, February 7, at 8 p.m. in the Parish Center of St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church on Lamberts Mill Road in Westfield.

Meetings are held on the first non-holiday Monday of each month. These are information and sharing sessions. For more information, please call Marilyn Ryan at (908) 233-8757.

Genealogical Society To Meet February 12

WESTFIELD - The Genealogical Society of the West Fields will meet in the Program Room of the Westfield Memorial Library, 550 East Broad Street, on Saturday, February 12, at 10 a.m.

Jo Ann Schwab, Union County Deputy Surrogate, will speak on the importance of making a will, understanding the probate process, and the significance of advance directives or living wills.

Admission is free and the public is invited to attend the meeting. Refreshments will be served. For additional information, please call (908) 276-7104.

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