

Rabbi, cantor arrested in clergy gas pipeline protest | www.thejewishadvocate.com

By Brett M. Rhyne

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Cantor Roy Einhorn of Temple Israel, Boston being arrested

PHOTO: ALLEGRA K. BOVERMAN

WEST ROXBURY – A Reform rabbi and a Reform cantor were arrested last week while attempting to block construction of a natural gas pipeline here.

Shoshana Friedman, assistant rabbi for engagement at Temple Sinai in Brookline, and Cantor Roy Einhorn of Temple Israel in Boston were among the 16 clerics of several faiths that police removed from the West Roxbury Lateral Pipeline construction site on the morning of May 25.

Spectra Energy is currently constructing the West Roxbury Lateral Pipeline to carry fracked gas from shale deposits in Pennsylvania. Its route takes it through residential neighborhoods, under a soccer field and alongside a quarry where there is active blasting.

In an interview with The Jewish Advocate, Friedman described her experience of organizing and leading the protest.

The group of clergy and 75 supporters met at the pipeline metering and regulator station at 8 a.m., she said. At 8:20 a.m., they entered the station and held a prayer and song service for an hour. At 9:20 a.m., the group walked to the construction site; the 16 clerics entered the site and sat down.



PHOTO: ALLEGRA K. BOVERMAN

“About a minute after that, the machines all shut off,” Friedman said. “It was a very profound sensation, going from a very noisy construction site to being totally quiet.”

Friedman had created a song sheet, and the group sang and prayed, accompanied by Friedman on her ukulele, which was better for carrying from one location to another, she said.

“Something really beautiful happened at the end,” she said. “Instead of reading what had been prepared on the piece of paper, the clergy one by one gave very short, impromptu testimonies about why we were each there. That wasn’t planned.”

“It was in the middle of that, that the Boston Police came,” she added.

Police came “in pretty short order,” Friedman said, “within about half an hour.” There are always police at the construction site, she noted, and they called the police vans.

Police gave the protesters about five minutes’ warning before the arrests began. “One by one, the police came behind us and very courteously asked us to stand,” she said. “I asked the officer if I was under arrest. He said yes, so I compliantly stood up. Meanwhile, everybody is still testifying. Then they cuffed us.”

“A powerful moment for me,” she continued, “was as I was being taken away, my father – who is studying to be a rabbi – started playing the climate change anthem that my husband and I wrote, ‘The Tide Is Rising,’ on my guitar.”

Friedman described being in a pitch-black transport vehicle with five or six other clerics, all with their hands cuffed behind their backs. “It’s a little scary. We’re on benches on the side of the wagon, and there are no seatbelts. You could really get hurt in the back of one of those things. So we braced against each other, and we sang.

“I was singing because it gave me courage to do what I had to do,” she continued. “It was very different than singing to lead a group of people or to elicit an emotion in a congregational setting.”

Once at the police station, the men and women were separated, Friedman said. “Guess what? The cell had great acoustics, so we sang!”

Police held the clerics in custody for about an hour, and then released them on their own recognizance after confirming their identities. They will be notified by mail of a summons to appear in court later, Friedman said.

“From a Jewish theological standpoint,” Friedman said, “I think climate change is a sign that we’re not holding up our end of the covenant. The land of Israel is not the only place that’s holy in this world. All land is holy, and all human beings, not just Jews, are holy.”

Einhorn’s motivation was more personal.

“I’m a new grandfather,” he said. “I did it for my grandson. That’s the reason I was there.”

“We want to be using our station as religious leaders to put a stamp of our religious values on this kind of event,” Friedman said. “This is our calling, to serve the world, so let’s show up in a way that’s not only for our congregations, but the world beyond.”

Einhorn said his congregation at Temple Israel is “very supportive” of his activism.

Friedman said the response of her congregation at Temple Sinai – and its senior rabbi, Andy Vogel – has been “very positive, and very, very proud. I think that many Jews are really looking for religion to be relevant to the great crises of our time. And if it’s not, then why are we bothering with religion?”

“For me and many, many others,” she continued, “this is what it looks like to be a religious leader. If it doesn’t mean standing up for life, for love, for human dignity, I’m in the wrong profession.”

The other clergy arrested were Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, president, United Church of Christ, Mass.; Rev. Anne Bancroft, pastor, Theodore Parker Church, West Roxbury; Rev. Ian Mevorach, American Baptist, pastor of Common Street Spiritual Center, Natick; Rev. Margaret Bullit Jonas, missionary for Creation Care, Episcopal Diocese of Western Mass.; Rajesh Kasturirangan, Hindu, leader at South Asian Center; John Bell, Buddhist; Rev. Rob Mark, Church of the Covenant (Presbyterian and UCC); Rev. Rali Weaver, pastor, Dedham Unitarian Universalist Church; Rev. Martha Niebanck, minister emeritus, Brookline Unitarian Universalist Church; Rev. Rebecca Froom, minister of the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Quincy; Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, Unitarian Universalist Association; Rev. Fred Small, Unitarian Universalist; Rev. John Gibbons, minister, First Parish in Bedford; and Rev. Heather Concannon.

Simchah-Celebration