

Area rabbis remember, hope during German trip

The Jewish Advocate July 22, 2016

By Aaron Ginsburg
Advocate correspondent



Area rabbis standing in front of a site that used to house the Jewish orphanage in Munich.— The German Consulate in Boston sent a dozen area rabbis to Germany for last week, one of the first such trips specifically for rabbis.

The trip came out of a relationship that German Consul General to New England Ralf Horlemann built up with Rabbi David Lerner of Temple Emunah in Lexington, as well as fellow members of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, more than a year ago.

The rabbis represented the range of Jewish belief and practice, and included men and women. One was a Holocaust survivor and for some it was their first trip to Germany.

According to Rabbi Victor Reinstein of Nehar Shalom Community Synagogue in Jamaica Plain, the consul worked with the rabbis to design a trip that did not ignore the past and yet closely examined Germany's present and future.

Rabbi Dr. Laurence Bazer of Temple Beth Sholom in Framingham said he went on the trip to “experience a new level of remembrance and hope” in Germany. This was the first time he had been to the country in decades, he said.

The trip included visiting sites associated with the Holocaust; meetings with a wide range of people including students, the Jewish community, refugees at a processing center, and members of the government; and observing an interfaith dialogue.

The trip began with a visit to Dachau. Rabbi Joseph Pollak of the Rabbinical Court of Massachusetts, a child survivor of Bergen Belsen, led the *kel malei rachamim*, the prayer of remembrance for the dead.

Bazer said he felt the consciousness of the Holocaust was more than skin deep. He believed the compassionate approach to the many refugees over the last few years provides evidence of a changed Germany. He said this might be why Germany has been so welcoming to Syrian refugees. The rabbis got a chance to meet some refugees and the people who were helping them adjust to their new home.

At the end of the trip, on Saturday, the rabbis attended various synagogues. Some of the rabbis attended the bar mitzvah of Jacob, a grandson of former Jewish Theological Seminary Chancellor Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, who was not part of the delegation, but whom Bazer knows quite well.

Bazer said he was very moved watching children running around the shul. He said it was evidence of a growing vibrant Jewish community in the country.

In his sermon, Schorsch, who was born in Germany, spoke about his grandfather, who was killed in the Holocaust, and quoted German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine's prediction, "Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people."

Schorsch thought the world failed when it did not react to the book burnings in Germany in May 1933.

Schorsch spoke of a visit to Babelplatz, site of a book burning on May 10, 1933. Among the books turned to ashes were works of Heinrich Heine.

Others expressed how impressed they were with Germany facing its difficult history.

"This means to never forget and to never let it happen again," Bazer said.

"I now have a good sense of both the successes of Germany in really scrutinizing and wrestling with the Holocaust and being in an ongoing process of remembering and conscientious education, and also the struggles of small Jewish communities trying to find their way," said another delegation member, Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, director of religious and chaplaincy services at Hebrew SeniorLife.

Rounding out the delegation were rabbis David Braham of Temple Shalom of Medford; Ron Fish of Temple Israel of Sharon; Ronne Friedman of Temple Israel of Boston; Daniel I. Lehmann, president of Hebrew College in Newton; Michelle Robinson of Temple Emanuel of Newton; Benjamin Samuels of Congregation Shaarei Tefillah of Newton; and Andy Vogel of Temple Sinai of Brookline.