

Campaigns urge Jews and non-Jews to attend Shabbat services in wake of Pittsburgh attack



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Hundreds gathered at the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston Thursday night.

By [Laura Crimaldi](#) | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 02, 2018

A gunman shattered the peace of the Jewish Sabbath a week ago, killing 11 people at

Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh.

Now as Shabbat approaches for the first time since the massacre, Jews and non-Jews are being urged to set aside fear and show solidarity by attending services on Friday and Saturday.

“I’m just encouraging all our community to not be afraid and not be divided but to be strong and to be tough and to fill our pews,” Wes Gardenswartz, senior rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Newton, said Thursday. “We are here more determined than ever to have a vibrant faith community that is going to radiate light and love into the world.”

The invitation to worship is spreading across the Internet and social media through campaigns promoted by Jewish advocacy organizations. Combined Jewish Philanthropies has a [link](#) on its website to a directory of Massachusetts synagogues where people can observe “Solidarity Shabbat.”

The American Jewish Committee is promoting the concept with the hashtag ShowUpForShabbat.

“It’s an important statement that people are not going to be intimidated,” said Rob

Leikind, regional director of AJC New England. “They are not going to stay away from synagogue. It is going to be their spiritual home as always.”

In Boston Thursday evening, hundreds gathered at the New England Holocaust Memorial for a candlelight vigil to show solidarity with the Pittsburgh victims, and to denounce racial violence and intolerance.

Rabbi Leora Abelson of Congregation Agudas Achim in Attleboro read the names of the 11 Pittsburgh victims, as well as two African-Americans killed in a racially motivated shooting at a Kentucky supermarket.

“The Torah teaches that every human soul is a divine light,” Abelson told the crowd standing in the shadow of the memorial’s tall, glass towers. “We light candles tonight to honor the lives and to mourn the deaths of those we lost last week to white supremacy.”

Some who attended held signs decrying hate, and many wiped tears from their eyes. A moment of silence was held for the victims.

“It’s good to be together,” said Susan Etscovitz, 73, a member of Jewish Voice for Peace, of several groups represented at the vigil.

As a Jewish woman, Etscovitz said, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting “felt very, very painful — very painful.”

Other interfaith services are planned for the Jewish Sabbath.

Temple Israel of Boston is expecting about 1,500 people to gather Friday evening for what is being called Shabbat of Comfort, Community, and Courage, said Rabbi Matthew Soffer. Governor Charlie Baker, Mayor Martin J. Walsh, Senator Edward J. Markey, City Councilor Ayanna Pressley, and Police Commissioner William Gross plan to attend, he said.

The killings in Pittsburgh were an attack on Jews, immigrants, and others considered outsiders, said Soffer, citing anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant views expressed online by the alleged shooter, Robert Bowers. Bowers [appeared in federal court Thursday in Pittsburgh](#), where he pleaded not guilty to murder and hate crime charges.

“We realize this is a moment of such tremendous vilification of the other,” Soffer said. “What we do on Shabbat is we come together to celebrate life and celebrate our love for humanity.”

Some worshipers may see increased security.

Uniformed Newton police officers or private security personnel now guard the entrances at Temple Emanuel 12 hours per day, Gardenswartz said. Rabbi Alfred Benjamin of Congregation Beth Shalom of the Blue Hills in Milton said synagogue doors will now be locked during Shabbat services.

[Boston police continue to deploy more officers to synagogues and other houses of worship](#), said Sergeant Detective John Boyle, a department spokesman.

“Pittsburgh was a watershed moment for American synagogues. There is a before-Pittsburgh and after-Pittsburgh zone,” Gardenswartz said. “I want to take security off the table as a concern.”

Senator Elizabeth Warren plans to participate in Shabbat services at Temple Emanuel Saturday morning, where she will recite a prayer for the country, he said.

The service will conclude with the song “America the Beautiful,” Gardenswartz said.

“We love our country. We want to express that love in ways that give us strength,” he said.

As services end Saturday at Congregation Beth Shalom of the Blue Hills, people are planning to gather outside and form an “arc of protection and love” around the

building, said the Rev. Shelly Davis, president of the Milton Interfaith Clergy Association.

“These are our neighbors and we love them. That is what we want them to see and know,” said Davis, who is pastor at East Congregational Church in Milton.

Benjamin said 11 candles will be lit inside the synagogue to honor the Pittsburgh victims and the services will conclude with a Mourner’s Kaddish during which their names will be recited.

People gathered outside the synagogue will be invited in for refreshments afterward, Benjamin said.

“The statement is we’re all here together,” he said.

Jeremy Burton, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, said congregations are trying to balance their desire to be welcoming with the fears and anxiety many face following the Pittsburgh attack.

“We are a strong, resilient community of Jews both in America and around the world who are not going to be deterred by violence and attacks,” he said. “We don’t have to face this alone nor can we defeat hatred and anti-Semitism alone. We need to be in community with others.”

Rabbi Marc Baker, president and chief executive of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, said campaigns promoting Shabbat services this weekend quickly gained momentum.

“We are not going to retreat in fear,” he said. “We are going to return to our places of worship and family gathering and our community is safe and secure and as strong as ever.”

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