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## Interfaith leaders commemorate Yom Hashoah

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[http://www.jewishjournal.com/los\\_angeles/article/interfaith\\_leaders\\_commemorate\\_yom\\_hashoah/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/los_angeles/article/interfaith_leaders_commemorate_yom_hashoah/)

In what was anything but a typical Yom HaShoah assemblage, more than 300 people — including two rabbis, a Methodist preacher, a Catholic priest and a U.S. congressman — packed into Temple Ramat Zion in Northridge on April 7 for an interdenominational observance titled “Remembering the Past, Securing the Future.”

The 90-minute event included recitations, songs from the Ramat Zion choir, and speeches by assorted religious leaders and political ambassadors. The common mantra of every remark: the importance of remembering the past to prevent an act like the Holocaust from ever happening again. Among those in attendance were Los Angeles City Councilmembers Mitch Englander and Dennis Zine and U.S. Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Sherman Oaks).

During a yellow candle procession honoring those who lost their lives in the Holocaust, dignitaries carried signs with the numbers of Jews murdered at Nazi concentration camps. Bringing up the rear of the procession, the Rev. David Loftus of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church — wearing a priest’s collar and a yarmulke — carried a sign recognizing “5 million non-Jews.” Behind Loftus, survivor Ruth Resnick bore a sign that proclaimed simply “Never again.”

“We are in a rare moment of time,” said Dana Erlich, Israeli consul for culture, media and public diplomacy in Los Angeles. “We are the last generation that will meet the survivors and be privileged to hear their stories firsthand, to be able to look into their eyes and to promise them, ‘We will not forget.’ ”

Erlich and keynote speaker Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, made repeated reference to the remarks of Israeli President Shimon Peres earlier in the day, and to the fact that the State of Israel has reached a population of more than 6 million — the number of Jews who were killed in the Holocaust.

Quoting his longtime friend Wiesenthal — the death camp survivor and postwar Nazi hunter — Cooper emphasized that Yom HaShoah is not about vengeance or justice.

“As we gather together today and as millions of Jews gather around the world, we must remind the world that we will never forget our enemies,” said Cooper. “But the other secret to survival is a concept called *hakarat hatov* [gratitude]. We also never forget our friends.”

Leaders at Ramat Zion have been sowing the seeds of interfaith relationships between local religious institutions since Thanksgiving 2011, when newly appointed Rabbi Ahud Sela accepted an invitation from the Rev. Steven Petty of Northridge United Methodist Church to have the two congregations join for an ecumenical Thanksgiving service.

The church sits across the street from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, which also joined the gathering along with members of a Muslim organization from the Pacifica Institute. A year later, Ramat Zion hosted the Thanksgiving service, this time with Muslims from the Islamic Center of Northridge. When Yom HaShoah came around, the church leaders were eager to participate.



From left: Rabbi Abraham Cooper; Dana Erlich, Israeli consul for culture, media and public diplomacy in Los Angeles; and the Rev. David Loftus at Temple Ramat Zion’s Yom HaShoah event. Photo by Caryn Baitel

"I have to credit the minister and the father, who are such sweet wonderful human beings," Sela said. "I don't know if you can say it, but they're both complete mensches."

Petty, who attended the Thanksgiving services, recalls marveling at being in a Jewish temple and watching a Muslim singing the Islamic call to prayer.

"It was magical," he said. "And we can remember that we can make a difference for tomorrow for our children. Because if you were there at that meeting, you realized there were no 'others.' We worshiped together. We can build a better tomorrow."

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