

# Press Release

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **40th Anniversary of the Bombing of Jackson's Beth Israel Congregation**

**Jackson, MS**— On September 18, 1967, a shaken Jackson community gathered together to mourn the bombing of Beth Israel Congregation, the city's only Jewish house of worship. On September 18, 2007, Jacksonians will again gather at Beth Israel, this time for a bittersweet program to remember the terror and violence of that time and celebrate the spirit of interfaith cooperation that grew out of this tragic event.

Cosponsored by Beth Israel, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference, the event will take place at 7 p.m. at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson. The Honorable Governor William F. Winter will give the keynote address in a program of reflection and prayer. The Reverend Hosea Hines and Bishop Joseph Latino will also participate.

Early in the night of September 18, 1967, several Ku Klux Klan members detonated a powerful bomb outside the rabbi's study in Beth Israel's brand new synagogue. Just months earlier, Rabbi Perry Nussbaum, the congregation's progressive and outspoken leader, had dedicated the new synagogue in an interfaith, interracial ceremony. Many of Jackson's leading clerics participated in this event as they were friends of Nussbaum's and fellow leaders in civil rights causes and organizations.

Rabbi Nussbaum was an active member of the Greater Jackson Clergy Alliance and Council on Human Relations, both interfaith, interracial committees working to improve the social problems of Mississippi. That the temple was bombed just days after Beth Israel hosted a meeting of the Council on Human Relations confirmed for many that the rabbi's civil rights involvement provoked the attack.

These same Jackson-area clerics convened three days after the bombing of Beth Israel to lead a "Walk of Penance." As Reverend Tom Tiller, the organizer of the walk, recalls: "To exhibit our sorrow at what had happened to the Jewish community... we decided that the best thing to do would be to express that in public... We expressed our condolences and our determination out of

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our feelings of guilt at not having been able to lead the community in the direction in which we felt it ought to go.”

Despite this public expression of solidarity and good will toward the Jewish community, the Ku Klux Klan struck again, this time bombing Rabbi Nussbaum’s home, on November 21, 1967. The same perpetrators later bombed Congregation Beth Israel in Meridian on May 28, 1968. When they tried to bomb the home of Jewish community leader Meyer Davidson in Meridian, they were captured by authorities thanks to a tip from a Klan informant.

Forty years after these bombings, the Jackson Jewish community is more committed than ever to pursuing interfaith and interracial activities and asserting that “one’s conscience cannot be bombed into silence.” Beth Israel leaders and congregants are active participants in many interfaith dialogue partnerships as well as groups like Habitat for Humanity, the Amos interfaith network, and the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference.

The September 18 program, which will last about an hour, will both recall the trials of the past and celebrate future opportunities for interfaith work in Jackson and Mississippi.

To learn more about this event, contact Dr. Stuart Rockoff at 601-362-6357 or Rabbi Valerie Cohen at 601-956-6215.