

*Rev. Dr. Debora Jackson, Executive Director*

*August 2015*

## From the Desk of the Executive Director

For the last 13 months, I have had the privilege of participating as a Fellow in the Christian Leadership Initiative, a program co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Shalom Hartman Institute. According to AJC Director of Interreligious and Intergroup Relations, Rabbi Noam Marans, the program gives "Christian scholars an opportunity to understand Judaism, and Jews, the way it is understood by the Jewish community." He says further, "We expose them to the diversity of Jewish thought and the ability of Judaism to sustain pluralism and divergent opinions." Now that I have completed the program, I thought that I would share my reflections.

I remain humbled by the invitation. Through this program, I have joined a select group of leaders that I admire including Rev. Dr. Molly Marshall, President and Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation of Central Baptist Theological School, and Rev. Dr. Nick Carter, former President of Andover Newton Theological School. In addition, my cohort included such notable leaders as Rev. Dr. Javier Rivera, Dean and Professor of Ecumenical and Pastoral Theology at Drew University Theological School, Rev. Dr. Frank Yamata, President of McCormick Theological Seminary, and Rev. Laura Everett, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. In some ways, I cannot help but be awed. How did I make it in? It has been a true gift of God to be a part of such an amazing group of leaders.

Yet by the same token, this has not been an easy experience. I was so excited by the opportunity to study Torah and Hebrew Scriptures with rabbinic scholars, but many times the interpretations of the scriptures were so different as to be disturbing. For example, Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman, President of the Shalom Hartman Institute, lectured from Genesis 1, sharing the Jewish perspective of what it means to be made in the image of God. He posited that God creates the world and then leaves because God has created God's replacement in humanity. Humanity has been imbued with tremendous power, having been made in the image of God. Therefore in a certain sense, Judaism says that there is no need for God. Dr. Hartman added that the rest of the Bible tries to overcome this mistake with God trying to take back this authority. Notwithstanding, Jewish consciousness is imbued with this a sense of adequacy. That consciousness says, "I have everything within me to do what I need," and as such creates deep religious ambivalence. Personally, it would have never occurred to me that because I was made in the image of God, I had no need for God.

I was also challenged by the conflict between espoused values and lived reality. Being chosen by God, "chosenness" and "particularism" is lived out by many Jews through charge of "Tikkun Olam" - repair the world. It is the belief that as Jews live out their chosenness, the world will be improved for others. Stories in the Midrash speak of the responsibility of the Jews to carry out this work and circumcision, interestingly enough, was offered as just one example how the mandate is manifest. God created the world, but humanity is called to make it better. Through circumcision, humanity finishes the work the work of God and thus improves upon it.



**Meeting with His Beatitude, Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, 2014.**

Now the idea of repairing the world is a beautiful thought. But in so many instances, I saw instead a widening of the breach. Some Arab Israelis seemed to have a second-class-citizen existence, relegated to congested areas in East Jerusalem. I met Palestinian entrepreneurs who spoke of having no status, requiring magnetic ID cards and permits just to travel from the West Bank. I recognized the familiar sting of racism through the experiences of Ethiopian Jews. Many are new immigrants responding to the Law of Return, which states that every Jew has the right to return to the land of Israel. Jews from all corners of the globe have returned to Israel to be identified simply as Jews. Yet even our tour guide noted that Ethiopian Jews continue to be identified as Ethiopians. They are not universally welcomed and accepted. As a result, they have suffered exclusion and marginalization.

No, my experiences were not easy and at times I found myself frustrated and angry. And still I could not help but emerge with a sense of hope. Dr. Hartman lamented that Jews coming of age in the United States were seeing themselves as Americans first and Jews second. He expressed concern over this fact because 20th century Jews have coalesced around the horror of the shoah - the holocaust. This genocide sharpened the call for a Jewish state - a home and refuge against those who would discriminate. But as time passes, emerging generations do not see that same need to build walls to shut others out. Rather emerging generations are more likely to see people as people. This shift helps us to gain respect for the other with a capacity to see a common desire for life.

One of my cohort members, Dr. Brian Rainey, is an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. Holding both an MDiv and PhD, Dr. Rainey teaches anthropological and sociological theories of religion in classes that consider race, ethnicity and gender in the ancient world. He asserts that there were no distinctions of race in antiquities. People of



**Sign on the side of a building in Rothschild Square in Tel Aviv**

every hue were simply accepted. The potential for that view of humanity is represented in Israel. People of every color and hue were there. Now the goal is to realize the hope of a shared existence - to live out the vision of the Proclamation of Independence. It declares that the State of Israel will be based on freedom, justice, and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel, ensuring complete equality of social and political rights to all inhabitants, and guaranteeing freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture. Perhaps we will not see this "Promised Land" in our time. But certainly our prayer can be that those who come behind us, possessing a greater capacity for acceptance, will not only see this land, but will enter in.

## **The Challenge of Going to Church**

A true highlight of my trip to Israel was the opportunity to worship at the East Jerusalem Baptist Church. Dr. Marcie Lenk, Director of Christian Leadership Programs at the Shalom Hartman Institute, recommended that I attend the church because she knew it would be meaningful to me. So I excitedly set out for church on Sunday morning, but my trip was fraught with challenges.



The first came in the form of a cab driver that did not want to take me to the church. You see, West Jerusalem is Jewish, but East Jerusalem is largely Arab. The cab driver insisted that the church was in the Old City, which as you may know is walled. Cabs cannot drive in the Old City. I insisted that the church was not in the Old City, but was dismissed as an uninformed tourist. The cab driver and security guard at the hotel decided together that I should be taken to the Damascus Gate outside the Old City. It is a populated and busy section of East Jerusalem, so the cab driver could feel safe leaving me there. Unfortunately for me, that drop off point was nowhere near the church, which, as I had insisted, was not at all in the Old City. I was annoyed, but undaunted. With directions on my phone, I set off on foot.

The directions said that I should walk along Sultan Suleiman Street to Herod's Gate. Wanting to ensure that I was going the right way, I spoke to a man who was sitting on a bench. Saying "Good

morning,” and asking if he could speak to me in English, I asked whether I was close to Salad ad Din Street. He gladly pointed me in the right direction and blessed me saying “As-salaam alaikum,” which is the Arabic greeting meaning “Peace be unto you.” I returned the blessing and headed on my way.

Walking several more minutes, I found myself at a dead end. Unable to read the street signs because they were in Arabic and Hebrew, I approached another man who was sitting in a chair on the roadside. This man could not speak English, but he motioned to me to follow him and brought me to a group of men who could. I told them the name of the street on which the church was located – Ali Iben Abu Taleb Street – and they all conferred as to the way that I should go. Feeling quite certain of the directions, they pointed me on my way.

It only took a few additional minutes in walking to realize that my helpers were incorrect. I stopped another man on the road and asked if he knew where Ali Iben Abu Taleb Street was. He did not. But he pulled out his cell phone and called his father. And when his father did not know, he motioned to me to follow him as we saw a woman on the street. The man spoke to this woman on my behalf and asked if she knew where the church was located. She motioned for me to follow her to her home. Thanking the man who made the introduction, I followed this woman to the courtyard of her home, where she called for her husband and daughter to help me. The husband walked out into the courtyard in his pajamas, but together they discussed in Arabic where I needed to go and then translated the directions for me in English. But they did not stop there. The woman was so intent that I have the right directions, she led me to the correct street and iterated once more the way that I should go. As she spoke, she saw a neighbor whom she knew spoke better English than she. And so she told the neighbor of my plight, and the neighbor, speaking perfect English, confirmed that I had the right directions.

With this hospitable handling, I made it to church. Imagine my joy as I walked up the stairs of the church hearing the hymn “Be Thou My Vision.” It was the quintessential Baptist worship service. We had a period of praise and worship. During the welcome, the visitors were asked to stand and introduce themselves. The scriptures were read in English and in Arabic. Pastor Blaine Barber shared a sermon from John 8:12-32. In it, he commemorated the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of John Huss, a Catholic Priest, Church Reformer, and University Professor in Prague, who was burned at the stake by church leaders for his beliefs.

After worship, I had the opportunity to meet the pastor and members of the church. I asked a woman to translate the words on a beautiful banner that hung in the church.

She said, “Well it says to do justice, and love mercy and be humble.”

I excitedly said, “Oh! That’s Micah! It’s in the Bible.”

She said, “Micah? I do not know this Micah. Please show me.”

I pulled out my phone to share the Bible verse with her. And when she saw the text, she immediately said, “Oh! ‘Me-ha!” She did not understand my English way of saying, “Mi-ka.” She was pronouncing the word as in the Hebrew. We were both overjoyed having made the connection.

Granted my family was less than enthused as I shared my experience. Fearing for my safety, they thought it a bit foolhardy to walk the streets of East Jerusalem alone. But I was not afraid. In fact, I was blessed. Unspoken prejudices suggested that we should be fearful of Arabs in East Jerusalem. My experience shattered the stereotype. People were kind and helpful. The people I asked for help made my problem – being lost going to church – their problem and they created community to ensure that I reached my destination. They demonstrated hospitality. They ministered to me in a way that was restorative. I was welcomed and my perceptions were changed. And for this, I give God thanks.



**Banner at East Jerusalem Baptist Church.**  
“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before your God.” Micah 6:8.

## 50 Ways to Support a Pastors' Health and Well-Being

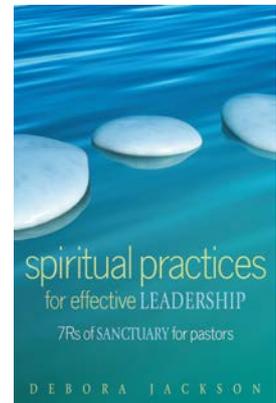
In their July newsletter, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative shared a guide published by the United Methodist Church's General Board of Pension and Health Benefits' Center for Health. It provides 50 examples of how everyone can support pastors' well-being in the areas of physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and financial health. You can access this resource by going to [50 Ways Guide](#).

### From Judson Press

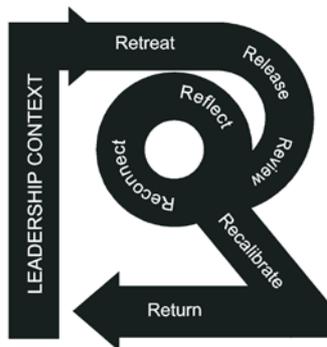
Guess what? Judson Press is still featuring *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors*, by Debora Jackson as their "Hot of the Press" book of the month. It's a hot seller because it speaks to the heart of ministry and how we as ministers might balance demands to be more effective in our leadership while realizing greater spiritual well-being. Have you purchased your copy yet?

If not, what are you waiting for? Go to [http://www.judsonpress.com/product.cfm?product\\_id=18676](http://www.judsonpress.com/product.cfm?product_id=18676) and order your copy today. Through the 7Rs of Sanctuary you will learn how to:

- **Retreat** from your ministry – your leadership context;
- **Release** from confronting challenges so that you can disconnect;
- **Review** your current leadership context in a mindful way;
- **Reconnect** with God's call on your life;
- **Reflect** on the disconnections between your current context and your call;
- **Recalibrate** by determining strategies that will help you realign;
- **Return** to you ministry context grounded and prepared to lead.



Realize this transforming method for your effectiveness and wholeness. Order *Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7Rs of Sanctuary for Pastors* today and enjoy free shipping with your Ministers Council Membership.



### Only a Few Spaces Left for the 7R's of Sanctuary Program

Registration for the *7Rs of Sanctuary* program closes on August 15, 2015. Only a few spaces remain. Register now by clicking [here](#).

The *7Rs of Sanctuary* is a 12-month program designed to help leaders realize greater personal and professional efficacy in leadership by integrating contemplative, spiritually-grounded practices, both personal and communal, into their daily lives. Participants will engage in a variety of contemplative practices, learning strategies that will help them address some of the most pressing leadership challenges. The results will be transformative as leaders attain increased well-being and wholeness for themselves in community, while mastering skills that will strengthen their organizations. The program features one three-day residency to be held **September 28-30, 2015 in Arlington, MA**; four one-day follow-up sessions to be scheduled quarterly, supplemented by reading, reflection and peer group learning.

As the research clearly articulates in the book [Spiritual Practices for Effective Leadership: 7R's of Sanctuary for Pastors](#), leaders who take time apart to engage in spiritual practices are more effective in their leadership. Leaders must become competent in taking an action and simultaneously reflecting on the action to learn from it. The challenge is in making space for that time of reflection so that leaders can restore their sense of purpose, put issues in perspective, and regain courage and heart. This is the goal of the 7Rs of Sanctuary program.

The cost of the year-long program is \$1000. However, as a result of a generous grant from the Imago Dei fund, scholarships covering up to 75% of the program expense are available.

Click [here](#) to register. Space is limited for the pilot program and registration closes on August 15, 2015. Program acceptance and financial aid decisions will be communicated by August 28, 2015.

## An Essay Contest for Young Adult Women

Judson Press and AB Women's Ministries is hosting an essay contest based on [Sisters of Scripture: Mentors of Womanhood](#) by Billie Montgomery/Cook. Young adult American Baptist women, ages 17-35, are invited to submit an essay of 200 words of a mentor in their lives by **September 15, 2015**. For more information and an online essay submission form, please visit <https://sistersofscripturemnw.wordpress.com/>. You may also download the informational flyer from [www.abwministries.org/resourceDetails.aspx?resourceDetailId=277](http://www.abwministries.org/resourceDetails.aspx?resourceDetailId=277)



### Local News Anyone?

As we share the news of what we are doing in our local Ministers Council chapters, others are inspired. We want the light of your good works to shine brightly so that others might be informed. Our readership increases every month. Share your news and spread the word.

## Upcoming Events

- Valley Forge, August 19-21.

## Give to the Ministers Council

Support the work and ministry of the Ministers Council through the Ministers Council Endowment. Visit <http://ministerscouncil.com/the-ministers-council-endowment> for more information.

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