



A Welcoming Congregation



On April 24, 2017, the Board of Trustees of Temple Beth Israel adopted a motion from the Social Action Committee to have TBI sign on to the Welcome Campaign sponsored by HIAS, a Jewish-based refugee organization. Founded in 1881, HIAS (originally founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) is the oldest Jewish organization whose mission is to assist refugees. Originally established to assist Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, HIAS has touched the life of nearly every Jewish family in America and now welcomes all persons who are fleeing persecution. HIAS rescues people whose lives are in danger for being who they are. Guided by its Jewish values and history, HIAS seeks to protect the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reuniting them with their families in safety and freedom. HIAS advocates for the protection of refugees and immigrants, and assures that displaced persons should be treated with dignity. In HIAS' words, "once the Jewish community helped refugees because they were Jewish; now we help refugees because we are Jewish."

By signing on to the HIAS Welcome Campaign, TBI commits to being a "welcoming congregation" and engaging in refugee issues in at least one meaningful way in the next year, such as education, advocacy, direct service, or tzedakah. Additionally, HIAS will provide TBI with ongoing support, resources, and access to a network of communities that support welcoming refugees and who are responding to the global refugee crisis.

Temple Beth Israel does not usually endorse outside organizations, but after a thorough and thoughtful discussion, the Board concluded that the significance of the global refugee crisis warranted adding our voice with those of hundreds of other synagogues in support of this organization and its work. In making this decision, the Board is aware that in recent months HIAS leaders have made intemperate and in some cases offensive comments directed toward President Trump. We further recognize that the overtly partisan, political language has led some in our congregation to see our association with HIAS as a divisive proposal. We understand this position, and acknowledge the desire not to associate with an organization that would make such statements. The Board deplores the use of such language and is heartened to see that this rhetoric has been curtailed in recent months. Moreover, we hope that all congregants can come together to support the important work being performed to bring much needed aid to millions of refugees around the world.

The great sage Hillel teaches us that we should not separate ourselves from our community (Avot 2.5), and thus we think it is important to show that we care about helping refugees and raising awareness of the crisis not just as a single congregation, but as part of a larger Jewish community. The approval of this motion means that TBI stands together with other Jews in representing our shared values of welcoming the stranger and repairing the world (*tikkun olam*).

Marc Kramer
TBI President

Deena Benjamin
Chair, TBI Social Action Committee

Rabbi Jonathan Kupetz