

**A Letter from religious leaders in Ann Arbor of civil opposition
to the Actions of the Sabbath Protestors of JWF&F in front of Congregation Beth Israel
September 2011**

Since the fall of 2003, a small group of protesters called Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends have positioned themselves each Saturday in front of Congregation Beth Israel on Washtenaw Avenue. Their purpose has been, among other things, to call attention to the plight of Palestinians and those actions of the State of Israel that are troubling toward Palestinians. Every week the group stands off the sidewalk holding signs directed at members of Beth Israel. The effect is harassing and punishing.

The members and friends of Beth Israel come to Sabbath services for usual and special religious observances, and they are singled out for positions of the U.S. government, as well as positions of support for Israel's autonomy as a nation held by most American religious leaders. As religious leaders we do not offer unqualified or uncritical support for political states of any nation, our own, or that of Israel and Palestine, but we offer them unqualified respect and support as autonomous peoples and nations. But the organization targeting Beth Israel is blaming them for the behavior of a foreign government. This is the same sort of marginalizing, demonizing of a minority we have seen attempted recently against Michigan Muslims in Dearborn.

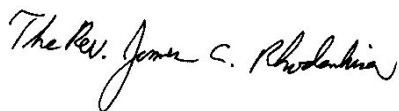
To harass a religious minority in front of a place of worship is objectionable to most Americans within any religious community. It is uncivil. It is desecration, a hostile intrusion against someone else's consecrated sacred space and time, as one clergy member in our town has put it.

It is a matter of free speech regardless of how it comes across to those being picketed and to those in the wider community, but there are better venues to exercise it. Just because something is legal doesn't mean that it is right or even useful in moving a conversation forward when it comes to difficult issues. In solidarity with Beth Israel, we would invite the protestors to find a public venue to discuss their issues. And if they will not desist in targeting worshippers, we invite them to "spread the blame around" and target each of the congregations we serve and give Beth Israel "a rest." We are all guilty as fellow Americans for any perceived wrongs that Congregation Beth Israel is being scapegoated for.

For us, the undersigned, this is a matter of harassing behavior directed toward Jews of this synagogue, irrespective of what its members believe. What if this became the norm in front of the Muslim Community Association, or the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is, or the Baptist Church, the Hindu congregation, or the Zen Buddhist Temple? There are many issues that this town has battled over. Religious issues have been on this long list. Some of those exchanges have been cruel. Many have not. In the larger picture, we believe that those protesting who call themselves "Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends" are a poor witness when it comes to civil discourse, and hardly peaceful.

For these reasons we ask that the City Council of Ann Arbor go on record denouncing this method of public incivility. This is an Ann Arbor issue, not just a Jewish issue. This is not the kind of action that is welcomed in our town. It is not helpful. It is not constructive. It is not respectful at the deepest level of human interaction.

In the spirit of all that is best about America,



The Rev. James C. Rhodenhiser, Rector,

And Clergy who have signified their support to date

1. Robert Levy, Senior Rabbi, Temple Beth Emeth, 2309 Packard Road
2. Ken Wilson, Sr. Pastor, The Ann Arbor Vineyard, Platt Road
3. Barry W. Ludwig, Sr Pastor, Zion Lutheran Church, 1501 West Liberty
4. Judith Harmon, Vicar, St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, Broadway
5. Beth Scriven, Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults, St. Clare's Episcopal, 2309 Packard
6. Reid Hamilton, Episcopal Campus Minister, The Univ. of Michigan, "Canterbury House, Huron St.
7. Nancy Wilson, Community Life Pastor, Ann Arbor Vineyard (since deceased)
8. Lori Carey, Lead Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Stadium Boulevard, Ann Arbor
9. Nigel Berry, Youth Director for the Ann Arbor Vineyard
10. Susan F. Spowls, Campus Pastor, Lord of Light Lutheran Campus Ministry, 801 S. Forest Ave.
11. Ian Reid Twiss, Pastor, Holy Faith, Saline, MI, (Ann Arbor resident)
12. Larry Courson, Pastor, Peace Lutheran, 8260 Jackson Rd. Ann Arbor
13. Rodger Williams, Pastor, Divine Shepherd Lutheran, 2600 Nixon Road, Ann Arbor
14. George Lambrides, Director, Interfaith Round Table, Ann Arbor
15. Tracy Huffman, Pastor, Westside United Methodist Church, Ann Arbor
16. Don Neuendorf, Senior Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, LSMS, Liberty Street, Ann Arbor
17. Bob Lynn, Associate Pastor, Knox Presbyterian, Wagner Road, Ann Arbor
18. Paul Simpson Duke, Co-Pastor, First Baptist Church, Ann Arbor
19. Joanne Kennedy Slater, Rector/Pastor, St. Luke's Ypsilanti,
20. Martha Brunell, Senior Pastor, Bethlehem UCC, 423 South Fourth Street, Ann Arbor, MI
21. Gail Geisenhainer, Senior Pastor, First Unitarian Universalist, Ann Arbor Saline Road, Ann Arbor
22. Chris Grapentine, Pastor, Northside Community Church, Ann Arbor
23. Steve Hedquist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
24. Bob Livingston, Senior Pastor, First Congregational Church, 608 East William, Ann Arbor
25. Jim McDougell, Senior Pastor, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 2250 E. Stadium, Ann Arbor
26. Haju Murray, Zen Buddhist Temple, 1214 Packard Road, Ann Arbor
27. Doug Paterson, Senior Pastor, First United Methodist Church, 120 South State Street, Ann Arbor
28. Michael Ryan, Pastor, King of Kings Lutheran Church, 2685 Packard Road, Ann Arbor
29. David Bell, Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth, 704 Airport Road, Ann Arbor
30. Laurie Gailunas, Church of Scientology, Ann Arbor
31. Susan King, Interfaith minister, Ann Arbor