

Faith Matters



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Is it safe?

A mom who was active both in her synagogue and the wider community shared with me this story.

A few years ago, just before Covid, she and her nine-year-old daughter were on their way to a local church to attend the town's annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.

As they walked through the main entrance, her daughter, looking a bit perplexed, turned to her and asked, "Where's the policeman? Is it safe here?"

From the mouth of babes...

In one way or another, beefed-up security at synagogues throughout the United States has been part of the Jewish community's reality since the massacre of 11 elderly Jewish men and women at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue in 2018.

Regrettably, this act of hate-filled violence against Jews was not an isolated

incident. This scourge has also hit the Black community.

One example from far too many; a shooting in 2015 in Charleston resulted in the death of nine congregants engaged in Bible study.

At this time of year, I look outside and see so many enjoying the opportunity to spread the light of their holiday joy and with it, their religious affiliation. What's not to love?

Even more, for some, blinking lights are complemented by the spiritual light they want to proclaim with a display on their front lawn of baby Jesus lying in a crèche.

As guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution, this is religious freedom at its best.

Similarly, in Jewish tradition, it is a mitzvah (religious practice) to place the Hanukkah menorah at the window facing the street. This is to "proclaim the

Hanukkah miracle to all passers-by." Sadly, Jewish families across this great land find themselves hesitating. Like the nine-year-old girl, they wonder, "Is it safe?"

If the existence of this worry comes as a surprise, take it as a reality check.

As I'm sure you know, Jewish people have seen this before. We are a practical lot.

Jewish Law prioritizes life and safety such that during a "time of danger," one is permitted to keep the menorah inside.

Imagine not feeling safe to put up Christmas lights. Imagine a child asking you, "Is it safe?"

In 1993 in Billings, Montana, a young boy put up a Hanukkah decoration in his bedroom window. It was soon shattered with a rock.

A town-wide campaign of Jews and non-Jews (who were the vast majority)

responded by decorating their windows with a menorah, either a picture or the real deal. Ten thousand plus ended up participating.

Yes, a few more windows were smashed, but the statement to confront intolerance and hatred was made.

In 1790 President George Washington expressed it well, "May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy."

May we all resolve to do our part so this country can live up to its ideals and promise.