

Engaging in Racial Justice: A New Working Group

By Deborah Goldman, chair

The aftermath of the 2020 horrific killings of several African Americans under police custody and worldwide civil protest creates both a challenge and opportunity for the Jewish community. How does the Jewish community understand and respond to this moment? We are living in an unprecedented time of people from all backgrounds marching in peaceful protests against systemic racism.

The pandemic and police brutality have highlighted intense racial disparities in this country. This reality has ignited the largest social movement – a new civil rights movement – called Black Lives Matter. This movement is de-centralized, locally based, diffuse and diverse. The Jewish community is proud of its strong solidarity and participation in the civil rights movement of the past and many of in the community are eager to engage in this issue. As of this writing, 69% have responded to the Jewish Community Relations Council Survey, saying that the pursuit of Racial Justice is very important to them.

With the support of the Buffalo Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Relations Council, a three-month volunteer led- working group is forming to self-educate, evaluate, discuss, and submit recommendations to JCRC Executive Committee and Buffalo Jewish Federation Board of Governors. The Racial Justice Working Group (RJWG) will recommend actions to address racial justice in our Jewish and general community. These concrete recommendations will move beyond statements and focus on specific individual and community actions to “chisel away at centuries of systemic racism. The RJWG will be providing updates to keep this work as transparent as possible.

RJWG is rooted in values key to our Jewish community:

- Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof – Justice, Justice You Shall Pursue
- Lo Ta'amod Al Dam Rey'echa – Do not stand idly by. Making our voice heard on issues of vital importance to the Jewish community and the communities in which Jews live.
- Tikkun Olam – Repair the world. Making the world a better place for all people
- Hineini – We are present, accounted for and ready to take action.

Equally as important is being a good friend before you need a friend. The Jewish community has been supported by any people from other faiths, backgrounds and ethnicities embracing us as we mourned the shootings in at the Tree of Life in Pittsburgh, Chabad synagogue in Poway and stabbings in Monsey. Our friends in the African-American community and, within our community, Jews of Color, need us. Today, we need to stand up and say Hineini: Here we are!