

God's Hope for America Bus Tour - Keeping the Angels Busy

Michael Balcomb

July 26, 2014



Rabbi Mordecai Waldman of Detroit is quite a character. Rumor has it that he is THE rabbi referred to in many of those hundreds of jokes involving a rabbi, a priest and an imam/actress/bishop/bar/theater. Diminutive, sporting an immaculately groomed beard and a sharp sense of humor, he's my kind of padre, as we used to say. Though we don't know each other all that well, we've broken bread together in Washington, New York and Jerusalem.

It was therefore a distinct pleasure to run into him again on his home turf in Detroit, where the #GodsHopeforAmerica Holy Ground Pilgrimage arrived at Belle Isle park on Thursday. As luck would have it, that was also the 313th birthday of the City of Detroit, one of the most religiously diverse cities in the country. A couple of newspapers and a TV station, sensing a two-for-one, were out in force to cover the event.

Our Unification Holy Ground on Belle Isle is easy to find, distinguished by a large decorative boulder, complete with a plaque identifying it as a Holy Ground, established by the Rev. Moon back in 1965. I'd like to see more of these formal identifiers around the country: something to work on for next year. Belle Isle itself stand as an oasis of tranquility, so different from the ruined landscape of too many of Detroit's neighborhoods. In fact the City was recently forced to lease the Isle to the Federal Government because it couldn't afford the maintenance.

Rev. David Kasbow, pastor of the Detroit Family Church, had organized a service with a strong interreligious component, inviting a handful of ministers of different faiths who are all busy ministering to the people of Detroit, a city struggling with bankruptcy and despair in all their many forms. In addition to Rabbi Waldman, we heard from Imam Mohammed El Amein, a fiery Spanish Protestant minister and Father Lawrence Ventline, a genial Catholic priest.

Waldman shared candidly how True Parents had allowed him to perform an important duty towards his mother, who passed away many years ago. In life, he had not attended her well, and, according to Jewish tradition (if I understood him right) was therefore not supposed to visit her grave in Jerusalem without

being invited by a third party. Finally, in 2003, Waldman was invited by our Middle East Peace Initiative to join a rally in Jerusalem that brought thousands of Christians, Jews and Muslims together in unity in Independence Park. I was there too, and I remember what a joyous gathering of the children of Abraham it was. Afterwards, Waldman was able to go and say prayers at his mother's gravesite. "I am eternally grateful to Father and Mother Moon for that opportunity," he said. "It was truly priceless."

The four ministers then joined the simple but moving "Water of Life Ceremony," where each poured a flask of Detroit river water (I was surprised to see how clear it was!) representing their own faith in to a large common bowl, representing the unity and mingling of all faiths and peoples as one family under God. Then the water was poured onto roots of a newly planted holy tree, which will keep vigil over the holy ground, together with the rock and the plaque.

It was all very peaceful and delightful, and the large congregation of over 200 clapped in appreciation. Just when it was all about to end, the Rabbi pulled out his well-worn shofar (a ram's horn) and prepared to deliver a blast to declare victory. It's his signature move.

"We understand that whenever a Jew blows the shofar, the angels all rush to the throne of God to ask if it is time for the Messiah to come," he explained. "But then God has to tell them to calm down, that the time has not yet come. But one day it surely will be the time— for the Messiah to come for the first, the last and indeed the only time!" This somewhat pointed remark, even though delivered with twinkle of an eye, seemed to sound a jarring note as a possible challenge to the Christian pastors, and even the to the Unificationists.

But no one seemed much perturbed. "He's sounded the alarm on that shofar so many times, I'm surprised Gabriel himself hasn't come to take it away!" smiled one of his friends. "He's been keeping the angels of Detroit on their toes for a long, long time!"

Contributed by Mike Balcomb