

May, 2012

Dear Friends,

As one might expect, our Nashville Jewish community has divergent and often passionate views when issues regarding Israel are raised. In an effort to bring our community together in a spirit of constructive dialogue and mutual respect, the Jewish Federation's Community Relations Committee approached Roger Conner, a Vanderbilt adjunct law professor and respected facilitator, to lead a process that would contribute toward encouraging all Jewish Nashvillians to express and hear opinions regarding Israel respectfully and in a safe environment. The result was the "Conversations about Community and Israel" project. The project was funded by a grant from the New Initiatives Fund of the Jewish Federation.

More than 150 community members responded to the online questionnaire created by Mr. Conner. Nearly 100 members of the Jewish community committed at least three hours to attend one of three grass roots consensus-building meetings. Fifty people participated in a final "Summit" meeting in which three representatives from each of the three initial groups worked to form consensus goals for our community that are acceptable to those on all parts of the spectrum when discussing Israel.

Participants with differing opinions about Israel took their responsibilities seriously. It was not always easy for them to find the words that would encompass all their ideas, but through intense and respectful discussion, they accomplished the task. It was a significant moment for our Jewish community and resulted in the articulation of the five actionable goals that are presented in the report. The report spells out how the process worked from start to finish. We now have a consensus developed from a broad spectrum of opinion statements about "how" our community should talk (and listen) about Israel with one another.

We are asking individuals, congregations and Jewish organizations to embrace these goals by signing on and agreeing to strive toward them. We hope the use of the goals and action steps (found at the end of the report) will continue to make this a community that listens, respects and tries to understand all of our opinions on issues about Israel. We urge you to work to implement these goals and strengthen our community's support for Israel.

We extend our thanks and sincere appreciation to the many individuals who gave so much of their time and thinking to participate in this project.

Martin Ted Mayden, President

Mark S. Freedman, Executive Director

Irwin Venick, Chair  
Community Relations Committee

Judy Saks, Director  
Community Relations Committee