

GJC Public Issues Policy

Enacted by the Board of Germantown Jewish Centre on October 23, 2019.

The present document is the result of a more than a year-long process of conversations within our community. Its goal has been to draft a statement of policy in which we, the Executive Committee of Germantown Jewish Centre, and in consultation with the Rabbi, seek to define the parameters of GJC's interactions with outside world on issues of public interest. We believe that issues surrounding oppression of Jews and other marginalized groups, and of welcoming the stranger, have taken a defining role in our tradition as Jews, and have shaped our values and our history. We are aware that any attempt to speak out on behalf of the full congregation of GJC is to take on a great responsibility and includes a careful consideration of the consequences of such actions. The final decision on any such expression resides with this body.

As Jews, we have borne witness to the destructive role that ethnic, racial, religious and other group divisions have played in our history and in the world at large. At the times when these kinds of intimidations or oppressions have reared up, Jews and other refugee groups have left their homes and sought shelter from hatred and violence. We are taught by the Torah to "welcome the stranger," and we know from our own historical experience what happens when countries that are able to take in immigrants in times of crisis, fail to do so.

We believe that taking a stand, as a congregation on such issues, is a reflection of our core values. And we seek to do so in a way that speaks to our own values and experiences, without reference to political parties, or candidates; as we believe these issues transcend these sorts of partisan divides. And, when we do speak out, we make every reasonable effort to do so without disparaging others.

We acknowledge that there are many other issues of critical importance that we as citizens of the world must face. We are also aware that these issues can be complex and may have political implications. Furthermore, we are aware that members of our own community may find themselves, reasonably, on opposite sides of these divides. We have, and will continue to support the efforts of those congregants who wish to undertake the work of tikkun olam by advocating for a better world in the ways that they believe in.

Germantown Jewish Centre has a long tradition of encouraging members to worship, to study, to engage in Jewish learning, and to build community. Many of our programs help educate our members so that they develop a deeper understanding of contemporary issues, find individual ways to be engaged with those issues, and understand and respect the views of others. We are also committed to inclusion, fostering a welcoming environment, and advancing justice. We appreciate that our members hold a range of views. We want to value and cherish this rich diversity of opinion while recognizing that neutrality is itself a moral hazard and that on occasion our heritage and history dictate that we speak out. As a community we strive to find an opportunity to learn from one another even in areas of disagreement.

On issues of oppression of Jews and other marginalized groups, and on welcoming the stranger, we believe that we can speak in the name of GJC. On other issues, we believe that it is in keeping with the values of our community to tread carefully, and to respect differences of opinion. We encourage those members who would like to speak out on such issues, to consider bringing their passions to the various groups within our community who are already engaged in that work.