

Hate's hard to ignore when it's at doorstep



Your Turn

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Guest columnists

A few weeks ago, the Jewish community in Rochester was confronted with a direct antisemitic attack by the placing of a series of "wanted" posters throughout the University of Rochester campus. While it was not only Jews that were targeted, this action was a clear condemnation of the Jewish people and anyone who sympathizes with our plight.

The attack was difficult enough for our community, but feeling the need to

justify our collective pain was, in some ways, worse. Students on campus and members of the Rochester Jewish community were forced to explain to peers and colleagues why this incident was painful, scary and an example of antisemitism. Our Jewish community has been wrestling with hard questions: What sort of judgment do we believe the students should face? To be clear, Judaism does not believe in revenge. In the Hebrew Bible, Leviticus 19:18 implores us, "You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow like you love yourself."

In fact, many of us believe that restorative justice could be the perfect solution for those involved in this crime. However, before we are able to decide on the most appropriate punishment for these students, we must also be clear on the crime that was committed.

These "wanted" posters were an attack on the Jewish community and therefore this attack, while it was indeed vandalism, was a hate crime. Thus, while we would want for these students to receive constructive punishment, it must be made clear that their crime is not just vandalism but also one of pure and uncalled for hatred against another group.

The University of Rochester is the largest employer in our region and therefore has a responsibility not only to the students on campus but also to the broader community. We expect that the university would have a sensitivity to all of its minority employees and populations, Jews among them. The fact is that everyone should feel safe, seen and supported by the university.

We ask that the university leadership hear our pleas and our pain. Seek out

the leadership of our Jewish community and work with us to create a space of inclusivity and acceptance.

Encourage all of our community members to engage in difficult conversations and even respectful disagreements over larger issues but also call out hate without fear of the fallout.

Most importantly, they must have clear red lines that address the growing trend of antisemitism around campus and the community. And, in so doing, we hope and pray that our community will become one of greater acceptance of those with differences.

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