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October 27, 2018 - Present
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Several Boston-area Jewish groups are organizing a vigil at the Parkman Bandstand at 2 p.m. on Sunday, following today's murder of 11 by an anti-Semite with an AR-15:

We are as devastated as we are horrified. We have reached out to the Pittsburgh Jewish community to express our support. We pray that the families of the victims find comfort during this unimaginably painful time and for the full recovery of the wounded. And we offer our gratitude to the brave first responders in Pittsburgh who risked their lives to prevent further bloodshed.

In our close-knit Jewish communal world, many of us have friends and family in Pittsburgh, and know congregants at the Tree of Life Synagogue. These are our brothers and sisters, our friends, our family, and our children. ...

Anti-Semitism and hatred in its many forms are antithetical to our faith and an affront to humanity. For the victims, we will mourn. For the living, we will continue to fight for a better, more just world.

May the memories of those we lost today be a blessing.
Emotional vigil in Boston brings people together to mourn Pittsburgh synagogue victims
By John Hilliard and Lucas Phillips
October 28, 2018

Elijah Wiesman, 16, of Arlington (center), linked arms with others and sang during a vigil for Bostonians to stand with the Pittsburgh Jewish community after the mass shooting at a synagogue there.

Religious, political, and civic leaders offered full-throated support for their Jewish “brothers and sisters” during an emotional vigil Sunday on the Boston Common, where they denounced anti-Semitism, bigotry, and the brutal violence that claimed the lives of 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue the day before.

Among the speakers was Ariel Stein, a Boston University student who has belonged all her life to the Tree of Life Synagogue, where the deadly shootings took place.

“It is up to all of us to love each other. . . and to stand up for the other in society,” Stein told about 1,000 people gathered around the Common’s Parkman Bandstand.

On Saturday, Robert Gregory Bowers allegedly killed 11 people in the synagogue during worship services, according to authorities. Bowers, 46, told police after his arrest that he wanted to “kill Jews.”
The city’s mayor, Bill Peduto, said the shootings were the “darkest day of Pittsburgh’s history.”

Across the country, vigils were held in honor of the victims Sunday. In Massachusetts, the victims were honored in many communities, including Newton, Cambridge, Lexington, Waltham, Swampscott, Worcester, and Springfield.

Boston’s gathering, in the same spot where Dr. Martin Luther King spoke to crowds more than 50 years ago, included prayers for the victims of Saturday’s shooting, each of whom was remembered by name.

A woman held a sign of support.
Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff

Nearby, large-scale photographic portraits of Holocaust survivors were on display as part of a public art exhibit that opened earlier this month.

Stein talked about attending the synagogue in Pittsburgh’s Squirrel Hill neighborhood, where storefronts display the message “love thy neighbor” in Arabic, Spanish, and Hebrew.

“Although Squirrel Hill suffered the largest blow [that] could have ever happened yesterday, I know that we will bounce back,” Stein said. “And I hope that all communities can embody loving thy neighbor, as well.”
Governor Charlie Baker quoted from the Talmud in his remarks, and told the crowd “that good always triumphs over evil.” He said the country is about freedom, faith, community, and diversity, his voice raw and rising as he spoke.

“Most of all, it is about remembering every time someone is lost, that there is work to do, and that none of us should ever abandon our commitment to build a better, and a stronger, and a more inclusive Commonwealth and a more inclusive country,” Baker said.

Mayor Martin J. Walsh of Boston said he had spoken to the mayor of Pittsburgh an hour before the vigil, and Peduto had a message: “Thank you, Boston.”

Walsh said from his vantage point on the bandstand, he could see the crowd growing at the vigil.

“We’re here today because we’re letting the Jewish community know that we’re standing with them, here in Boston and around the world,” Walsh said, calling the shooting "an anti-Semitic mass murder.”
US Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III said everyone at the vigil was gathered in solidarity with the Jewish community, which has been “mercilessly targeted” in recent years.

“We hold their hands today. We pledge our hearts to yours. And we say that we stand with you,” Kennedy said. “And most of all, we gather in strength to say with one voice that we will not sit idly by while hatred . . . finds quarter in our United States.”

Robert Trestan of the Anti-Defamation League decried the rising level of anti-Semitism in the United States.

“Anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem,” he said. “It is an American problem.”

Shaykh Yasir Fahmy, with the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, said the people who died at the synagogue were victims of a “disease” of racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and bigotry which are, “embedded, unfortunately, in many hearts.”
Americans are being torn apart, he said, when they should be coming together.

“We have to know with certainty that as human beings we are inherently good,” he said. “We don’t need to hate, we don’t need to be separated, we don’t need to attack one another, we don’t need to fear each other.”

He later told the crowd: “As a Muslim, I love you.”

A feeling of deep interconnectedness pervaded the vigil, where attendees ran into friends and family by chance, and voices broke out spontaneously in Jewish songs.

Some people carried signs. “We will not be divided from each other or from you,” one said.

Another said, “We stand together.”

Strangers joined hands, and at the end, many recited the Hebrew words to the Mourner’s Kaddish in unison.

Gideon Klionsky, 29, of Somerville was racked with emotion at the end of the vigil, when a circle of at least 100 people formed and songs broke out. Friends surrounded him in an embrace.

Klionsky’s grandparents, who both died in the past two years, lived directly across from the synagogue that was attacked.

“The largest mass killing of Jews in America was across the street,” he said, struggling as he thought about how his grandparents would have felt.

“I can’t even imagine,” Klionsky said, tugging at his beard with emotion. “I can’t imagine.”
From left to right: Eli Witkin of Cambridge, Gideon Klionsky of Somerville, and Beni Summers of Somerville held hands and linked arms at the vigil. Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff

A Jewish woman, who declined to give her name, said the attack in Pittsburgh was all too familiar to her, as a child survivor of the Holocaust.

She said she was 12 when she was smuggled out of Poland, only to be taken to a concentration camp, including seven months in Auschwitz with her mother.

She has carried a fear of crowds from the trauma of her youth, and yet she felt she had to attend the vigil. “This is one of those moments that feels important,” she said.

“This touches me very deeply,” said the woman, who requested her name not be used for fear of online attacks. “I saw how Hitler came to power,” she said, citing an atmosphere of propaganda, lies, and fear that Jews feel after the attacks.

“This really troubles me,” she said. “It hurts my heart.”
Hundreds of people gathered in the Boston Common to send a message that good will triumph over evil.
BOSTON (CBS) — Hundreds gathered on the Boston Common Sunday afternoon to join in solidarity for an interfaith service and to mourn the loss of 11 people killed at a Pittsburgh synagogue Saturday.

Among the speakers were Gov. Charlie Baker and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh.
“From the time that we started speaking here seven minutes ago, or eight minutes ago — there’s easily 500 more people here and they keep coming. People keep coming and the crowd keeps growing. So I want to thank you for that. We’re here today because we are letting the Jewish community know that we are standing with them here in Boston and around the world,” Walsh told the crowd.

Baker said, “The pain, the horror, the anger, and the outrage that comes with Pittsburgh and a shockingly large number of events across the globe, are a constant reminder to the rest of us that there will always be work to do.”
Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller joined other at the packed Temple Shalom in Newton as people came together to stand up against violence, hate, and anti-Semitism.

Eighty students at Clark University also held a vigil Saturday night.
More than a thousand people gathered on Boston Common Sunday afternoon to hold a vigil a day after a gunman opened fire inside a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, killing 11 worshipers and injuring six others, including four police officers.

The deadly attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh's residential Squirrel Hill neighborhood is being investigated as a hate crime, federal prosecutors said, and the Anti-Defamation League said it believes the shooting is the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in U.S. history. The gunman surrendered to police inside the synagogue and now faces 29 counts in the deaths, including "federal crimes of violence" and firearms offenses.

In Boston, people representing a rainbow of faiths gathered to pray, sing and mourn the victims.

Originally from India, Silvana Shaqueeb said as a Muslim woman, she wanted to stand in solidarity with Jewish people.
"I know how painful it is when things like this happen, and we wanted to just stand by them and tell them we are here for them and nothing, no matter how evil everything is outside, we still love each other," she said.

Hamida Merchant, of Canton, shared a similar sentiment.

"Tomorrow it could be me," she said. "Tomorrow it could be my mosque. Somebody could just come in, and we pray there every Friday. God forbid something like this happens and some crazy person comes in and just kills. It could be me or my children."

Several prominent public figures spoke at the gathering, including Gov. Charlie Baker, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey. Healey told the crowd that on this day, "We're all Jews."

Walsh pledged the city would honor the welcoming spirit the victims embodied in their faith.

"[The Squirrel Hill victims] were targeted because they welcome the refugee and the immigrant," he said. "They were the helpers. ... That's what we're going to continue to do, we're going to continue to welcome people and open our arms."
Boston Responds To Pittsburgh Synagogue Attack

By Simón Rios
October 28, 2018

‘Boston stands with the Tree of Life Synagogue, Jewish Community and The City of Pittsburgh,’ said Boston Mayor Marty Walsh.

BOSTON, MA — After a gunman opened fire at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh Saturday, killing 11 and injuring at least six others, towns and cities across the country are showing their solidarity, and stepping up security at synagogues Boston.

"Boston stands with the Tree of Life Synagogue, Jewish Community and The City of Pittsburgh," Mayor Marty Walsh said as he joined the governor, politicians and religious leaders on the bandstand at the Boston Common as members and supporters of the Jewish community Sunday afternoon attended a vigil in remembrance of the lives lost in Pittsburgh to antisemitic violence. "We're also standing here today to fight back on what's happening," he said from the bandstand on the Common.

Cardinal Sean O'Malley also spoke, praising collaboration of Jewish and Catholic Communities to help immigrants; "To think the congregation was targeted because of their openness to receive a stranger which is a Biblical command that we all should embrace," he told the crowd.

The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center's Shaykh Yasir Fahmy called the people who died in the attack victims of the "disease" of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

The vigil, put together by the Jewish Community Relations Council, the Anti-Defamation League of New England and Combined Jewish Philanthropies, included speakers from Congressman Joe Kennedy to Attorney General Maura Healey to religious leaders and a college student living in Boston who is a member of Tree of Life.
Boston police announced they are planning to join New York City police and add patrols to
Boston synagogues.

"In light of the tragic events at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, BPD has increased
outreach and patrols in and around synagogues in the city," said Boston Police
spokesperson James Kenneally in a statement.

"While there are no credible threats targeting similar religious institutions in Boston, BPD
reminds community members to remain vigilant while the Boston Regional Intelligence
Center continues to closely monitor the situation while sharing information with law
enforcement agencies on both the federal, state and local levels," he said.

The Anti-Defamation League described the attack Saturday as probably "the deadliest
attack on the Jewish community in the history of the United States."

As a mark of respect for the victims of the act of violence Gov. Charlie Baker ordered flags
lowered to half-staff beginning immediately until sunset, Wednesday, Oct. 31.

"I am horrified by the mass shooting in Pittsburgh, and my thoughts are with the victims,
their families and the first responders. We must work together to overcome this evil and
violence," he said.
Over a thousand people gathered Saturday on the Boston Common Sunday for a vigil that honored those who died in the shooting at Tree of Life Congregation, a synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Approximately 1,200 people were in attendance at the start of the vigil at 2 p.m., and the crowd continued to grow until its culmination. Some in the crowd joined hands, and others cried as the ceremony progressed.

Several elected officials, rabbis, law enforcement officers and interfaith religious leaders said during the vigil that now is the time to find strength in community and combat hateful rhetoric.

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker said at the vigil that it is the duty of Americans to uphold the fundamental ideals of the nation in the face of terror.

“The pain, the horror, the anger and the outrage that come with Pittsburgh are a constant reminder to the rest of us that there will always be work to do,” Baker said. “None of us should ever abandon our commitment to build a better and a stronger and a more inclusive Commonwealth and a more inclusive country.”
Boston Mayor Martin Walsh, who also spoke at the vigil, commended Tree of Life for welcoming strangers into their community.

“This was an anti-Semitic mass murder, what happened yesterday in Pittsburgh,” Walsh said, “driven by scapegoating hatred, enabled by high-powered weapons. They were at a synagogue to welcome new life, and they were targeted because they welcomed the refugee and the immigrant. That’s what we’re going to continue to do, continue to welcome people and open our arms.”

The religious leaders who spoke said their communities need to unite together in the face of tragedy.

Rabbi Marc Baker, president and CEO of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, said during the vigil that the Jewish people must continue to derive strength from the Tree of Life symbol, the namesake of the synagogue in Pittsburgh.

“It’s not lost on many of us that the name of this synagogue is one of the most powerful symbols in the Jewish tradition,” Baker said. “For thousands of years, the Jewish people has endured, through joys and through sorrows. Because our Tree of Life has reminded us of where we come from and of what matters most. Our resilience enables us to overcome even when some try to break us.”

Other Massachusetts leaders, like Rep. Joe Kennedy III, used their time to address divisive politics and read the names of the 11 victims.

“We will not sit idly by while hatred finds quarter in our United States,” Kennedy said. “We will not accept a government that gives cover to anyone that seeks to scapegoat, to target or attack any brother or sister among us.”

Sen. Ed Markey said the nation is divided between talking about freedom of religion and the tension surrounding gun reform.

“We are being torn apart by bigotry and division when we know that the United States stands for unity and freedom,” Markey said. “Hate has no place in a house of worship, and neither does an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle.”

Vigil attendee Paul Shupe, 60, a minister at the Hancock United Church of Christ, said he felt that it was important that he attend the rally to show support for the Jewish community.

"Anti-Semitism, in any of its forms, has no place,” the Lexington resident said in an interview. “We wanted very much to be here as a symbol of solidarity with our interfaith colleagues.”

Shupe said he rejects President Donald Trump’s comment that, had the congregants been armed, there may have been a different result.

“Asking people of faith to arm themselves is asking them to lose an important part of their soul,” Shupe said. “We can’t be who we are and be armed to the teeth and do violence. We could do that only at the cost of our souls, a price we would be unwilling to pay.”
Yevgenia Khodor-Tolan, of West Roxbury, said in an interview that she attended the vigil because she felt a personal connection to the shooting.

“I was in college at Carnegie Mellon, and I lived in Squirrel Hill for the last two years [of college],” the 36-year-old said. “Going to the vigil helped. It helped to not feel so alone.”

Jacob Wessel, 27, of the South End, said he thought it was important to focus on the loss of the victims instead of politics.

“I don’t buy into people making snide comments, and now, having them dominate the conversation,” Wessel said in an interview. “This is about people who were shot at a Shabbat service yesterday.”

The vigil ended with a reading of the Mourners’ Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for remembering the dead. After the program, attendees formed circles around the Common and sang together in Hebrew.

“We will continue to stand together as we have in the past,” Wessel said. “Jews certainly know how to persevere.”
A vigil was held in Boston Sunday for the victims of the Pennsylvania synagogue shooting.

**Eleven people were killed and four police officers were injured** when a 46-year-old man armed with an assault rifle opened fire at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood on Saturday morning, the Jewish Sabbath.

**Authorities identified the 11 victims Sunday morning**, saying they ranged in age from from 54 to 97 and included brothers and a husband and wife.

"When an act of violence takes place in a house of worship it impacts every single person," said Robert Trestan, executive director of Anti-Defamation League of New England. "When we go to a synagogue, to a church or to a mosque we consider them to be safe places. Suddenly those places that seem to be safe make us the most vulnerable."

Sunday's event started at 2 p.m. at the Parkman Bandstand on the Boston Common. Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh addressed the crowd. "We're standing here today to fight back on what's happening," Walsh said to the gathering.

Baker said, "I do believe, as I'm sure you do as well, that good always triumphs over evil."
Baker also tweeted a photo of the vigil, saying in part, "The Commonwealth stands with the Tree of Life Synagogue family and the entire Pittsburgh community."

Sen. Ed Markey also addressed the crowd Sunday, saying, "More guns are not the answer."


The vigil was held by the CJP, JCRC, the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, and the ADL.
Tears, candles and action: A moment shared on Boston Common
By Jim Morelli
October 28, 2018

BOSTON - Fear, anger and a determination to fight anti-Semitism.

Those were some of the feelings expressed in the Jewish community around Boston, one day after a gunman murdered 11 people inside a Pittsburgh synagogue.

Eleven names were remembered Sunday on Boston Common by hundreds. The victims of the massacre at the tree of life synagogue in Pittsburgh.

It was billed as a vigil but at times, had the flavor of a rally. Speakers occasionally traded in idle sadness for political jabs.

“We know that we cannot make America great again by making America hate again,” U.S. Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) said.

There were also calls for action, but behind it all were the names of three women and eight men. Names that now live on a national list that won’t stop growing.
Thousands of anguished and stunned people gathered on Boston Common yesterday to stand up to hatred and mourn the deaths of 11 Pittsburgh synagogue congregants in what was one of the deadliest anti-Semitic acts in U.S. history.

“We’re horrified,” said Susan S. Weingarten, chairwoman of the Boston Synagogue’s board of directors, who spoke to the Herald. “We’re absolutely devastated. We’ll be in contact with the Boston Police Department, we just want to make sure everyone is safe.”

The shooting followed a hate-filled week across the country, where three incidents occurred in 72 hours. Saturday morning’s shooting brought terror to Boston’s Jewish community.

“I was pretty scared to be honest,” said Elijah Wiesman, a 16-year-old from Arlington. “I was with a whole group of friends last night from my school, who are all Jewish, and we were all just talking about how terrified we are and what we can do.”

Marilyn Sandperl, the daughter of Holocaust survivor Rena Finder, stood next to a photo of her mother on the common as part of the “Lest we forget” remembrance installation and recited her mother’s words to passersby.
Finder’s message read: “I had hoped and prayed never to see or hear this again. Hitler may be dead, but his message to kill the Jews lives on. This time I hope the world will speak up and won’t allow it to continue.”

Sandperl talked about how her community is reacting to the tragedy.

“It is getting harder and harder to be optimistic,” said Sandperl. “It is happening too often; the shootings, the anti-Semitism, the random killings and mass murders.”

Mayor Martin J. Walsh, speaking at the vigil, said he reached out to Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto and offered words of solidarity.

“I just told him we’re praying for him,” Walsh said. “This isn’t like a tornado or a hurricane, where we can send supplies down and send people down, this is more of a message that ‘You’re in our thoughts and prayers.’ ”

Police Commissioner William G. Gross called the community support for the vigil “impressive.”

“We are sending a message that evil can’t write the narrative of our country,” he said. Members of all religious backgrounds also showed support for the grieving Jewish community.

“Today wear your yarmulke tighter,” said Shayk Yasir Fahmy, senior imam of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center. “Don’t fear your faith, be confident, be strong and hold your head strong because millions of Muslims stand with you.”

Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley said the Catholic Church around the country spread a message that stood by members of the Jewish community yesterday morning.

“Today, we are here, all of us, as congregants of the Tree of Life congregation in Pittsburgh,” O’Malley said. “We feel a solidarity with our brothers and sisters there. Our hearts are filled with sadness for the suffering of those individuals who unjustly lost their life.”
Amidst anguish, solidarity

Emotional vigil on Common honors victims of Pittsburgh mass shooting

By John Hilliard and Lucas Phillips

Religious, political, and civic leaders offered full-throated support for their Jewish “brothers and sisters” during an emotional vigil Sunday on the Boston Common, where they denounced anti-Semitism, bigotry, and the brutal violence that claimed the lives of 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue the day before.

Among the speakers was Ariel Stein, a Boston University student who has belonged all her life to the Tree of Life Synagogue, where the deadly shootings took place.

“It is up to all of us to love each other… and to stand up for the other in society,” Stein told about 1,000 people gathered around the Common’s Parkman Bandstand.

On Saturday, Robert Gregory Bowers allegedly killed 11 peo-
At vigil, messages of solidarity, condolence

People in the synagogue during worship services, according to authorities. Bowers, 60, told police after his arrest that he wanted to "kill Jews."

"The city's mayor, Bill Peduto, said the shootings were the "darkest day of Pittsburgh's history."

Across the country, vigils were held in honor of the victims Sunday. In Massachusetts, the victims were honored in many communities, including Newton, Cambridge, Lexington, Waltham, Swampscott, Worcester, and Springfield.

Boston's gathering, in the same spot where Dr. Martin Luther King spoke to crowds more than 50 years ago, included prayers for the victims of Saturday's shooting, each of whom was remembered by name.

Nearly, large-scale photographic portraits of Holocaust survivors were on display as part of a public art exhibit that opened earlier this month.

Stein talked about attending the synagogue in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood, where storefronts display the message "Love thy neighbor" in Arabic, Spanish, and Hebrew.

"Although Squirrel Hill suffered the largest blow [that] could have ever happened yesterday, I know that we will bounce back," Stein said.

Governor Charlie Baker quoted from the Talmud in his remarks, and told the crowd "that good always triumphs over evil." He said the country is about freedom, faith, community, and diversity, his voice raw and rising as he spoke.

"Most of all, it is about remembering every time someone is lost, that there is work to do, and that none of us should ever abandon our commitment to build a better, and a stronger, and a more inclusive Commonwealth and a more inclusive country," Baker said.

Mayor Martin J. Walsh of Boston said he had spoken to the mayor of Pittsburgh an hour before the vigil, and Peduto had a message: "Thank you, Boston."

Walsh said, saying the shooting was "an act of antisemitic mass murder."

US Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III said everyone at the vigil was gathered in solidarity with the Jewish community, which has been "mercilessly targeted" in recent years.

"We hold their hands today. We pledge our hearts to yours. And we say that we stand with you," Kennedy said. "We must be in unison. We must stand together."

And we say that we need to be separated. And we need to attack one another. We need to fear each other."

A feeling of deep interconnectedness pervaded the vigil, where attendees ran into friends and family by chance, and voices broke out spontaneously in Jewish songs.

Some people carried signs.

"We will not be divided from each other or from you," one said.

Another said, "We stand together."

Strangers joined hands, and at the end, many rested the Hebrew words to the Mourner's Kaddish in unison.

Gideon Klonsky, 29, of Somerville was racked with emotion at the end of the vigil, when a circle of at least 100 people formed and songs broke out. Friends surrounded him in an embrace.

Klonsky's grandparents, who both died in the past two years, lived directly across from the synagogue that was attacked.

"The largest mass killing of Jews in America was across the street," he said, struggling as he thought about how his grandparents would have felt.

"I can't even imagine," Klonsky said, tugging at his beard with emotion. "I can't imagine."

A Jewish woman, who declined to give her name, said the attack in Pittsburgh was too familiar to her, as a child survivor of the Holocaust.

"I was 12 when she was taken to Auschwitz with her mother.

"This touches me very deeply," said the woman, who requested her name not be used for fear of online attacks. "I saw how Hitler came to power," she said.

"This really troubles me," she said. "It hurts my heart."

Material from the Associated Press was used in this report. John Hilliard can be reached at john.hilliard@jehudistle.com. Laura Sullivan can be reached at laurasullivan@jehudistle.com.
STANDING TOGETHER: Naomi Fireman of Cambridge, right, is joined at a community prayer yesterday by Elijah Wiesman Frieman has family who was at service at a different synagogue in Pittsburgh at the time of the shooting. Credit: Jim Michaud

Naomi Fireman has sat in the Tree of Life synagogue.

Her family and friends were attending services at another synagogue just down the road when the attack happened.

Yesterday, she was unable to be back home with friends and family, but mourned the loss of the 11 people who were killed Saturday morning at the vigil hosted on Boston Common. She talked to the Herald’s Brooks Sutherland about the emotional 48 hours.

“It’s unbelievable to see people come out to fight back and show a loving community. I would be here for any city, but it was shocking to hear it was my city. Every time someone said Pittsburgh, I’m just still in shock that it happened. The fact that I’m not there right now, is really hard. But it was really powerful to see. I didn't grow up there, but I spent a good portion of my life there.
My family is from Pittsburgh and I’ve sat in Tree of Life many times before. It's really hard to just picture myself in that synagogue. I have some friends who were in services at synagogues right down the street and I knew they were there and it could have been any synagogue, there’s like five synagogues within a 1-mile radius of Squirrel Hill. Just hearing that they were safe but on lock-down was terrifying.

They were on lock-down throughout the day, but they’re OK and supporting each other. I wanted to be out there so badly, but just being here was so comforting. It’s the most comforting thing I can have given these circumstances.

My dad is American and my mom is from France. And my cousins were texting me because they knew I lived in Pittsburgh for many years, and they just said ‘I can’t believe this happens in the United States.’ And normally, I’m used to calling them and hearing about anti-Semitic acts that are happening in Paris and that are happening in Amsterdam. And it was just such a surreal thing to not be surprised that it’s happening here.”
Rabbi Marc Baker, CEO of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, spoke to Herald reporter Taylor Pettaway about the Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh that left 11 people dead.

"First and foremost like so many others, hearing the news yesterday just broke my heart. I was devastated, angry, mostly heartbroken and standing alongside the community in Pittsburgh. I was deeply wanting to send them love and support from Boston.

The fact that we could bring the community together (for the vigil) so quickly is such a credit to so many of our partner organizations, to the leadership of the Jewish community and to our friends in the interfaith community. It was love and support and action.

The great thing here today is the power of our community to come together. To come together to mourn together, to have each other’s backs and to come together to say we won’t stand for this.

It means more than you could know to stand here with our brothers, sisters, leaders from the interfaith community, law enforcement and elected officials. It’s overwhelming and uplifting to feel the outpouring of love and support and know they’re standing with us. It speaks to the fact that it wasn’t just an attack on a Jewish community; it was really an assault on our shared humanity.

It’s profoundly human to feel fear, especially in the face of hatred and violence. I think the most important thing is not to become our fear and not to let our fear overcome us and to find faith and stand with others in the face of fear so we can be our best selves.

But this hasn’t stopped me. I was in synagogue this morning. It’s a form of spiritual activism and I’ll be continuing to practice proudly alongside all of the members of our community to make sure we send a strong message that we won’t retreat in fear.

We won’t be driven away from our places of worship because of hate and violence. On the contrary, we will stand strong and proud and continue to practice our faith.”