



May 1, 2018

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Last Saturday, March 14, hundreds of thousands flooded Washington DC and cities across the country in public protests, calling for action against gun violence. According to the New York Times, the marchers turned out in the most ambitious show of force yet, from a student-driven movement that emerged after the recent massacre at a South Florida high school.

Many young and not so young members of HJC participated in the marches. Some traveled to DC and many others, including my own daughter, marched in New York. The March took place on Shabbat, and although special arrangements were made for observant Jews to participate, we had a Bat Mitzvah at Hillcrest and it was impossible for me to attend. My colleague and friend Rabbi David Wise, from the Hollis Hills Bayside Jewish Center, traveled to DC with his family, asserting, like Abraham Joshua Heschel did 50 years ago, that we can and should pray also with our feet.

In my opinion, the most important feature of this march is that it was generated by young people, who despite the fact that they cannot vote yet, sent a strong message to the political leaders in Washington and across the country.

After the Sandy Hook shooting, I spoke from the bimah in favor of the implementation of stricter gun control laws and in favor of allocating more federal and local resources to mental health both inside and outside the schools.

The subject of gun control is a highly charged one, with strong opinions in favor and against, both outside and within our congregation. While I respect the opinions of those who disagree with me, I consider it not only my obligation as a citizen to speak up, but my obligation as a religious leader as well.

To conclude, I wish to share –with her permission- a piece written by Anne Hosansky, a Hillcrest Jewish Center member, in which she reflects on the power of young people to generate change. Coming from someone in her 80s, I find the piece, even more inspiring.

May we all become agents of positive change,

Rabbi manes Kogan

Voices Raised at Last

By Anne Hosansky

You heard it for years, maybe even said it yourself as an aggravated parent or grandparent: "These kids, what do they know? All they care about is themselves."

That common complaint is suddenly outdated, for we're amazed and awed by the courage of the thousands of young students who marched against gun violence this week. One by one they took the microphone and spoke – as The New York Times headline proclaimed – with "Passion and Fury."

Their tearful but determined faces vividly recall memories of the equally determined faces during the Civil Rights struggle. What was demanded in that earlier time has resonance today. For these students are also demanding basic human rights. The right to go to school without being afraid you'll never get home again. The right to learn and grow without this being stolen from you in a shattering barrage of bullets. The right to have your childhood.

I'm haunted by so many of these young students, like Martin Luther King's nine-year-old granddaughter Yolanda echoing his famous speech when she declared, "I have a dream that enough is enough. This should be a gun-free world. Period." And Emma Gonzalez, a survivor of the shooting in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, that triggered the global rally, recited the names of the 17 people murdered in the school massacre, and then – with incredible stoicism – stood absolutely silent until she'd been at the podium for a total of six minutes and twenty seconds – the exact amount of time it took for the gunman to murder her friends.

Typical teenagers? Emma wasn't there to show off her hairdo or talk about the latest music idol –things we too easily associate with adolescent girls. She was there to memorialize the 17 people killed and to help save the future for others.

Just dreamers? With impressive political savvy student leaders began signing up all those who will be old enough to vote this November. As 18-year-old David Hogg said in his speech, these students will be a major voting bloc. Those legislators, he warned, who aren't willing to pass gun control laws, should "get their resumes ready!"

I'm ashamed for all of us who have paid lip service to our hatred of gun violence, but done nothing. Maybe sent a check or two, and went about our lives. The silence after Sandy Hook will resound forever in American history.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing, Edmund Burke's famous quote. Our children are showing us that the time for "nothing" is over.