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Attacks spark security concerns

Jewish leaders consider safety issues as holidays approach

CHICAGO (AP) — Edward Alpert had heard stories of Jewish persecution and knew anti-Semitism persisted.

But he had never been afraid of being a target until a 21-year-old white supremacist shot and wounded six Jews just a few miles from Alpert's synagogue.

As Jews prepare for their most sacred time of year — the High Holy Days, which start tomorrow at sundown with Rosh Hashana and run through Yom Kippur on Sept. 20 — synagogues across the country will be on alert, with armed guards and security cameras.

Jewish leaders said the July attack in Chicago and the August rampage at a Jewish community center in Los Angeles have renewed feelings of vulnerability.

"I felt personally a sense of complacency that some of these issues were behind us," Alpert, executive director of Chicago's Temple Shalom, said. "Yet the reality is, given recent events, I feel the dangers that were present many years ago."

Security is being stepped up because the crowds of worshippers during the High Holy Days could create a concentrated target for harassment or violence.

"We have to be on the lookout," Rabbi Ivan Wachmann of Temple Shalom in Pompano Beach, Fla., said.

The Society Hill Synagogue in Philadelphia will hire an armed, off-duty police officer to stand guard during services, and ushers will check visitors for membership cards and watch for suspicious-looking bags, executive director Evelyn Segal said.

"I can't imagine there will be a single temple or synagogue that won't have some increased security."

—Jonathan Levine
 Midwest director, American Jewish Committee

"It's very expensive and we can't afford it, but we're taking it out of the budget because we feel that we can't afford not to," she said.

Chicago's Temple Shalom will hire security guards — some armed — for services and also has surveillance cameras, Alpert said. The temple has banned briefcases, tote bags and backpacks, and worshippers will not be admitted without a ticket.

Other synagogues will assign seats and have doors that open only from the inside

during services. Police will increase their presence around many synagogues. Ushers will be instructed not to let in large crowds outside.

"I can't imagine there will be a single temple or synagogue that won't have some increased security," Jonathan Levine, west director of the American Jewish Committee, said. But he added: "If we help ourselves, we help the haters reach their goals."

The white supremacist accused in the Los Angeles attack, Buford O. Furrow, said he wanted to send a message to America to kill Jews. "Still, I said they do not want fear to define the Holy Days."

"I don't think violence will ever come from coming together and celebrating," Rabbi Chaim Landau of the 1,000-member Greenspring Valley Synagogue in Philadelphia said the recent attacks will fill prayer that is traditionally recited at the end of the year.

"In this prayer, we stand before God who will live and who will die," he said. "We list the specifics of how we might be persecuted."

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John 15:12ff

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~ Contact: Director of Chapter Development
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