



THE PR OFFICE ^[PRO]

Conference of European Rabbis

Coverage update

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Chief Rabbi Goldschmidt: 'Support communities back into synagogues'

Conference of European Rabbis holds Spring Standing Committee meeting via Zoom.

Contact Editor Arutz Sheva Staff , 07/05/20 12:04



Conference of European Rabbis Zoom meeting

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The Conference of European Rabbis yesterday held its Spring Standing Committee meeting via Zoom. Rabbis discussed the practical issues that many Jewish communities across Europe were facing amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and how they engage new congregants who have participated for the first time during the lockdown.

Many CER Rabbis have reported increased attendances at online classes, events and services during COVID-19 lockdowns; several report sometimes 100 times the normal attendance. One of the major challenges facing communities is to keep engagement high, when activity moves back to synagogue.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, said: "Every Standing Committee meeting is unique as we visit a different community and understand new issues. However, there is no doubt that this year was a new experience. The fundamental question revolved around how Jewish communities in Europe can adapt to a new world post-lockdown. We have already seen several states begin to lift restrictions on the goings-on of daily lives. The Conference of European Rabbis wants to ensure that its communities are supported back into synagogues and equipped with the best advice and guidelines to help them carry out religious practices in a safe manner. This is an extremely testing time for everyone and we are here to support wherever we can."

The meeting brought together some 50 of Europe's leading Rabbis. Since the middle of February, the CER has had ongoing conversations with its Rabbis around the virus, hosting an emergency meeting of the Standing Committee via Zoom before Pesach, agreeing clear guidance on a number of issues including the precautions that individuals should follow prior to official lockdowns being announced. The CER has been outspoken throughout on its calls to strictly follow government advice in all countries. The organisation had previously issued Halachic advice around the observation of religious festivals – most recently Pesach – as well as a new prayer for the protection of patients and medics.





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Other agenda items included the economic impact of COVID-19 on religious communities and the potential creation of a fund to support families later in the year. Similarly, the organisation spoke about forming thinking groups that will act as a sounding board for ideas about how community leaders can continue to engage effectively with members in post-lockdown world. This follows the resounding success of the CER's recently launched learning platform, which provided a comprehensive directory of online shiurim, classes and resources.

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/279833>





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European rabbis prepare to reopen synagogues with social-distancing rules

Jewish communities in several countries, including Germany, Austria, and even Italy, are now reading themselves to begin communal religious life again

By JEREMY SHARON MAY 7, 2020 17:25



Jewish district in Antwerp.
(photo credit: JTA)





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Rabbis in Europe are preparing the ground to bring their communities back to synagogue following the prohibitions on communal prayer for all faiths in numerous countries on the continent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt Conference, the president of the Conference of European Rabbis organization, said that Jewish communities in several countries including Germany, Austria, and even Italy were now reading themselves to begin communal religious life again, although he acknowledged that things would not be the same as before.

Some states and cities in Germany have already permitted houses of worship to reopen, while in Austria they are scheduled to open on May 15.

Goldschmidt said the recommendations of the CER, the largest association of Orthodox rabbis in Europe, were that when the authorities in a particular country permit the reopening of houses of worship daily and Shabbat communal prayer services can recommence but with tight controls.

Services should be shortened, worshippers should stand two meters apart, and the congregation should not sing since singing reportedly increases the distance saliva can travel.

Torah readings should be conducted with only one person, other than the individual reading, standing at the bimah, prayer platform, the size of congregations should be limited, and only synagogues with large prayer halls should open.





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Kiddush is off the menu.

If a community has more people who wish to pray than can fit into the prayer hall with the requisite distance between them then extra services at earlier or later times should be instituted.

Goldschmidt said that congregants should also have their temperature checked upon entry, including on Shabbat when such a procedure should be performed by a non-Jew.

"It's going to be quite restrictive and difficult, and the transition period is not going to be easy," said the rabbi.

"We are going to have limited physical contact with each other, and limited possibilities to conduct religious services."

And in terms of other aspects of Jewish communal life, Goldschmidt says the reality will be different than before

"We're going to have to go back to what it was like 70 or 100 years ago, when a wedding had 30 or 40 guests not 300 or 400. Bar Mitzvas will be lower key, life cycle events in the short term will have to happen on smaller scale," he said.

One remarkable phenomenon witnessed during the coronavirus pandemic which Goldschmidt says he and his rabbinical colleagues are seeking to reinforce is the digital engagement of unaffiliated Jews in online lessons and





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video-conference prayer services.

According to the rabbi, video conference prayer services such as a Kabbalat Shabbat service staged before the beginning of Shabbat have in some communities garnered tens or even hundreds more participants than pre-corona physical prayer services in the synagogue.

Goldschmidt said that during a CER meeting on Wednesday, held by video conference, the rabbis discussed various ways of keeping virtual synagogue attendees in the physical fold, including communal meals and other initiatives once circumstances permit.

One phenomenon the rabbi is less pleased with is that of wealthy families spending large sums of money on chartering private jets in order to fly family members who have passed away to Israel for burial.

Goldschmidt says he has heard of several such cases noting that it can cost hundreds of thousands of Euros.

“From the perspective of Jewish values and Jewish law, it is possible to bury someone in their home town on condition that they are reburied at a later stage in Israel,” he noted.

“The huge amounts of money for flying a deceased family member privately would be much better invested helping poor families who have lost their livelihoods.”

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/european-rabbis-prepare-to-reopen-synagogues-with-social-distancing-rules-627268>

