



FEBRUARY 15, 2024
SAVANNAH COMMUNITY MEMORIES PROJECT
“FAITH IN ACTION” RESIDENCY
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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SUBJECT: RABBI ROBERT HAAS



Robert Haas

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:11:04 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. Well, rabbi, great to have you with us, and thank you for being here today.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:16:16 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Thank you. What a privilege.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:18:12 [Tom Kohler]: Well, the first question I'm gonna ask you is to say your name and spell your name. I'm going to ask you when you do that, to say, my name is, and, and to repeat the question,

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:28:02 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: My name is Robert Haas. R-O-B-E-R-T-H-A-A-S.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:35:17 [Tom Kohler]: And do you have a preferred pronoun?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:39:19 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I guess it would be he, him.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:42:04 [Tom Kohler]: Great, thank you. Let's just get started with kind of a little bit about you, kind of where were you born, if not in Savannah. How did you get here? What brought you here? And, and, and a little bit about sort of your first impressions of Savannah.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:34:58:00 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, I'm born in south Texas, a town called McAllen, which was right on the border with Mexico. My family was there for over a hundred years. Still have one member of the family there. And I came here because I interviewed for the position at Congregation Mickve Israel. I was actually volunteering in Africa at the time. And then I did the first interviews there, came back here for the personal ones and in person ones, and then moved here after I got the job.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:35:26:08 [Tom Kohler]: And how long have you been in our Community?

Robert Haas

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:35:27:17 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I have been here over 11 and a half years now.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:35:31:22 [Tom Kohler]: And can you remember what you thought it was gonna be like and kind of what you've come to realize about our little town here?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:35:40:08 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Yeah. I, I, I wanted to move to a place that was kind of smaller with a synagogue of a certain size. 250, 300, 200. That number I'd been at a mega synagogue, which I had a great experience at. But I wanted to, and I wanted to be in the south. I did not know very much about Savannah. I had never really been to Georgia. I'd been to Atlanta once or twice. That was for family stuff, you know, hospital visits, but that's about it. So I didn't know very much about it. I did check how many

13:36:10:19 sushi restaurants they had. That was one of my, you know, first impressions that they had enough. But really I moved here not because of the history, 'cause the synagogue is old, has a great history. I moved here because the people were so welcoming. The committee that was interviewing me was very organized. Its leaders, BH Levy and Philip Solomons just were magnificent. They had everything so well ordered and really seemed like it was a welcoming community. So that's, that's the reason I, I chose to come here

13:36:41:13 when they, obviously I had to choose after they gave me the invitation, but that's why I moved here.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:36:46:22 [Tom Kohler]: And this will be the last question I'll ask about you personally, but have things in your personal life changed since you've been here?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:36:52:17 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, my personal life has changed just a little bit, just tiny bit. I came here a bachelor. I was a lifelong bachelor. I planned to not get married. And unfortunately I failed miserably after a few years here. So I met my wife and now we have two children. I have a 4-year-old and a 6-year-old. My wife is April, my daughter who is six is Amira. And my son, who is four, is Ari.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:37:17:07 [Tom Kohler]: I'm gonna, I'm gonna sort of dive in with you in a little bit different way I've done with other folks. Okay. I'm just gonna ask the question. When you

Robert Haas

hear the word interfaith and you think about Savannah, what, what do you think about?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

- 13:37:31:22 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: When I hear the word interfaith, I think, wow, what an incredible place to be. So when I first came here 11 and a half years ago, there was already some interfaith stuff going on with my congregation a little bit with other congregations, including this one. First Presbyterian, they volunteered for babysitting for high holidays. We volunteered here for Easter and Christmas. We did a once a year interfaith Thanksgiving service with downtown congregations. I believe Congregations in Service was already in action, which is kind of what we call a day of
- 13:38:06:11 volunteering, or a weekend of volunteering twice a year. And we were already doing Backpack Buddies of course, although we did that ourselves, where we helped feed school on the weekends, feed the kid on the weekends. And we worked with other houses worship. So there was already some of that going on. I got to know some really wonderful people in town very early on, including Steven Williams here. And I'm very good friends with Billy Hester, obviously, and others like Michael White. So there was already a collegiality about Savannah that I
- 13:38:35:20 was really impressed with. However, I will say as time has gone on, the city has gotten even better because I think there was already some lines of division that people didn't cross, you know, when it, you know, ecumenically, is that how they say the word now? How do you say, did I say it correctly? Close enough. Close enough. I should know that word. But I think really in the last several years, I'd say starting right before Covid a year or two, there's been a lot of action on the part of the city, on the
- 13:39:06:01 part of houses of worship, on the part of organizations to bring an even wider variety of houses of worship together. And so what I see today has far surpassed what I saw years ago.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

- 13:39:19:08 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And when I talked to other clergy about it, they believe in many ways that Savannah has really gone farther in that respect than ever before. I obviously can't say yes or no, I wasn't here 50 years ago or 40 years ago, or 20 years ago. But from my perspective, the improvements have been amazing. And it's been on every level. I mean, obviously the city has been very supportive about it. Covid really brought a lot of people together, ironically, as we're all trying to help each other, a lot of organizations really have been trying to bring religious
- 13:39:50:11 leadership from every corner to work together and work together for ideas that everybody supports. So staying away from the issues that divide us, which are really minimal in number and concentrating on the issues that bind us. Housing,

Robert Haas

education, you know, criminal justice, those things, feeding those in need. And so we've really seen an incredible amount. I

13:40:19:14 still think we have ways to go, obviously, but I think we've made some really good, good, what do you say? We've made good inroads into doing more. Yeah, good steps. Good steps, yeah.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:40:33:01 [Tom Kohler]: And then specifically about trying to connect people from every corner to work together, the mechanisms, the organizations, the mechanisms, the movements that have, have really kind of been the, the catalyst there?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:40:47:11 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, I think there's been quite a few. I think the city itself, Mayor Johnson, I think has gone a long way. He did before he was mayor, has really brought a lot of clergy and he is updated us on what's going on. I'll give an example. When they had the, I, I think it was the Black Lives Matter, was that the, I can't remember which walk we had. And there was fear that there would be interlopers who would try and create havoc here as around the country during these types of events.

13:41:20:05 People would come and kind of create violence and he brought all of the clergy together and said, listen, we don't want these outsiders creating havoc. So if you see any of these people, just help everybody stay away from 'em and let 'em say their peace and don't let anybody instigate. And he went to all the clergy and we went out there and just kinda stood and helped out and made sure that, you know, helped the everybody else create calm.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:41:45:05 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And again, the city and the county people were fine, but there were, you could see several people who obviously from other places tried to create it. So that preventative idea was really helpful. I think there's a lot of organizations, obviously Housing Savannah, Loop It Up. I mean, there's tons of organizations now that really try and bring people together for these events and for these ideas, you know, really the biggest issue and one of the biggest issues is housing right now. It's obviously not just for the homeless, but for people who do,

13:42:15:13 you know, have jobs and just can't afford to live anywhere. And that has been a rallying point. Whereas a few years ago, I think the rallying point was the gun violence, which is still an issue obviously, but I think housing right now is the one we're all dealing with even more so. So there's an organization we, and I'm part of our organization called JUST that was started, which obviously I'm very involved in, you know, you've got the Homeless Authority, the Housing Authority, and so

Robert Haas

many other organizations working towards this. But you also have other organizations

13:42:46:03 in town trying to get ecumenical support. You know, I'm on the, I'm on the Homeless Authority, but I'm on Hospice Savannah and doing a lot for the community as well. And you know, there's just an incredible amount of, I think, support and I think goodwill right now.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:43:06:20 [Tom Kohler]: Lemme go all the way back to your con conversation about Black Lives Matter. Are, are you saying that the mayor called clergy together and you were at clergy as a group or in the street that day and were literally doing sort of anti-violence work?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:43:24:20 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Exactly.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:43:25:21 [Tom Kohler]: As clergy?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:43:26:08 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Yeah, I wasn't really anti-violence, it was just walking around, being supportive, helping people out. I think it was Black Lives Matter, I'm almost sure, but I don't want you, I'm pretty sure it was, was it? I think it was. And yeah, and that's what he called us all together. I don't know how many of us, but there were plenty of us. And when it came to Covid as we, as well, I mean, we had lots of clergy working together during Covid, especially the first year, because everybody's wondering what's going now, don't get me wrong, there's still a lot of places we need to fix and a lot of issues that go on between the, the

13:43:57:01 houses of worship. But I think it's really so much better than it has been. It's been really inspirational for me to see the movement, you know, whereas when I first came here, I knew, you know, several pastors and ministers and reverends and now, you know, I know tons of 'em from all religions. It's really incredible.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:44:17:22 [Tom Kohler]: I may be misremembering this, it seemed like there was a time when there was a, you may have mentioned that there was a group of ministers and or clergy that met, and their common bond was, they all had downtown congregations. Is that a a correct memory?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

Robert Haas

13:44:33:11 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Yeah, we do a downtown Thanksgiving service every year for congregations that are downtown, anybody who wants to join. So it's really nice. All the pastors come together and we do a, a small service and it's, it's nice. But again, what we're doing now is beyond that, I think, I think we're working together for the common good, which is what was done before, but I think we're just doing it even more, certainly more than when I first came.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:44:57:18 [Tom Kohler]: Tell me more about the, the just, the JUST organization. Much of what we've heard so far today, quite frankly is, is very wonderful. But it tends to move more toward charity. Charity in the best sense of the word, or benevolence in the best sense of the word, but not social justice and, and help, help me with that. I mean, what, what's going on as you see it in this community from the, with regard to the faith

13:45:27:22 community that has to do with social justice work.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:45:30:15 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And I think we're seeing a lot more social justice work today than before. Obviously what they call the Mercy Ministry has been something that houses worship had been doing for a long time. So organizations like JUST and other ones try and work with city officials to create rules and laws and edicts and change policy that is going to help. And that's the difference. So this organization is more about bringing houses worship together to bring people together to help the city, the county, you know, do better. You know, to help them see what is better when

13:46:05:20 it comes to housing, what's better when it comes to education, what's better when it comes to justice in terms of, you know, criminal justice. And so that's really what we're trying to do. And it's in a young organization where, you know, we, we started during Covid, so it's, you know, it's, it's been running and we've had some successes and I think it's gonna grow more, but I think we're working with other groups too, that are working more and more with the city, not just to help in the moment, but to

13:46:32:01 create policy that will help in the future.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:46:33:22 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: For instance, now the city has, I don't know how much they have now, but they had a, a fund for low income housing and there's very little money in it, you know, I don't even think it was 50,000 in it. Now they have, they have 10 million, I think they just got another 6 million from another. So they're gonna have, and this is a guesswork, don't, don't gimme the exact numbers, obviously 15, 20 million and it's gonna grow, started off with getting federal

Robert Haas

money, but obviously that federal money was not guaranteed every year. So the city now gives money from the city funds every year into this fund. And so they can use it for a

13:47:09:02 wide variety of things. They're using it for a lot of repairs now. We hope they use it for rentals in the future. Maybe even building and low income housing, because obviously Savannah's growing and we had 16 million tourists last year. And again, don't quote me on the numbers and you know, everybody loves Savannah, but you know, you can't afford to live here. It was just ranked. And then top 10 least, least, what was the, what was it? Top 10 least

13:47:33:22 affordable, least affordable cities according to what people make. Obviously New York is much more expensive, but people pay. So for all the good and you know, we gotta do better. And so raising, for instance, the minimum wage here, at least raising what people are paying. And you see a lot of companies doing this. They're raising the minimum wage and still having trouble finding people because it is expensive, because it's such a great place. And it's that balance that, and I'm not, you know, I don't know if numbers and such forth, I am not a business person at all. If I

13:48:05:15 was, I would not be doing very well in life. Business was, but you know, I think we all see some really smart people working on this issue from a wide range of areas. And hopefully they'll do more and more. There's a lot of issues because obviously we're land limited. We got a big plant coming and trying to find housing and schooling for everybody. But I think the good news is everybody wants to do what's right. So they're just trying to figure out the best way to do it.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:48:33:21 [Tom Kohler]: And then when you say "we," it tied back to this organization JUST?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:48:39:04 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And it's not JUST us. I mean we, the city, the county, the people, the houses of worship, the leaders, I'd say the vast majority of people from every religious persuasion, every political, the ideology wants to help in this area. Like most areas, you know, and we're seeing people come together, they don't always agree what's best, obviously. But I see the best intention. So it's now how do you put that into action? And that's the hardest part because there's so many moving parts to this issue and way beyond me. We're just trying to, you know, we,

13:49:12:13 we deal with, you know, pick one or two issues and try and, and work with that. And one of 'em was changing the, the reading instruction for the, the, the area which they're now doing. They just hired somebody to do it, which is great. And she's amazing. So obviously, and also working with the, the Fund for Low Income

Robert Haas

Housing, which the city has done, you know, has really started to prove, and again, this is a start because \$10 million to

13:49:39:13 me or you is a lot of money. And I'm retiring and you know, I'm, I'm, I'm taking that around the world cruise for a year. But \$10 million for housing for a city our size is just a good start.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:49:51:11 [Tom Kohler]: Are there 10 organizations, 10 houses of worship involved in JUST, or 70 or gimme size?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:49:57:10 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Officially it's like 22, 23. But you know, we're going through growing pains and you know, trying to figure out our, our place in this. But what we have done is create this really good group of people who are working together and we all know each other, which is great because as I said, the houses of worship that we're all working together, we're not necessarily doing much before. And even houses of worship that were in JUST for a little bit, but have left for other reasons, you know, now I know them, you know, it's really quite incredible how many clergy we, you know, how many clergy know each other now, which is

13:50:29:05 before would've been minimal, you know? And if it was, it would've been, hey, and now it's like, let's do lunch, let's hang out. You got issues. I call somebody, I need a favor. And that happens all the time now.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:50:39:01 [Tom Kohler]: And, and then I'm gonna stay on this just for a minute, if I may. How, how do, how do you manage to stay funded in this little, in this little social action organization?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:50:47:15 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And that's what we're working on. We grants and we try, we're gonna be looking to businesses to help us out, which we're just starting to do for, just as a minimum. You're only allowed to give us certain amount. So you can't ask for like a hundred thousand dollars from a business. You can only ask for a smaller amount. So that, and through houses, worship and individual donations. So that's, that's how it's fine. It's a very, you know, small run where you get one organizer, hopefully good two and everything else goes towards the help. It's been great. It's more of a people organization, people power is kind of the

13:51:19:20 basis for it.

Robert Haas

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:51:22:06 [Tom Kohler]: And then help me, you mentioned Backpack Buddies. Talk a little bit about that. 'cause not every, I mean, not everybody knows. Talk a little bit about that, if you would let, let's start, let's just leave it at that 'cause I wanna hear a little bit about that and how long it's been active at Mickve Israel. And I'm also interested, are there individual folks at Mickve Israel that you feel, if we think about this idea of faith in action, people that have taken their faith and carried it into the streets, into the community. Are there some people at,

13:51:55:18 at congregation that you feel like, well, these are the exemplars When you think about faith in action?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:52:00:13 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, faith in action, my congregation you've got a lot of people, because I think there's very few boards, organizations in this whole community that have not been touched by people at Mickve Israel through the years. In fact, I would imagine there's been a founding member on almost every board going back to 1733. So we've had a lot, as for the first question, Backpack Buddies, it's a great organization. It was founded funny enough by one of our congregants before I came. I, unfortunately, I wasn't here to help him out at the beginning. But it's a great organization. They, they, it's not, doesn't originate here

13:52:32:03 as an organization. He brought the idea from a place, the idea is, you know, kids do better if they're fed. Obviously it's a pretty simple idea. And of course you can give free meals during the day, breakfast and lunch. But what about the weekends during the school year?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:52:48:06 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And so this was an idea that kids who need food on the weekend, we'll take a backpack with enough food for them for the whole weekend and then they come back next week with the backpack and they do it again. They don't use the backpacks anymore. And so Norman Hirsch, who was the guy who found unfortunately passed away, you know, maybe seven or eight years ago, brought it to our congregation and he thought to himself, he was a retired guy, had been, you know, in a hospital administrator. He thought, well, why don't we bring this to the city? Why don't we do? And so he went out and found houses of worships and few

13:53:21:20 organizations so that at that time, every single school in Chatham County had Backpacks Buddies program for it, sponsored by houses of worship. You'd sponsor one or two or maybe smaller houses of worship would sponsor a school. And so you sponsored schools. So any and, and you know, the kids apply for it, but it was a free simple application process. And then you do other special things, you know, bring books for

Robert Haas

13:53:49:10 certain days or for, you know, winter holidays you'd bring extra stuff or, so it was, it just really was the one way all of the houses of worship were doing this mercy ministry and it was great. It's still great. Obviously Covid slowed things down a bit because it was, you know, really impossible to, when they're not in school to figure out who's doing what because there wasn't free lunches. And so, but it's still going strong with a lot of houses of worship. I don't know if we cover every school anymore, but I

13:54:17:10 would say the majority are still covered.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:54:21:01 [Tom Kohler]: Is there a a, I want be careful about language here. Does there a contingent to be a backdoor relationship between Wesley and Mickve Israel?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:54:29:23 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: There's no backdoor anything in Savannah. We're, we're friends with everybody. So we have a really good relationship with Wesley Monumental. In fact, they're gonna be using our social hall every Wednesday for the next several months because of some construction they're doing. So it's, and we do this whenever, you know, when we built our social hall 20 years ago, we used a church for months and months. You know, we had First Baptist use our sanctuary when they were doing ours. We had somebody. I mean it's really that, that has always been really easy in

13:55:02:16 Savannah. We've all worked together I think, in kind, which has been great. I think what we're doing now with social justice and social action is more though than what was done before. But that's just from my point of view, I have not been here for, you know, more than 11 and a half years. So, but it's, I think, I feel, what I like is you see houses of worship that have very different viewpoints politically and religiously. But again, the fact that they'll get together to do things to help each other, you

13:55:31:18 know, that's been, you know, great. And that's I think one of the best things about our city is that, you know, we, we houses worship, get along for the most part, I think the most difficult part is probably houses worship within the same movement. That's probably where, you know, the more issues often are. But when it terms to us and other houses worship, it's great. It's been really, it's been beyond amazing, I think.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:55:55:20 [Tom Kohler]: Are there other, are there clergy that if someone from, you know, another, someone from someplace else sort of looked at the relationship, they would say, Hmm, those are unlikely allies or Hmm, that's an interesting, the, the, the way that relationship between those two clergy has emerged, that's kind of an

Robert Haas

interesting and unusual relationship between individual clergy and you or, or there other examples of that where it's just like, hmm, you just wouldn't see that everywhere maybe?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:56:23:20 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Yeah, I think you see a lot of that and I, I don't want to give names or anything, but 'cause it's so many, but really you have wide variety of viewpoints on everything from gun control to abortion, to politics, to gay marriage. I mean there's a lot of issues in the that separate people unfortunately. But the vast majority of issues bind us together. And I think we see people who are willing to work on

13:56:57:04 other issues that I mentioned, as long as we keep the politics out of it. And that's been a real key is all of these different groups keep the politics out of it. We didn't, it doesn't matter who's on the city council or the county commissioners or who's the DA or who's the mayor. It's, we wanna work with people to do things better. And that's, that I think has been really rewarding. So we really try and keep that out of the discussions at, in fact, if you come to a lot of these gatherings, you

13:57:27:01 don't know who believes in what, when it comes to all that. I mean, obviously if you're a terrible person, we don't want you there. But most people are really great and good nature and just have different viewpoints.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:57:40:07 [Tom Kohler]: And then I, I want to be a little more personal again, if I may. You personally seem to move quite freely into interesting spaces that people may not imagine maybe on St. Patrick's Day. How do you start your day?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:57:57:16 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, St Patrick's Day, the last couple years, I do comedy on the side. So I often do a comedy show for different St Patrick's Day organizations and as I say, and they're very supportive of me because I, I always tell 'em, listen, if I'm gonna do comedy at eight o'clock in the morning, you better all have a lot of alcohol in you. And all the St Patrick's Day organizations are very nice enough to do that for me as they get start drinking at three in the morning. So they'll start laughing at my jokes. So yes, I'm doing another one this year, so I've done

13:58:26:10 a couple of 'em. So it's a lot of fun.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:58:28:16 [Tom Kohler]: Other places that your humor has shown up in our community?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

Robert Haas

13:58:32:21 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, you know, I do comment on the side. I'm not professional. I mean, I'm professional that I'm paid tens of dollars a year sometimes, but I do it for fun for, you know, just, and, but I do a lot of it for, you know, non-profits. You know, I do a lot of emceeing. I do, you know, I just did a show last night for Hospice, I mean, not sorry for Housing Savannah at Front Porch. So it's really great because I love doing humor and so I can give them my time doing this. You know, I emcee for, I'm an emcee for Savannah Tech. I did an, I do emcee every year

13:59:06:06 for Hospice for Union Mission. I've done it for CASA. So it's just a lot of fun 'cause I, I go in and I prepare and I wanna make sure the jokes are there and I don't, I take it seriously, which is ironic 'cause it is comedy.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

13:59:20:16 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: So I just enjoy it and it's, it's great. You know, I, I used to, all my free time used to be volunteering, like, you know, my days if I took a day off, which I never did. But I always, you know, volunteer time. Now I have two kids and a wife, so I'm a little bit more limited on what my time can be given for. But if it's a banquet like that at night and it's great, I, you know, but I, I try and stay more at home at night than I ever did before for the kids. But there's so many opportunities here. You know, you join boards, which is great because they

13:59:52:04 have meetings during the day understanding this and you know, there's a lot of volunteer options. And when my kids are older and my daughter's six, she's about there, my son's four, he is a little wild. So he is not quite ready for it. And we do it with our synagogue, you know, volunteer things. My daughter will volunteer and my son will run around, break things. But in a, a year or two, I look forward to taking them more and more to all of these things. It's gonna be really moving, you know, I already, we we, we donate food and on Sunday morning and my daughter

14:00:21:10 sometimes will come with me to, to give that out, which is great. And, and any, any house of worship that wants, you know, is trying to demolish a building and rebuild it, I just throw my son in there and saves him a lot of money. Yeah, he's, he's a little bruiser

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:00:42:21 [Tom Kohler]: Again. I wanna go back a little bit personally, was there a moment in time that you realized that you would come into a life of faith as a rabbi? Is it, was there, is there a magic moment for you?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:00:54:17 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I don't know if there's a magic moment where I decided to become a rabbi. So I was at, went to the University of Texas at Austin that just went to the semifinals in football, just to let you know they did pretty well. Lost,

Robert Haas

but really played a good game and almost won. So I was in, I was at University of Texas, I was looking at different majors, psychology, but I, I was basically history/pre-law and I just decided, you know, I think I really love working with kids. So I became an elementary school teacher and it's, I tell this all the time, a lot of

14:01:25:01 people think I did it just upset my mother and that is not true. That was only part of the reason I did it. So I was an elementary school teacher getting an MBA gotta go to law school. And then I realized this was, you know, I was probably do some sort of child advocacy law, which I think would've been really spectacular and rewarding. But then, you know, I thought about it and I thought, well this is not what I want to do. I moved to Israel for a little while and then, 'cause I was already thinking about rabbinical school, I didn't know that many rabbis, I just was doing so much in the Jewish world. 'cause I volunteered all my free time with youth groups, mostly youth groups and

14:01:57:13 camps and running all these things. And every night of the week I'm teaching Hebrew school or I Sunday school or Saturday school. And so I, I wanted to find something where I could work with a wide range of people and a wide range of places. And I thought the rabbi or clergy might be a good place for me.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:02:18:23 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: So I applied, got in and wanted to go into the pulpit 'cause what we call a pulpit or because there's a lot of other options because you can do a lot of different things. So I think it was more, you know, about the people. Like I worked with kids but I wanted to work with adults. I wanted to do this and that and not just concentrate in one area. And I think this is a good place to do it because you know, from birth miraculously to unfortunately to death and everything in between, I'm, I am part of it and it's also an action oriented position 'cause

14:02:49:14 there's always something to do. And if you don't have something to do, there's plenty to find to do. It just depends on your initiative and how much time you have and your congregation. So that has been a true blessing. So I did a lot of that. One of my first two places I served were in Dallas and Houston. Dallas was like a thousand family congregation. Houston was a 2000 family congregation. So big. But I was single, so I'm doing tons of stuff, nonstop, meeting people, volunteering, it was great. And I came here

14:03:17:15 in the same thing. So it's been really a good place for me, I think.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:03:24:04 [Tom Kohler]: Is there, in your experience, is there ever any blow back by a congregation feeling like their rabbi or their minister or whatever is spending too

Robert Haas

much time in the other world rather than how, how does, what's, what's the politic of, of of interdenominational effort versus this is my pulpit...

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:03:47:08 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And that is an excellent question and that's the question I've probably dealt with the more personally than ever before. I think my congregation is very good about it because it's been kind of the center of interfaith in this community when it comes from the Jewish perspective. We also have the JEA and the Federation, obviously we also have, you know, two other synagogues. But it's really been at the center since we've been here so long. And I think as long as I maintain what I'm supposed to do with my synagogue, that's the most important thing. And I think a lot of clergy probably have made that mistake where they do too

14:04:20:03 much and too little. And so I try and balance it definitely. And it's also about getting people involved. We have a lot of people involved in our synagogue in different things, which is great. And it's also, I think one of the reasons they hire rabbi at this congregation is to represent the Jewish community to the outside community. We're such a small group of people. I don't think people in the world realize there's only 15 million of us in the world and you know, we're 0.001% of the population and about 2% of the population of America. So

14:04:49:10 we're very small in number. So it, I think that's one of the reasons. So I, I think I try my best to make sure I don't miss anything at my synagogue. And I'm always there. Sometimes I don't do as well as I should obviously. But yeah, I try to hopefully balance it as much as possible. But you know, you're not, nobody's perfect. So sometimes unfortunately I don't, don't make the balance as well.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:05:13:15 [Tom Kohler]: You mentioned the, the, the size of the Jewish community, but in, in Chatham County and Savannah, how big is the Jewish Community?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:05:20:06 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: It's pretty sizable. I mean, you're not gonna find very many small southern cities that are not near a major metropolitan area with 4,000 plus Jews plus a very sizable Jewish community. Not that much in, in South Carolina, just north of the border. 'cause they have Sun City, they have Hilton Head. So we're tied five, just 5,000 plus for those areas, which is a very big number considering our counties, what, 300,000? Our cities, probably a 4,000 in Savannah. And the city's what, 140,000, something like that. So that, that percentage is, is

14:05:53:04 higher than the national average. And so that's pretty impressive. 'cause most, most of the Jewish community, because we're so small, live in south Florida, New

Robert Haas

York, you know, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, LA... That's where most of us live. I when I mean most, I mean like 90%. I mean, you know, Atlanta certainly has a sizable population. But for the whole state of Georgia, there's, and this is a guesstimate 'cause I know it's grown. There's like 150,000 Jews, 145,000 in Atlanta, 4,000 here and like a

14:06:26:05 thousand for the rest of the state. So it's a very small Jewish community outside of Atlanta. So we're kind of a, an enigma in many ways. As is Savannah in many ways.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:06:36:22 [Tom Kohler]: There used to maybe there, I believe there was a time in Savannah when a knock on a pastor's particular downtown church, a knock on a pastor's door from a homeless person and there would need to be a response. Is that still part of your faith responsibility or has that become a bigger, more of a, and I use this word value-free or is that response now more institutional and and the notion is information and

14:07:06:18 referral rather than here, here now? How, how has that evolved?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:07:11:23 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And that's a good question 'cause we're downtown, so there's a lot of people asking for help. And so we try our best and we did for a while, but it's really hard when people are coming to the door all the time. And we're also a museum. And also unfortunately there's a question of safety in especially recent years. So we have to spend an inordinate amount of our budget on safety 'cause we're a Jewish congregation. So it's getting to the point now that there are gonna be very few Jewish congregations that don't have guards at services. And since we're open all the time, we have to be a little bit more careful than we

14:07:45:00 used to be. So what we try and do is if there's somebody we can help, we do and we try and get 'em to organizations because obviously organizations have a better chance of helping out. If somebody needs a bus ticket or something, or a train ticket, we, we will not give anybody cash. We don't give cash to anybody. Obviously that's a, you know, that just sends a message that we have cash, which is fine for people who are innocent, but for people who, you know, want to injure us, that's problematic. So we will help. But really the best way to help is

14:08:13:17 through organizations and the house of worship together. Because you know, you feed a man for a day, that's great, but if you can get 'em into working with Union Mission or some of these other organizations or go to Emmaus House to make sure they have a meal. So it's consistent, but we'll do everything we can. But, you know, we just have to be a little bit careful. Security is a very big word. What's the word?

Robert Haas

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:08:39:00 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Security is one of the center points in the Jewish world right now. There's been so many attacks. The anti-Semitic attacks in America have set records every year except for the Covid year and it's getting worse. And obviously what happened in Pittsburgh, and there's other places, unfortunately in Texas and even though there's never been an incident really in Savannah, you know, we did have somebody put up some graffiti. Everybody has just cared. The, the Jewish community, the federation hired a full-time security expert just for the Jewish community.

14:09:12:22 So we can go through trainings all the time. So we just gotta be extra careful, unfortunately,

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:09:18:13 [Tom Kohler]: When things move in that direction. Do you experience, do, do other congregations reach out in moral support? What's, how does, how does that feel these days? I mean, if, if, if after Pittsburgh for example, I mean what what was, what, what happened ministerially here with relation to our Jewish community, if anything?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:09:44:15 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well, Savannah's been an amazing bubble. You know, Pittsburgh happened on a Saturday. That was the attack in Pittsburgh at the synagogue, their Tree of Life. And we had our big food festival on Sunday, the very next day. Obviously it happened there on Shabbat for us this Saturday. And so we were, the people were actually, we, you know, not hold our big event and we're like, this is America. You know, if obviously if we're fearful about going to a park in America on a Sunday afternoon, then, so we did have it. And more people than ever came. I mean everybody

14:10:17:10 came, all the clergy downtown were saying we need to go support them. It was amazing. And even more difficultly is the issue in Israel right now. You know, the, the Israelis were attacked, now there's a war and there has been an outpouring support for our synagogue, for the Jewish community, for the anti-Semitic issues we're facing.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:10:40:12 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Obviously there are different views on Israel, but when it comes to the Jewish community here, it's a hundred. I mean you cannot imagine the number of emails and Facebook messages and calls and letters we received from people we knew, didn't know from little houses of worship all over the state. I was inundated with calls and emails and Facebook messages. I mean, and it was

Robert Haas

just fantastic. Everybody was calling to show support and to really be there for us. And I think we had

14:11:16:00 one person put something on Facebook that was not, was anti-Semitic. But everybody else is just so supportive and a lot of them I didn't know, we didn't know. They were just people sending us notes. Handwritten, I'm so many handwritten letters. It was amazing. And I'm making all these calls and just saying thank you as much as I can. But a lot of 'em didn't leave phone numbers, you know, so it's been not universal support, but almost universal support. And I think a lot of the people here have a lot of

14:11:45:20 wonder at all the antisemitism because they don't see it here. I mean, and that's really wonderful to know. But just, just minimal amounts. I think a lot of it's the south is also, there's not a lot of Jews in the south as well. And so the south is, although there's a reputation of not being supportive, I, I think in fact it's been the opposite, had been very supportive.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:12:06:00 [Tom Kohler]: Would you have any idea how the yaman at the mosque would have experienced this in, do you think they the same kind of public support?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:12:15:11 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I hope so. I think so. Now I'm, we're friends with the Imam at the, the downtown mosque, right? So the one on the south side really has more of a, of a North African feel. And I have not really talked to the imam there in a while because we just haven't done not, not anything about, he did a little bit more with the other synagogue, but I know when there was a moment a few years ago, maybe more than when the mosque was defaced, we all went out there, all the community went out to show supports, which I think is important because I think one of the

14:12:48:16 lessons we learned is, you know, showing support is essential, but what's even more important is to get to know people before you need issues. So I already had some friends who were clergy and we all went together to show support now that we all know each other even more. So, you know, if anything were to happen, God forbid that I think there'd be a lot of support.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:13:08:07 [Tom Kohler]: And then how was here to or help arrange this in, into Steven Williams in the kitchen on a Wednesday and he was filling a salt and pepper shakers, which is, you know, high level faith-based work.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

Robert Haas

14:13:21:00 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Well I don't wanna, I don't wanna say anything but Steven Williams is probably the best clerical, salt and pepper shaker filler that I've ever met. Thank you. Just, yes, yes.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:13:30:16 [Tom Kohler]: And he mentioned, and I, I is there some sort of ecumenical cooking club you're in?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:13:37:12 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: There was a while ago we did some cooking. (Tom: What's up with this?). I don't cook at all. But when we had a, some of us got together a couple times for cooking demonstrations. So I had somebody at our synagogue do it 'cause I don't cook. But we have so many different things going on, you know, you know, Reverend Williams and I and a couple others went to interfaith retreats together. We, you know, I do lunches with people all the time, you know, through, JUST and other organizations, you know, we have a very, very good relationship with a lot of people. Some people I, you know, some clergy I see all the time and I

14:14:10:02 see them more than my wife and she's very happy about it because she doesn't want me in the house too much. But it's, it's, it's true. There's just a lot going on and I think it's, it's really been, you know, nice to see, you know, the Pastoral Alliance change their name. I forgot what they changed it to because obviously I'm not a pastor, you know, so they call, we still call it the Pastoral Alliance because, but there's another name now. They asked me if, I said, I don't care if you

14:14:38:01 change it, it doesn't bother me. But they said, no, we wanna do it. It was mostly because of me and because I was the only non-pastor in the Pastor's Alliance, I, I recommended calling it the Pastor... Savannah Pastor's Alliance and one really good looking rabbi. That's what I remember they said. Yes. And they of course invited Rabbi Gelman at the other synagogue to be a member. That's a joke. I'm gonna be trying, I forgot to try last night. But yeah, they, they changed the, they changed it. I don't, I'm, I'm deadpan humor so I don't, but they, they, they're just great and you know,

14:15:09:18 it's just a really nice group of people and it was nice of them to do that.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:15:16:01 [Tom Kohler]: And I'm reaching back into history. I should know, and I'm not sure if I'm reaching back correctly, when the first boat of Jewish people came, a story I've heard is that the colony may not have been particularly accepting

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

Robert Haas

- 14:15:32:04 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: That. So Yes, well it's hard to know. I mean, this was a 300 years ago almost. So the first boat arrives in 1733. You know, the colony is founded in February, the boat arrived in July. And you have to understand, this is a different period of time. We can't anachronistically look back and say they weren't doing what they were supposed to because there had never been a boat of Jews who intentionally came to America before that. There had been one boat that had escaped, had, was forced to leave Brazil and ended up in New Amsterdam and then stayed.
- 14:16:05:16 But they weren't doing that intentionally. They had, they were attacked by pirates. There were some ship issues. They ended up there. So this is the first group of Jews. There are always, obviously there'd been Jews who'd come here, sailors and adventurers and, and in small numbers, but never a group of Jews on a boat. And it was only 41 who arrived. So it's not a big number, but never had happened before. And they're coming to a colony that had just been established and there was an, unofficial law on some books and official on
- 14:16:37:02 others that Jews were not allowed in groups. It was just around the world. That was just what it was. I mean there were very few places that Jews were welcome. So they arrived here in 1733. Obviously we all know who that Oglethorpe was, kind of a utopian visionary. And so for several reasons he did welcome them. I'm sure some of the colony were not supportive. Others were, it was probably very strange for them to have a group of Jews because
- 14:17:05:23 they, Jews had only been welcomed back in England, you know, in the 1650s. Been kicked out in 1290. And this is 1733. So the is funded by a synagogue in, in London. So it's hard to know. But what we do know is they arrived, they were given the same thing as everybody else. They were given a plot of land, a garden, farmland. They were given full rights in terms of increasing what they had.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

- 14:17:32:20 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Not only that they were not only invited to serve in the militia, they were required to serve in the militia. And almost nowhere would they allow Jews to serve in the militia in the world. It happened once before New York, after somebody petitioned over and over again. But this is the first time because you know, we were here to protect Charleston from, from Spain in Florida. And so it was pretty, from a Jewish perspective, it was beyond what they hoped. Now did all the people, were they excited that Jews were living with them? I think we'll have to look at
- 14:18:03:15 the historians and ask 'em. I'm sure some were not, some were probably just unsure what was going on. Some were probably not thrilled and some were happy. Obviously there was a Jewish doctor on the boat and he's one of the ones who saved the colony. So that was something they were very appreciative of. But you know, true or not, the charter did not originally say Jews couldn't come. But

Robert Haas

if, since it had never happened, it was just assumed that... Had never thought about it. And the backers of the colony in England didn't

14:18:35:06 want 'em to stay either. But of course they're here by the time the letter goes there and the letter comes back saying you can't do this. He had already done it. So it was really fortuitous timing actually. And so Jews have pretty much been here ever since. So that's one of the, I think that's one of the other reasons, if you're here from the beginning, you know, you're welcomed. I think it's also the Jews in the South have done very well. I think some of it is because we've been here in small numbers, that's as well. But I think, you know, my family got to McAllen as most

14:19:03:13 Jews got to smaller towns as they went to open up stores.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:19:06:11 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: You know, they, they had connections, they had experience in mercantilism or you know, running little pedal carts in New York and they went out and they went to places and they had skills that those areas did not. They had connections. So they started a general store, a store. All of a sudden the city has access to stuff they didn't have before. And so when I grew up, every single person in my small town who was Jewish, they all had a store downtown. Not all, not all of downtown was Jewish, but every Jewish man had a store down there. And then the next

14:19:39:09 generation of the store and then me, next generation, then they changed, you know, to do professional jobs as well. So,

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:19:45:17 [Tom Kohler]: So this was, I mean, in an odd sort of way, this was an interdenominational experience.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:19:50:05 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: It was very much so.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:19:52:14 [Tom Kohler]: That folks, I mean in my experience, folks from Jewish person from Savannah would be go upstate to go open a furniture store in Glenville. Yeah. And that would be the only Jewish person in Glenville. Right. But and time, time would go by and people would get to know each other.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:20:08:16 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Exactly. And that's what happened because you know, you have come somebody to come, you know what, through the years you have some,

Robert Haas

a Jewish person moved here from New York, he'd meet with the Jewish community wants to open this kind of store and they would say, listen, we already have two of those stores here. We're not, you know, wanna help you compete, but you know, Brunswick, we're helping help you find connections there you go there, you go to Alma or Vidalia and we'll help you start your store there. So it was a very supportive environment. But also you gotta be careful not to start a store next door to one that's

14:20:39:18 selling the same thing. And so, and that was one of the ways Jews moved out from New York throughout the country and ended up in all these small town. I'd say that was the majority of the reasons Jews ended up small town around the country.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:20:52:13 [Tom Kohler]: And did help me understand sort of the relationship between the Jewish and the African American community and the American South historically.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:21:02:12 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And that's a very difficult question. Obviously, you know, Jews have lived in the south. We've been a very small percentage. But we have been here. So if you go way back to pre-Civil war where the Jews who had slaves, definitely, I mean they lived in the South, we try and make sure the stereotype doesn't live because there are people out there who say 90% of slaves are owned by Jews or Jews dominated the slave trade, which of course is untrue. It was a very small percentage. 'cause there were almost none of us here during the later during

14:21:33:06 segregation. You had a lot of Jews come from the north to protest down here. And in the south you did I think a lot of people who were supportive of the African American community giving jobs, paying 'em higher wages, the first cashier, the first salesperson, first person to, you know, be the, the head of the, where all the stuff is. That's why I can tell I'm not a businessman. Where do you put all your stuff? (Tom: The bank?) Not the bank, your stuff? (Tom: Warehouse?)

14:22:03:10 Warehouse! Thank you can tell I'm not a business person. So, so on that I think we did pretty well. But you know, again, we were part of the community here and there was a little bit of a fear of the retribution because if you're coming from the north, they're not gonna go after your family. But you know, so I think the Jewish community was as supportive as possible, but they probably could have done more as well. I mean we were part of it as well. So you talk a lot of people who were living during that period of very happy with the support they got from the Jewish community.

Robert Haas

14:22:34:02 Certainly with jobs and education and, and we know Julius Rosenswein, a high percentage of the African Americans in America were educated because of Jewish businessmen like him.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:22:46:10 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I think some may have been 75%. A lot of people forgot about that. So in many ways we did what we're supposed to and went beyond what we're supposed to. But did we protest segregation for years before it became an issue? Probably not. I mean, just was not, which is unfortunate. But you know, that was there people, the Jewish community today very feels very comfortable in America. You know, I can marry somebody who's not Jewish. I can go to an event, doesn't matter. I can become Senator Congress people. If I'm a congressman, you're probably not gonna hate me 'cause I'm Jewish, you're gonna hate me because I'm a

14:23:17:18 Republican or Democrat. You know, you're gonna be so there's no issues. But that was not the case in the 1930s and forties where Jews, you know, were, a lot of 'em were still second generation, first generation immigrants. And there was a lot of antisemitism. It was kind of like, we just need to duck and cover and just do our thing. We're not, you know, we're kind of outsiders living here. This is a great place to live. America's one of the best places at that time ever. And so we love it, but we're not gonna make

14:23:48:04 waves. But by the sixties, I think especially after World War II or you know, half a million Jews serving the war. And by the sixties I think we're feeling like we're Americans now we can protest. And that's why you saw so many Jews in the Civil Rights movement. But before that, I think it would've been very difficult in the thirties and forties, I think it could have been disastrous because the Jewish community was not quite as welcome as it is today. I think still better than most places. But today, I think

14:24:17:07 despite the rise in antisemitism, most people in America are very supportive.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:24:23:23 [Tom Kohler]: You, you mentioned World War ii, and just as a side note, I'll share this with you. I did some research about sort of the history of disability in Chatham County. And it turns out that post World War II, that was the kind of work I was doing. And the Mental Health Association here sprang from the Jewish War Veterans Association.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:24:42:23 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Oh really? I didn't know that. Post

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

Robert Haas

14:24:44:02 [Tom Kohler]: World War ii, because those soldiers came back with what we would now call PTSD.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:24:50:18 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Right.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:24:51:02 [Tom Kohler]: So there were others, but there was a, a acumenical effort to establish a mental health association. And that was the beginning of the mental health association.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:24:58:22 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Really? That is, I I, we should bring that information to us. So put on archives. Yeah, it's an unusual, yeah, I mean a lot. I mean the Jewish community has always, in America, especially since we've been invited, tried to do as much. I mean, the NAACP was founded by African Americans and Jews. People don't realize that today the first war veterans organization was the Jewish War Veterans. You know, everything from the orphanage, you know, instead of one of the first or original orphanages in. So we try and do our best. We're small and we, but you know,

14:25:30:22 there's been a very real fear of repercussions by rocking the boat too much until the last 50, 60 years, I'd say. So the last 50, 60 years, you've now seen Gloria Steinem and people in gay rights and not afraid to say, I'm Jewish and gay, or I'm Jewish woman supporting this, or I'm a Jewish man supporting civil disobedience or supporting civil rights, or protesting the war. That would never have happened on the level in the thirties. There may

14:26:00:07 have been protests against antisemitism because that was for us, but I don't know if we ever felt as comfortable until probably the sixties and doing these type of things. But underneath, you know, jobs and supports and starting organizations for mental health. I think everybody was a, you know, that was definitely, but I didn't know about it, so That's great.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:26:21:14 [Tom Kohler]: I want to, I'm going to take us right back to Savannah as we, as we close, how many different houses of worship you've personally been in, do you think?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:26:30:04 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Oh my goodness. Been in, yes. I don't know. Physically present. Probably 25, 30 at least. Yeah, I mean it just gone in for something. Yeah. 'cause I speak at a lot of 'em and then we do events or meetings at a lot of

Robert Haas

'em. That's just a guess. It could be more or less, but probably that number, maybe more. A lot of times I meet with people but at different places, not in the churches. Not 'cause they don't want me there. But yeah, I mean, again, you have to understand there's a very small Jewish community and I'm, I've been the rabbi here 11 and a half years. I'm at the Reform synagogue, which is a very interfaith oriented, the

14:27:02:13 conservative one is too, they've just had a host of different rabbis for many reasons. So usually don't get into that kind of stuff till you've been in a place, you know, my belief is when you start at a house of worship as a clergy, you spend two years with your house of worship. You know, you do little things outside, but you gotta really meet people and get to know 'em. And you don't, you don't lead blindly. You lead because you create relationships. And I've been here now 11 and a half years, which is a little bit longer. So really the last half of it, I've done a lot more

14:27:32:16 interfaith stuff. But as for speaking, I think our synagogue considers itself one of the, you know, centers of interfaith. There's not very many Jews. And so I, I go and speak all over the place whenever asked,

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:27:44:13 [Tom Kohler]: Well, what made me think of it a little bit, 'cause I, I, I wouldn't, I didn't know what the number would be, but I, I'm not surprised. I would wonder how many other people in Chatham County period could say that they have personally been in 35 houses or different houses of worship.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:28:00:21 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I have no idea. Yeah. I think, you know, this is just my life. This is what I do. So I don't want, you know, so it's, but I can say a lot of people have been in our synagogue. I mean we had I think probably 10 to 20,000 visitors last year. You know, we have the museum, but people come for services or the Jewish people visiting. But people from the community come here all the time. You know, if we have a big event, you'll have the mayor and all the, you know, different count city council people, the aldermen and women come. So it's a really good

14:28:35:00 place to be. It's kind of a, I think it's an, we could, I mean we have a lot of issues obviously with housing and stuff, but I think ecumenically, we could really set an example for the rest of the country. 'cause the rest of the country doesn't always do as well as we do here in this, like what we're doing now. Some areas are doing great and some areas are not. But I think you feel very little derision between houses of worship and even people who have no idea what a Jew is. And there's a lot

Robert Haas

14:29:01:04 of 'em. 'cause they're for tiny population and they see me, they're still interested, you know, they see my yamaka and my kippah right there. And they're, they're, I mean, I never get anything negative. It's always, I support you or I support Israel, or I support the Jewish community. If you, anything I can do for you, I hear what's going on. So it's really great. And, and a lot of people don't know much about Jews, I'd say most, because obviously we're a very tiny population. But the support of Savannah is overwhelming.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:29:30:01 [Tom Kohler]: I just, I'll propose and we need to watch our time 'cause someone's on the other end of that door. I propose that if, say a thousand people chose over a ten year period to be in 35 different houses of worship in Savannah, that it would make Savannah a safer and better place.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:29:48:15 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I agree.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:29:49:07 [Tom Kohler]: I Propose if they have 10,000 people who over a 10 year period decided that they would be in 35 different houses of worship, that that would be a transformative Savannah.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:29:59:10 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: I agree. I think we still have a long way to go in every movement. The Jewish movement and religion and all religions, you know, it's, it's not about, you know, who's right, it's about showing respect for everybody. You know, all of that's gonna be settled in the next world. I think God wants us to, you know, play nice here and show respect and deference. You don't have to be best friends with everybody as I teach. But showing respect is essential. And I think it's a, you know, and in

14:30:30:19 politics especially what we're seeing now, you know, there's nothing wrong with having a difference of opinion. I mean, it's, if you don't have a difference of opinion, then you're living in a totalitarian state. We do not want that. But I think it's a little bit about being friends with people who are different than you. And yes, there are issues we disagree with, but I think we're getting, we get to the point at different stages where you're Christian, I'm Jewish, we're completely different, we can't be friends, we can't do anything together. Maybe business. Whereas 90% of Judaism, Christianity is, this is

14:31:04:04 very sim it's it's ethics. I mean, so it's the same thing in politics. You know, Republicans and Democrats, just an example, you know, a lot of 'em do a really good job. And I know a lot of 'em who do or heard of 'em, but a lot of 'em are

Robert Haas

like, if you're not Democrat, you're, I can't talk to you if you're not a Republican, I can't talk to you at all. I mean like, you know, 90% of what they want is the same thing. You know, they want a better

14:31:28:21 America. They want people have jobs. We have people live in peace.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:31:33:09 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: So I think you're exactly right. I think we do really well in America. I think even despite what's going on now. And you hear, but I think we have a long way to go. But I think we also have to remember the news is different now. And that has played a major part for good and for difficulty. I remember an article about a man in, you know, 1920, you know, on Sunday morning as a farmer. He'd open the paper, he'd read the paper, he'd worry about the issues of the world and he put out in the paper and that was it. And he went back to doing his thing. You know,

14:32:04:01 now we are inundated with information and, and most of it, the negative stuff makes the news, but the positive stuff doesn't. And that's not just 'cause of the news. That's because that's what we want. That's part of our, one of the issues we have as human beings. But if the news was right, there would be mass chaos in the streets. I mean, there'd be people shooting each other all the time. Nobody would stop at a stoplight. There'd be people beating each other and attacking and everybody would be poor and everybody would hate each other. And you know, I look

14:32:36:07 around and I'm like, this, where is this happening in America? I mean, obviously these things happen, but you pick out, you know, I remember I went to a VH-1, it was a, I don't dunno if it's a channel anymore. VH-1 was a music channel. So I'm living in rabbinical, I'm in la I'm in rabbinical school and they have the first VH-1 Awards, which was next door to my rabbinical school. That was the place they used to have the Academy Awards.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:32:58:23 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Somebody got tickets. I'm like, great, let's go to it. So we go to it and there's like, they first had the outdoor event and then the indoors. So we go to the outdoor event 'cause they had people play and there's like 50 people, like there's nobody here. And they, they crowd us all together so the helicopter can come and, and get the picture, make it look like a crowd. So we go inside and they must not have publicized it because there's nobody there. We're like fifth row and there is nobody there. And they've got like, you know, Christine Aguilera and Creed and the, all these really famous bands getting awards or playing and

14:33:34:11 there's nobody there. But then if you watched it on tv, it made it look like it was packed. And I think the news sometimes, you know, wants us to run and hide. You know, don't leave your door. You know when every time you go to, I don't

Robert Haas

go to this country because it's, don't, you know what, I'm not going on vacation in Syria. That's true.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:33:54:09 [Tom Kohler]: Well you said don't leave your, don't leave your door. But what you and other people in Savannah are doing is opening each other's doors.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:01:23 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: And I think that, and that

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:02:23 [Tom Kohler]: Is, I think to your point, that's what we need. I hate to do

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:06:07 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: This. No, but who's waiting by the way?

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:08:09 [Tom Kohler]: Katrina. Katrina Bostic.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:09:18 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Oh, I know her. She can wait. Katrina can wait as long as I want. She owes me money. She didn't return my call the other day. She likes my wife better than me.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:26:03 [Tom Kohler]: I know that's not true. Yeah, she is the most

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:28:11 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Pon. Oh she is. I've just been facetious. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. That I know. Oh yeah. I've

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:33:11 [Tom Kohler]: Been stunned without, yeah.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:34:09 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Yeah, she's not very good at poker. That's where she owes me money from though. Yeah. She's not a good bluffer. Well here we go.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

Robert Haas

14:34:38:18 [Tom Kohler]: More internet nomination.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:40:21 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: That's right. Right.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:41:19 [Tom Kohler]: We're gambling together. Thank you for your

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:43:15 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Time. Thank you so much. So we could do a lot, but I appreciate it really. It's such, you do so much for the community and people like Katrina do a lot for the the community. Unbelievable mouths. Let's get to

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:52:11 [Tom Kohler]: Learn

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:52:16 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: About that. Yeah. So what she does is great. Yeah. Watch your head right there. Okay, thanks person.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:56:10 [Tom Kohler]: Do a bump. I'm gonna steal some chips please.

SCMP-A-DAY1-0006

14:34:59:13 [Rabbi Robert Haas]: Thanks guys, I Appreciate it. You talking up, I'm gonna steal some fruits. I'm gonna steal.