



Deacon Brian McNulty, center, studies the site of an ancient Jewish synagogue in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee Aug. 6.

PHOTOS BY GREG FRANCIS

Trip gave gift of seeing through others' eyes

Lawrence W. Fine, Guest Contributor

Places are sanctified by the people who pray there, not by what may have happened there. It is the individual spirit that makes a location holy.

This is one of a number of personal reflections and insights stimulated by our recent interfaith journey to the State of Israel. The interactions of our diverse group, a group unafraid to interact with one another on any topic, helped reinforce feelings long held and reveal ideas not previously explored. Our journey was tourism of the soul, as much as tourism of the country; let me share some of the internal landscape.

As a Jew, the diversity of Christian belief and practice, even within the same denomination, came as a surprise. I suspect that we each tend to view the "other" as monolithic and cohesive. The diversity of prayer and place was amazing. Different denominations identify different events as having taken place at different sites... or not at all. Rules and regulations are debated and reinterpreted, or not, just as intensely in each of our traditions. Religious practice is neither static nor universal; rather, in each of our traditions, it is vibrant and very, very personal.

There are similarities among us, Christians and Jews, but we are not the same. We can celebrate and share and work together. Yet, we can also retain our individuality of belief and respect those differences. It is fairly easy to observe a Mass or a Shabbat service and feel the power and strength that the participants each feel. It is harder to craft the common language that each of us can own at those moments when we wish to participate together. We will often have common goals, yet we will sometimes travel different roads to get there. As a group, we made great strides in crafting those shared moments, as well as in celebrating the distinctive ones. This is hard, but important work — to find joy in each other, while retaining our individual identity.

Spirituality sometimes is found in the most unexpected places and surprising times. Late afternoon on the Galilee. A hillside in the setting sun. The first cool breeze of the day wafts through this first-century Jewish village, an archaeology project of the University of Rochester. In this amazing setting, an area that looks much as it did 2,000 years ago, we find the roots of



Lawrence Fine, center standing, takes part in a group prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane.

our common past — a place from where Judaism and Christianity grew. Our religions, and our group, stand side by side.

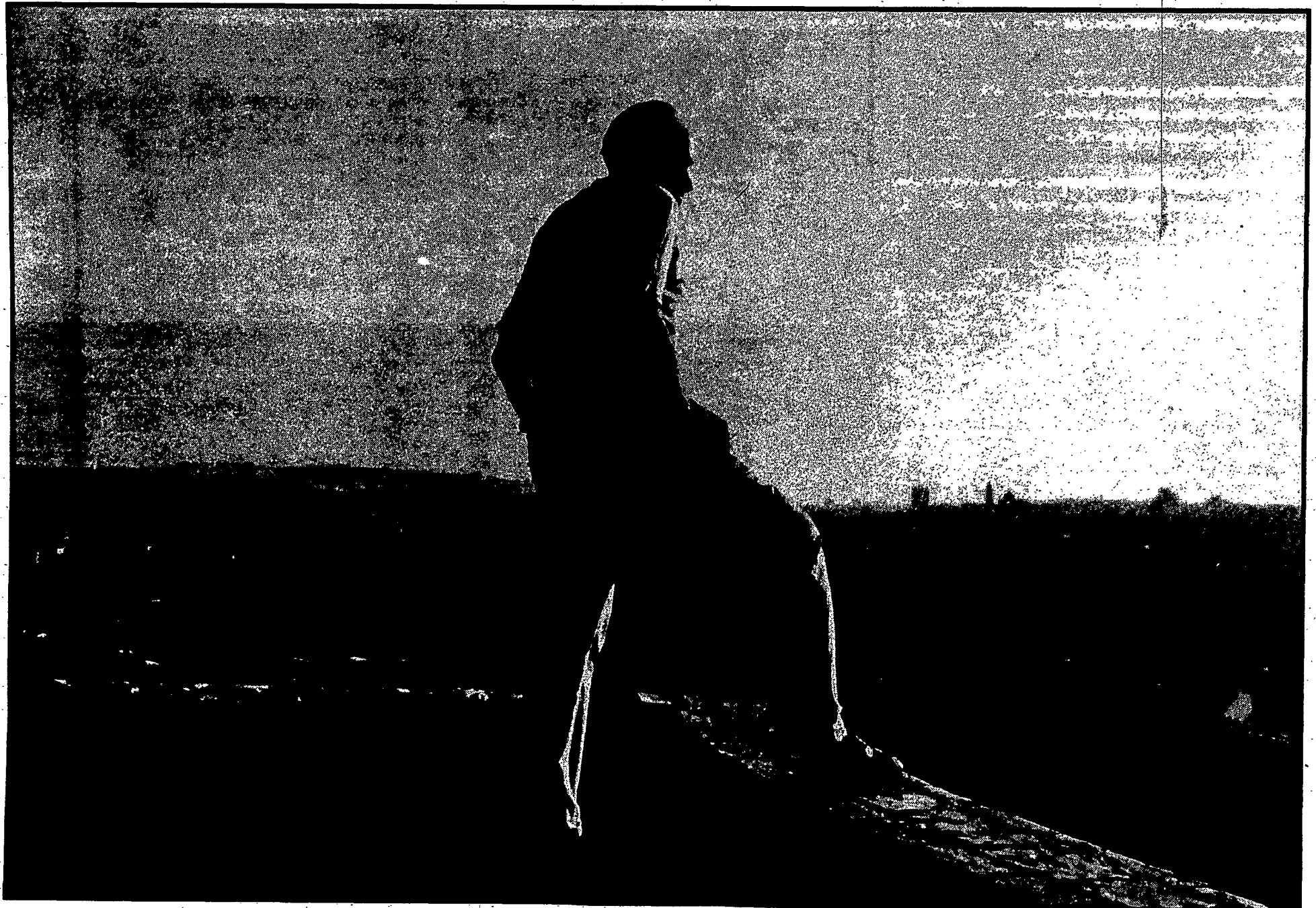
Two days later, in a synagogue in Jerusalem, a brutally hot day. The Rabbi has cut short his sermon and rapidly moved the service to its conclusion.

As he is about to chant the spirited closing prayer, he looks up to see his 3-week-old grandchild, in the arms of its mother, enter the sanctuary for the first time. The rabbi sweeps the child into his arms and dances with him in front of the congregation, celebrating another generation, another link to history.

These moments transcend words, they transcend denomination — they are human. And that, in the end, is the greatest lesson of the trip. To seek, wherever we may be, that which binds us as human beings. To work, wherever we may be, to make the world a better place. From each of the participants I received that most vital of all gifts, to see the world through another's eyes. Each of us has pledged to keep those 23 distinct world views in our hearts. Each of us has pledged to use our hands, here in Rochester, to fulfill those promises in our hearts.

For me it reinforces the Jewish obligation of Tzedakah — justice — and Tikkun Olam — the repair of the world. Thanks to each of my new brothers and sisters, I am filled with the energy to act on these obligations. May it always be so.

Fine is executive director of the Jewish Community Federation of Greater Rochester.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark stands deep in thought on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem Aug. 7.