

39th Annual Manfred E. Swarsensky Humanitarian Service Award Program

In honor of Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky

(October 22, 1906 to November 11, 1981)

Presented on November 18, 2020, to:



Dr. Floyd Rose



WHO WAS RABBI MANFRED E. SWARSENSKY?

Each year we pause to remember and pay respect to the memory of one of our past members. In 1982, the Manfred E. Swarsensky Humanitarian Service Award was established to recognize an outstanding individual in our community and provide a financial stipend to the charity designated by the award recipient.

Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky was a proud and loyal member of the Rotary Club of Madison for 22 years, adding luster to our ranks by the quality of his service to the wider community. He touched so many organizations and causes, and through them the lives of so many individuals. He possessed a deep belief in the indispensable nature of those institutions which unite us as a community and which undergird social stability and continuity in times of trouble. When the University of Wisconsin was under serious attack from people seeking to "close it down," Rabbi Swarsensky rose up to defend it. He supported churches, synagogues, hospitals, service clubs, the United Way—all those institutions in our community that bind us together.

Manfred Swarsensky was a builder of bridges—between Jew and Christian, between the city and the university, between old and young—linking many facets of what he called "The wonderful City of Madison with its symphony of nature and culture." He was avowedly Jewish, committed to values of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation which are so central to his heritage, and from the heart of that heritage, as he understood and exemplified it. He viewed all persons as children of God. Manfred reached out to them all — excluding none.

Most revealing of his largeness of spirit was his attitude toward his native Germany, in the wake of the Holocaust. To forget what happened, he insisted, would be, "A sin against the memory of the dead." But he also declared, "I have no right ever to push away a hand stretched out in reconciliation." Despite personal suffering from the Nazis, he stated emphatically, "I do not believe that the sins of fathers should be visited upon their children." So, in 1970, when the City of Berlin invited him to return for the reopening of the synagogue where he had begun his rabbinate, Manfred accepted, saying later, "Twenty-five years ago I would have said: Never again shall I set foot on the cursed soil. But twenty-five years ago, no one would have invited me."

Manfred Swarsensky truly possessed an educated heart. We remember him with love and gratitude as we honor those who have demonstrated that sense of generosity and openness, that appreciation of institutions that nurture our community's life, and especially the Rotary ideal of "Service Above Self," which were so exemplified by his life.

*We thank Rotarian **Dick Goldberg** who, in 2000, produced "A Portrait: Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky." The film received a Bronze Telly Award for best short documentary. The video is available on our club's YouTube channel.*



Past Recipients of the Manfred E. Swarsensky Humanitarian Service Award



1982	Harry and Velma Hamilton	2001	Manucher J. Javid
1983	Alfred Swan	2002	Albert Goldstein
1984	Thomas Leonard	2003	Beatrice Kabler
1985	Harold and Ruth McCarty	2004	Carol Toussaint
1986	A.C. Schumacher	2005	Robert Lang
1987	Walter and Lowell Frautschi	2006	Hugh Johnston
1988	Michael B. Petrovich	2007	Bill Rock
1989	Irwin and Robert Goodman	2008	Andrew Davison
1990	Marie Stephen Reges	2009	Norval Bernhardt
1991	Harlan C. Nicholls	2010	Nancy Abraham
1992	Charles Pfeifer	2011	Steve Morrison
1993	Menahem Mansoor	2012	Melanie Ramey
1994	Alice Schacht	2013	Mercile Lee
1995	Milton McPike	2014	Jonathan Gramling
1996	Rennard Svanoe	2015	Christine Hodge
1997	Mary David Walgenbach & Joanne Kollasch	2016	Robert Beilman
1998	Max D. Gaebler	2017-18	Suresh Chandra
1999	Patty Loew	2018	Milele Chikasa Anana
2000	Richard Davis	2019	Dr. Masood Akhtar

2020 Manfred E. Swarsensky Humanitarian Service Award Recipient Dr. Floyd Rose

This year's recipient is Dr. Floyd Rose who is passionate about education and supporting the next generation. Fellow Rotarian, Dr. Floyd Rose, received multiple nominations. In the tradition of Rabbi Swarsensky, Rose has sought to find solutions with area schools and families surrounding the persistent educational achievement gap between white students and students of color.

As President of the 100 Black Men of Madison since 2011, Rose has worked tirelessly to support area students. When administrators announced the school year would begin "virtually", the organization, in collaboration with their strategic partners, altered the 26th Annual Back to School Celebration into Project 3000. Instead of giving away backpacks and school supplies, Project 3000 worked with families to ensure internet access and a plan to sustain the service and utilities. They are also supporting families by providing basic computer training when

needed, mentoring, and tutoring to facilitate successful learning.

As a volunteer, Rose uses his professional expertise and connections to advance the missions of many local nonprofits. He is the founder of the African American Communication and Collaboration Council and a member of several boards, including the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, 100 Black Men of Madison and the Center for Family Policy and Practice. He is a former board member of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, Edgewood Campus School and has served in numerous other volunteer capacities.

Rose is President of the Wisconsin Supplier Development Council (WSDC), a nonprofit organization he created in 1984 to support and develop minority-owned businesses by facilitating important connections between corporations and minority suppliers of goods and services.

Along with this award, a \$2,500 grant is presented by the Madison Rotary Foundation to an agency of the recipient's choice. Dr. Rose has chosen the Madison Rotary Foundation Community Grants Campaign to receive this grant.

Rabbi Manfred E. Swarsensky

I once made up my mind that I would not die an angry man. Being angry is just a way of sitting in judgement on the world, and who am I to be the world's judge?

— Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky

He was born in Prussia. He was ordained a rabbi in Germany and became the spiritual head of one of Berlin's leading synagogues. In 1938, the Nazis burned his synagogue to the ground.

I arose, ran into the building, and saw how Hitler's henchmen were pouring gasoline over the inside and the outside of the majestic cupola and the walls. They were turning the building into a sea of flames while the police were standing idly by as firemen poured water on the adjoining buildings protecting them from the flames.

Following the fire, Rabbi Swarsensky was incarcerated in a Nazi concentration camp. Luckily, in 1939, he was allowed to emigrate to the United States.

I, too, could have been one of the millions... turned into ashes and made into soap. But for reasons unknown to me I was saved from the inferno. I swore long ago that for the rest of my days I, for my small part, would act as a messenger from the dead to the living.

Many who worshipped with Rabbi Swarsensky in that synagogue did die at Nazi hands. But, in 1940, the rabbi became the first spiritual leader of a small synagogue, Temple Beth El, here in Madison.

He served Temple Beth El until 1976. He resigned to teach ecumenical affairs at Edgewood College. From 1940 until his death, Rabbi Swarsensky was a role model of humanitarian action and compassion.

A lesser man would have been bitter. The Nazis, who purported to be "Christian," had taken his family, his synagogue, and his reputation as an up-and-coming rabbi, leaving him to find his way in a small Wisconsin city where people who wished to compliment him called him the "best Christian in town." A lesser man would have been bitter.

Rabbi Swarsensky chose, instead, to spend his entire life building bridges between people.

To endure, mankind needs bridges, not walls, between man and man, between faith and faith, between race and race, between nations and between the human creature and God, the father of us all.

He embraced Madison's Christian community, meeting with pastors, encouraging Sunday School groups to visit the synagogue, and being willing to offer invocations at hundreds of events, both large and small. When the Sisters of St. Benedict decided to turn their school into an ecumenical center, the rabbi was one of those who convinced Bishop William O'Connor to support the move. During anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, Rabbi Swarsensky — already elderly — was one of the clergy who walked through the area, serving as a buffer between students and police.

It was 30 years ago that Hitler made his move into Germany. I just couldn't let violence like this happen in America.

His sense of the oneness of humanity extended even to the Germans who once had persecuted him. After World War II, he urged compassionate treatment. "Living under Hitler, he said, was punishment enough." Years later, he accepted an invitation to return to Berlin and receive an honor in a city that had held tragedy for him and his family.

His sermons, whether in the Temple or at community gatherings, at Christian organizations or charity dinners included the same message, "Build bridges, not walls."

During his last years, Rabbi Swarsensky was in poor health. He carried nitroglycerin tablets to ease heart pains. He suffered from inoperable colon cancer. His energy was sapped. But he didn't slow down. He would always make time for any seeker of truth.

In the darkest moments of my life, I am sustained by faith in God, the rock of ages, the alpha and omega of my existence. Even when he seemed to be hiding his face, I trusted him. Without such trust, I would have lost my faith in man and the worth of life.

Rabbi Swarsensky died on November 10, 1981 at the age of 75.

If we try to live our lives with such nobility of purpose, then even the closing of the gates at the setting of the sun is not to be feared because it is a triumphant, a homecoming. It is a grateful celebration that the ship has returned safely and peacefully to the port from which it started a few decades ago on its brief voyage.

— Bill Wineke, September 1998