

Security enhanced at Jewish centers nationwide

by [Yamiche Alcindor](#)

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(RNS) Allan Finkelstein's phone began ringing soon after a gunman killed three people at two Jewish sites in the suburbs of Kansas City on Sunday.

Right away, the president and chief executive officer of Jewish Community Centers of North America began hearing from some of the hundreds of community centers the umbrella organization connects. Their leaders wanted credible details about the shooting, instructions on how to respond and ways to prevent something like it at their centers.

Within a day, Jewish community centers across the country had requested more police patrols and asked members to be more vigilant in reporting suspicious activity.

"When something happens at an individual JCC, it impacts all of us," Finkelstein said Monday (April 14). "I heard yesterday — probably in the first hour when it broke — from 10 to 15 different communities calling: 'What happened? Is everyone OK? What do we know? What do we need to do? What do we need to learn?' And this has gone on for now the last 24 hours."

On Sunday, police arrested Frazier Glenn Cross, 73, of Aurora, Mo., and charged him with premeditated murder. He is accused of carrying out the shootings at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City, which is in Overland Park, Kan., and at Village Shalom, a retirement home nearby. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Cross, also known as Frazier Glenn Miller, is a former grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan with a history of running illegal paramilitary organizations and intimidating minorities.

Since the shooting, Jewish community centers in New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere have consulted with local law enforcement agencies, which have beefed up police presence.

On Monday, more than 400 senior Jewish leaders held a conference call with Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and the FBI to discuss security concerns, said Paul Goldenberg. He is national director of the Secure Community Network, a nonprofit organization that shares information among Jewish organizations during crises and promotes security awareness.

Goldenberg encouraged leaders of community centers, synagogues and schools to take extra precautions during the Passover holiday this week and to test their security plans.

He said the conference call put many of the Jewish leaders at ease during a tense time.

“When you get a crisis like this that may prevent people from going to a house of worship, it’s all about information, credibility and trust,” he said.

Nathaniel Bergson-Michelson, spokesman for the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco, said: “All of us feel a great kinship to our colleagues in Kansas City, so we all feel what’s happened there very intensely. We have gotten a few questions to program staff and people at the front desk just wanting to know what our security situation is like.”

The San Francisco Police Department has sent extra officers to the center, which has reassured people, he said.

Erica Werber, a spokeswoman for the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, said tragedies like Sunday’s killings always resonate with people.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a written statement Sunday, “The NYPD is taking all steps to ensure the safety and security of Jewish individuals and institutions as Passover is being ushered in.”

Goldenberg remains concerned about lone wolves who may fly under the radar of police, but he, Finkelstein and others say Jews across the nation will not give in to fear.

On Monday, the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City was closed, according to a message on its website. Community center programs and Passover festivities at other centers remain scheduled for later this week in hundreds of cities.

“You can’t back away every time something happens. That’s what people like this man want to happen,” Finkelstein said. “Passover is the festival of freedom. We sit at our seder, which we will tonight, and talk about the Jews being free and in this case coming out of Egypt. When you have a situation like this, which certainly challenges the whole idea of freedom, it just makes you even more appreciative of what you have.”

Rick Jervis contributed to this report.