Remarks by Brant Rosen  
AFSC Chicago Benefit  
October 20, 2019

Thank you all so much for coming out today in support of AFSC’s program work in Chicago. I know many of you in this room have been longtime supporters - and we’re immensely grateful for all you have done to keep our work vital and thriving over the years. Thanks so much to our many community partners as well. AFSC has been honored to collaborate with such amazing coalition partners. In particular, I’d like to express a special note of thanks to today’s honorees, AAAN and Worldview, whose work is an inspiration to us all. Truly, it is our honor to honor you.

It is certainly bittersweet for me to stand here at my final AFSC Chicago Benefit as regional director. In truth, this organization has been my family for a very long time, even well before I became an AFSC employee. I’m thinking in particular at this moment of my predecessor Michael McConnell, of blessed memory, who I know was an important friend and mentor to so many in this room. It was a very important moment for me when, about ten years ago, Michael and the AFSC Chicago staff told me they wanted to honor me with an award at their benefit. As a congregational rabbi increasingly finding my voice in solidarity with Palestinians, their gesture of support meant the world to me. In many ways it was my entry into this very family of activists and organizers.

It quickly became clear to me that AFSC was an important lynchpin in the Chicago justice community. Like so many of you, I found myself spending an increasing amount of time with co-conspirators on the third floor of Grace Place. I knew then and even more now that AFSC’s importance in this community is profound in so many ways seen and unseen by the outside world.

I will also never forget, back in the summer of 2014, getting an email from Jennifer Bing, asking me if I would be at all interested in applying for the Midwest Regional Director job. Unbeknownst to her and the rest of the AFSC staff, I was in the midst of a very difficult and painful departure from my former congregation. Looking back, I realize now that Jennifer’s gesture was, as the Yiddish saying goes, bashert. Once again, at a very crucial time in my life, this important extended family thought to reach out to me. This time, however, they were providing me with a professional home - and an official reason to spend my time on the third floor of Grace Place.

I cannot begin to describe how important these last five years at AFSC have been to me. To be in a position to support and promote our program work in Chicago and throughout the Midwest has been an honor beyond words. It has been particularly humbling to become a part of this organization’s legacy in Chicago. Over the last five years, when I would tell people what I did for a living, so many would invariably tell me what AFSC meant to them, whether it was their work in support of Japanese Americans incarcerated in camps during WW II, draft counseling during the Vietnam War, efforts on behalf of immigrant rights, anti-war projects such as Eye Wide Open during the war in Iraq, the indefatigable Palestine solidarity work, and so much more.
So yes, this is a bittersweet moment for me. As I begin another unexpected chapter in my life, it is difficult to imagine my day-to-day routine without folks like Jennifer, Mary, Jesus, Debbie, Jehad and Jon at my side. And so many other talented, inspired, passionate, creative program staff across the Midwest region. But even as I leave AFSC professionally, I know that my place in this particular family will remain unshakeable. I think I can say without hesitation that you'll be seeing me conspiring with colleagues on the third floor of Grace Place for many years to come.

And yes, you'll also be seeing me at this annual benefit. This time next year, I'll be out there with you all – pledging my support to this organization that has done and continues to do such important, vital, crucial, necessary work in Chicago and beyond. I'm so honored to have all of you as my colleagues, friends and comrades – and look forward to the amazing work we will continue to do together in the future.