Living waters
Christians flock to the Jordan

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where they're standing," she says. The fact that few of the people living in the Holy Land today believe in Christianity doesn't sit well with her. "Jesus said a prophet will not be accepted in his own country. People here have to open up to Jesus," Fajju says.

The Pentecostals from the Incorruptible Word of Faith Tabernacle in Lakewood are no strangers to a Jewish environment; their hometown is one of the capitals of American Orthodoxy. Dino Rosato, the only white person in the group of 17, an admitted ex-pimp and drug dealer, sprinkles his English with Yiddish-Hebrew terms he's picked up.

"I have a mehitza barber shop [with a divider, or mehitza, separating men and women]," he notes. "I was a goy, born Roman Catholic, but I didn't have ruah hakodesh [the holy spirit]," he says, until he was saved as a Pentecostal. Asked if he tries to convert Jews in Lakewood, Rosato, 31, replies that this is "one of the most important parts of my ministry," although he's had little success.

"I always carry a Tanach [Hebrew Bible] with me, even though most of the hasids know the Talmud better than they know the Tanach. But you have to be able to give them rebutsals. They'll tell me, 'That's what your religion says,' and I'll show them in the Tanach and say, 'No, that's what your Bible says.'"

THE YARDENIT baptismal site was built in 1980 because, farther south, the Jordan River had become too polluted, says Bobrow. The changing room and other improvements were made in advance of the huge influx of Christians for the millennium year, which saw 600,000 pilgrims.

The Israeli decision to construct the site was made with inadvertently great timing. The intervening decades witnessed a worldwide Christian revival, especially among evangelicals, which translated into a dramatic increase in pilgrims.

Those years also marked the rise of the Christian Right in America, which, except for the odd vestigial slip of the tongue by a few pastors, turned away from its long-standing anti-Semitism and moved toward uncompromising advocacy for Greater Israel and wrath against Israel's Muslim enemies.

By now, most Israelis seem to appreciate, and frequently admire, the evangelicals for their plainly genuine love. *