

President's Message November 2007

Shalom Y'All

I just came back from the South. Okay, it was only South Jersey. I have been fortunate enough in the last few weeks to have attended two valuable meetings of Presidents of Jewish Congregations. The alphabet soup gets a little difficult, but let me try.

The Jewish Federation of Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren (Federation for short) met in the Jewish Community Center in Bridgewater, NJ. It is a magnificent complex. I wish it were closer to us. Some of our fellow congregants are members of this JCC. The Federation includes Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist temples. It would be great if it included all Jewish houses of worship, but the inclusiveness and diversity is still impressive.

The Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) is our reform national organization. It is headquartered in New York City. Our regional office is the New Jersey-West Hudson Valley Council (NJ-WHVC). It is located in Washington Township, in Bergen County. Rabbi Marcus L. Burstein is the new Acting Regional Director. I would assume that administratively he would report to Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the president of the URJ. My compulsion with all of these politics is intended to inform us regarding the wonderful resources that we have available to us.

A common thread that presidents of all the persuasions mentioned above listed was retention of members, especially members without children in Hebrew school. Yes, this has disheartened me in my short tenure as your president. I have talked to several ex-congregants that have given so much of themselves to our temple. The "reasons" they cannot continue must be valid in their lives, but difficult for me to understand.

I remember a memorable post-9/11 sermon that Rabbi Lewis gave concerning similar issues. One of her congregants from another temple had decided to end their membership. Their son perished in the 9/11 terror attacks. As a member, a shiva would have immediately been organized. Yes, one occurred, but this is not the event a family wants to organize after the death of a son.

My family has been comforted by this congregation after the death of several family members. We were in no position to initiate this responsibility. Thank you.

What a shame it would be for our children if there were not a Jewish presence in our rural area,. Diversity is what makes our country great, not conformity and uniformity, a trait too common in all teen-agers.

What can we do? After listening to the various speakers these past weeks at the meetings I attended, I believe we are doing a lot. Our confirmation classes seem to have a much higher retention percentage than larger temples. Our NFTY programs and Jewish camps

also appear to have a solid attendance among our children. We are making it even better with rebates on fees for some of these programs. We can always do more.

Please let me know your thoughts. More needs to be done.

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