

News

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INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RABBIS
אחדות הרבנים בין-לאומי

IFR President, Solomon, Attends Historic STAR Meeting

"Look toward heaven and count the stars..." And that's just what they did. On September 6 and 7 in Chicago, 150 Jewish professionals, identified as movers and shakers within their communities, gathered to look outward and upward to the vast expanse of synagogue change.

In a statement made to the Jewish community, this new organization states: "The mission of STAR is to promote Jewish renewal by helping the North American synagogue find and implement innovative, collaborative, effective and transdenominational ways to meet the spiritual, educational and social needs of every member of the Jewish community." How to accomplish this was the mission of the Chicago meeting.

Created by philanthropists Edgar Bronfman, Michael Steinhart and Charles Schusterman, this new organization hopes to be the guiding light for synagogue life. Their hope is that when rabbis and other professionals set aside denominational differences, the result will be ideas, programs and directions that will bring back the unaffiliated Jew to the synagogue and help the currently active Jew become more involved. Relevancy is the buzz word; a concept that seems to be critical in attracting and keeping North American Jews active in synagogue life.

Speakers and workshop leaders included Dr. Isa Aron, professor of Jewish Education at HUC, Rabbi Bradley Artson, Dean at UJ, Rabbi Marcia Prager, Director of ALEF, Alliance for Jewish Renewal, Rabbi Hayim Herring, Director of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation, and Rabbi David Teutsch, President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College,

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IFR Pres attends STAR meeting ... RSI head, Gelberman, gives IFR his blessing ... Ideas for Revitalizing High Holy Day Services ... things you can do now!



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3720 Alton Place NW • Washington DC 20016

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to name just a few. These "Stars," and other big names in the Jewish community led transdenominational round tables in an effort to bring Jews together to discuss and implement the conference theme.

Rabbi Lewis Solomon, president of IFR, and author of the Jewish Book Club's best seller, "Jewish Spirituality - Revitalizing Judaism for the Twenty-First Century," (Aronson publishers) was among this "by invitation only group." "It was a stimulating gathering," Solomon said. "As part of the leadership of the International Federation of Rabbis, I was especially interested in STAR's agenda... that of setting aside our labels and working together to bring renewal to the Jewish community. There were many conference participants who felt the same way."

The upshot of the meeting was an announcement by the philanthropists that they were donating \$18 million dollars over a five year period to help synagogues get the job of

renewal done. Funds will help synagogues expand their own fund raising bases, develop educational programs, add staff and refresh holiday worship.

"Synagogues are hurting," reports the Zippel news organization who attended the meeting. STAR hopes to change all that.

RSI head, Gelberman, gives IFR his blessing

And speaking of revitalizing... Rabbi Joseph Gelberman, the founder and Director of the Rabbinical Seminary International (RSI), recently had this to say about the IFR: "I would like you all to know that I support, agree with, and give my sincere and joyous blessings to the International Federation of Rabbis. It would be my pleasure to participate in the affairs of the organization and in whatever capacity that the Board of the IFR sees as proper and beneficial.

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I look forward to attending your conference in March and celebrating with each and every one of you. Shalom and Joy, Rabbi Joseph H. (Chaim) Gelberman.

Rabbinical Seminary International is one of only a very few independent seminaries that recognizes the critical need for modern rabbis. RSI encourages mid-career professionals to enter the rabbinate and apply their previous training to a specially designed program of independent study and distance learning.



NOTE: IFR's second annual conference takes place March 4-6 in Delray Beach, FL. See our website for information and registration.

www.intfedrabbis.org

Making the High Holy Days Meaningful and Inspirational

Some ideas from your IFR colleagues

Shofar School Ask congregants to contribute shofarot so that you can conduct a short workshop on the history of the shofar, the calls and the technique of making the sounds. Encourage synagogue participation in two ways: (1) learn more about the shofar tradition and (2) learn how to sound the shofar to become part of a "Shofar Chorus" on the High Holy Days. Have participants "get ready" for the shofar experience by practicing with combs and wax paper. Trumpet mouthpieces are good initiators as well. Teach the calls and station participants around the sanctuary. Have them make the sounds together. Announce the "Shofar Chorus" as a special addition to a High Holy Day family service, the Rosh Hashanah

"Fish crackers" for Tashlich...

Family aliyot...

Wearing a kittel and explaining its significance...

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morning service or the Shabbat service, prior to the lighting of the candles.

Tashlich - "Fish crackers" make the perfect addition to the tashlich service, especially when children are involved. Take the congregation out to a body of water (some congregations create a tashlich pool when there is no stream, river or pond nearby). Distribute the fish crackers (for throwing, not for eating!) and ask small groups to come forward and announce a sin the group wants to cast away. Conclude with remarks about unity and how, when we change our behavior, our entire group (synagogue, family, workplace) changes as well. Sing a song of unity such as "Hi ne ma tov..."

Aliyyot - When choosing the persons who will have aliyot (Torah blessing honors), consider offering an aliyah to a family that represents the new members, to a family that represents Jews-by-

choice, to a valued volunteer, to an intergenerational family, i.e., great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, children... Have these groups come up to the bimah, wrap themselves as a group in a tallit and say the Torah blessing (with help from the rabbi if necessary). Let the congregation know why a particular group has been chosen and how they represent similar groups within the congregation.

The kittel - Find and wear a kittel for Yom Kippur. Show the garment to the congregation, talk about its history and encourage others to wear a kittel as well. In addition, encourage the congregation to "Sneak into Synagogue" this year by wearing canvas shoes or shoes not made of leather. Talk about this tradition and show the shoes you will wear so that your group can see that you are really going to put aside the traditional "HH fashion show," and replace it with a more meaningful tradition.

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Resources:

"Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur Survival Kit" by Shimon Apisdorf

"Jewish Spirituality - Revitalizing Judaism for the Twenty-First Century" by Rabbi Lewis Solomon



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Open the Ark for Neilah
At the beginning of the Neilah service, announce that the ark will remain open throughout so that any individual or family group can approach the ark for a moment of personal prayer. Explain that, historically, the open ark was the place where we Jews poured out our hearts in times of personal or family crisis. The open ark was the place where we became one with the Torah. For Neilah consider reviving this tradition. Make the Torah accessible to everyone. Encourage anyone who has a desire for a personal prayer of supplication or gratitude, a personal need to make this connection with our heritage and with G-d, to approach the ark anytime throughout the service, and to stand and pray.

Not High on the High Holy Days? Conduct a short workshop or discussion group for anyone in the congregation or in the community who might have

been away from synagogue for years, who comes only once a year, or who finds the High Holy Day services not as relevant as they might be. A good resource is "Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur Survival Kit," by Shimon Apisdorf (Leviathan Press.) Lead a discussion about the why and the how of Holy Day worship.

More ideas? E-mail us your Chanukah innovations and we'll include them in the next issue!

Outreach?

How are you attracting unaffiliated Jews to your congregation? Let us know

Share your ideas with your IFR colleagues