

RABBI MICHAEL L. FESHBACH

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CONGREGATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Rabbi, Congregation Beth Israel, Northfield, NJ

July 2022 – Present

Serve as the rabbi of this 300-family congregation, the oldest, largest and most active full-service synagogue in southeastern New Jersey, setting a tone of warmth of inclusion at every level of congregational life and carefully helping community transition following predecessor's retirement after 33-year tenure.

Member Engagement

- Helped congregation return to in-person gatherings post-Covid by launching a *Kehilah* Love Community-Building Initiative and introducing inclusive community events such as a Chanukah Bash, Purim Extravaganza and Community Fall Festival.
- Focused on outreach to help community adjust to rabbinic transition, paying close attention to vulnerable constituencies such as long-time members, donors and active volunteers.
- Introduced creative new holiday celebrations for [Chanukah](#) and Purim (including a [Beatles Purim](#)), revived an old tradition ([Kever Avot](#)) of visiting the congregation's cemetery during the High Holy Days, and introduced observances for [Tisha B'Av](#) and other lesser-known holidays.
- Expanded the number of summer beach services and designed special "off-site" programs to attract participants, including a Potluck Dinner and Pool Party at our home.

Lifelong Learning

- Expanded depth and breadth of educational offerings for all ages, offering both online learning and in person sessions, on afternoons and evenings, including Taste of Judaism, Beyond the Bible, and the Shalom Hartman Institute's Foundations for a Thoughtful Judaism.
- Reorganized B'nai Mitzvah program after its adjustment during the pandemic.
- Re-introduced Parent Programs and Family Education to Religious School; invited teens for informal discussions in our home and other settings.

Synagogue Administration

- Worked with staff and congregants to modernize synagogue publications, transform the [bulletin](#), and improve overall communication and "messaging."
- Used social media, neighborhood listservs and community Facebook pages to conduct outreach within and beyond the community.
- Led the staff, leadership and members through an unexpected mid-year cantorial transition; coordinated search process and used creative outreach to arrange for immediate coverage and encourage applications.

Civic Leadership

- Represented the congregation and played a visible role in the community; initiated and coordinated October 2023 [Service of Solidarity and Support](#) for Israel; delivered keynote address at 2022 [Absecon Island Interfaith Thanksgiving Service](#) and 2023 [NAACP/Atlantic City Area Martin Luther King Day Service](#).
- Launched the Beth Israel/NAACP Annual Spirit of MLK Award program, modeled on a similar program in St. Thomas, offering a scholarship to a selected senior from each area high school, which was celebrated at our [Annual Service in Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

Rabbi, Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands

July 2017 – June 2022

Had the unique experience of serving this historic congregation of 100 on-island households and 3200 overseas member families. The oldest synagogue building in continuous use under the American flag – and one of only five synagogues in the world with sand on the floor – the congregation is a major point of interest for visitors, hosts a community of travelers, and is a sought-after setting for destination life-cycle events. The early years of my term were focused on helping the community and the island at large recover from two devastating Category 5 hurricanes that hit two months after I arrived, after which the Covid pandemic struck, making island life even more remote and challenging.

Synagogue Leadership

- Led the congregation in the full range of rabbinic responsibilities – providing spiritual, pastoral, liturgical, and educational oversight and guidance.
- Represented the synagogue in the Jewish and general community, both on island and in the larger world, sharing our story and giving voice to our values.
- Supervised office staff, Gift Shop manager and museum docents.
- Coordinated and conducted destination life-cycle events, working with home clergy and local communities to provide meaningful and high-quality experiences.
- Developed and presented educational offerings for all ages in varied settings, and introduced new holiday celebrations, including a [Bob Dylan Purim](#), a Mimouna traditional Moroccan-Jewish feast for the end of Passover, and a Yom HaAtz'ma'ut (Israel Independence Day) program. Renewed tradition of Hurricane Supplication Day.
- Helped elevate the synagogue's visibility by sharing our story through social media and [traditional news outlets](#), and regularly updating our [website](#), [bulletin](#) and [Facebook page](#).
- Led the first congregational trip to Israel in many years.
- Led interfaith [Solidarity Shabbat service](#) after shootings at Tree of Life Synagogue.

Hurricane & Pandemic Leadership

- Despite a sustained period without electrical power, cell service, internet access, and running water, worked to maintain continuity of in-person Shabbat services.
- After raising close to a half million dollars in material and monetary donations, gave voice to Jewish values oriented towards helping the entire island; shared with congregational leadership, the community and the Jewish world a sense of mission and purpose, in how we would use funds and donations given to support our recovery.
- Coordinated distributions of food, toiletries and medical supplies; donated generators to physicians, the hospital, and to individuals in need; provided help to women's shelters, orphanages, family resource centers, and local community foundations.

- During the pandemic, managed shift to online services, creating a visually appealing experience, and forged cooperative ventures in with other synagogues and organizations for worship, study, and mutual support.
- Conducted extensive personal outreach to maintain connection during the pandemic, and organized volunteers to deliver meals to the homebound in the community.
- Redoubled fundraising efforts to address loss in tourist income.

Senior Rabbi, Temple Shalom, Chevy Chase, MD

July 2001 – June 2017

Served as Senior Rabbi of vibrant, 550-household synagogue situated in a Washington, D.C. suburb. Offered new approaches to worship, education, social justice and communal life to appeal to the changing needs and wide spectrum of members and local community. A welcoming congregation, Temple Shalom proudly promoted diversity in many forms, from economic to sexual orientation to racial to religious background and traditional practice.

Synagogue Leadership

- Led the congregation in the full range of rabbinic responsibilities – providing spiritual, pastoral, liturgical, educational and programmatic oversight and guidance.
- Worked in conjunction with congregational leadership to articulate and implement a vision of synagogue life.
- Supervised and helped mentor senior staff.
- Coordinated expansion of staff roles to include a full-time, invested Reform cantor, and guided the congregation through a series of staff transitions.
- Participated in million-dollar capital/endowment-campaign to renovate the Sanctuary; partnered with leadership in identifying donors; solicited major gifts; worked to develop naming opportunities while honoring egalitarian ethos as part of congregation's identity.
- Established congregational cemetery.

Worship

- Introduced the new Reform Shabbat prayerbook (*Mishkan Tefilah*) and the new High Holy Day *machzor* (*Mishkan HeNefesh*); managed these transitions with forums, experimentation, open discussion and minimal disruption.
- Deepened and expanded Shabbat morning alternatives; experimented with early Kabbalat Shabbat services; introduced joint Festival morning services.
- Created a Confirmation service families still refer to as among the most spiritual experiences of their lives.

Member Engagement

- Created meaningful and significant life-cycle events for members.
- Empowered congregant-led initiatives at all levels.
- Fostered a nationally recognized Mitzvah Corps in which congregant volunteers participated in hospital visits, received training in senior care and other life-transition issues, brought meals to the homebound and others in need, provided direct services as needed, and served as shiva minyan leaders in houses of mourning.
- Expanded and deepened Adult Education offerings and provided learning options at the synagogue and beyond; initiated learning programs in local retirement communities; worked with area educational foundations to bring high-quality scholars to the congregation and lead study sessions downtown near where many congregants worked.
- Revitalized Israel programming and restored regular congregational trips to Israel.

- Introduced balanced approach to Israel education and advocacy within the congregation; strengthened teachings on the importance of Israel for Jewish identity formation; facilitated measurable increase in youth participation in summer travel and study programs in Israel; created *Sukkat Shalom*: Safe Spaces for Conversations about Israel, with facilitators and small group discussions; revived congregational travel to Israel.

Civic Engagement

- Initiated and promoted congregation's presence in the Jewish and general community.
- Worked with the Interfaith Conference on joint projects.
- Coordinated social justice initiatives in cooperation with local and national Jewish organizations, from Jews United for Justice and the Jewish Community Relations Council to the Religious Action Center.
- Initiated a Refugee Response Team which [welcomed and supported a Syrian family](#), galvanized Dream Act and Marriage Equality ballot initiative support, promoted involvement in other aspects of *Tikkun Olam* (social justice) work.

Senior Rabbi, Temple Beth Am, Williamsville, NY

July 1997 – June 2001

Led this Buffalo area congregation in full range of rabbinic responsibilities.

Rabbi, Temple Anshe Hesed, Erie, PA

July 1992 – June 1997

Led small congregation in full range of rabbinic responsibilities and served as co-Educator of joint Religious School for Reform and Conservative congregations.

Rabbi, Hebrew Congregation, Chautauqua, NY

June–September 1992 – 1997

While serving Temple Anshe Hesed, also served as rabbi of this summer, non-denominational congregation based at the Chautauqua Institution and led Shabbat morning services during the nine-week season.

Assistant Rabbi, Temple Beth El, Boca Raton, FL

July 1989 – June 1992

Served congregation in full range of rabbinic duties.

COMMUNAL & EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Educational Leadership

- **Senior Rabbinic Fellow, Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Israel**
Including completion of the Shalom Hartman Institute's Rabbinic Leadership Initiative IV, Summer 2010-Summer 2013
- **Visiting Professor, Allegheny College, Meadville, PA.**
Position sponsored by the Jewish Chautauqua Society, Spring 1993-Spring 1997
Taught undergraduate course on Judaism. Served as adjunct chaplain and student counselor. Presented lecture series as a Visiting Scholar as the Winslow Religious Leader Scholar (Spring 1994)
- **Instructor, Gannon University and Mercyhurst College, Erie, PA.**
Taught courses approved for credit through two local Catholic universities, September 1992-May 1997
- **Director, Community Retreat, Benedictine Sisters, Mt. Saint Benedict, Erie, PA.**
Led week-long retreat, "The Role of the Person in Community," June 1997
- **Faculty, Bioethics and Sacred Decisions: Medical Technology, Liberal Judaism and Our Lives, UAHF Family Concerns Conference, San Francisco, CA**

Jewish Communal Leadership

- **Executive Board Positions**, South Jersey Board of Rabbis and Cantors, Washington Board of Rabbis
- **President**, Buffalo Board of Rabbis
- **Keynote Speaker**, Mark and Sharon Bloome Jewish Environmental Leadership Institute, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)
- **Rabbinic Faculty**, URJ Camp Harlam, Kunkletown, PA, Summer 2007
- **Rabbinic Faculty**, URJ Camp George, Parry Sound, Ontario, Summer 1999
- **Rabbinic Dean**, SEFTY (Southeast Federation) Winter Regional, Winter 1991
- **Program Director**, Torah Corps, Kutz Camp-Institute, Warwick, NY Summer 1988
- **Group Leader**, UAHC/HUC-JIR Maskil Young Scholars Program, Summer 1987

Civic Leadership

- Atlantic City Bridge of Faith Interfaith Group; Absecon Island Clergy Fellowship;
- **St Thomas**: Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands; My Brother's Workshop; Interfaith Conference of the Caribbean; Rotary Club of St. Thomas
- **Board Member**, Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington
- **Board Member**, Interfaith Conference of Greater Washington
- **Commentator**, National Public Radio
- **Founding Chair**, Interreligious Affairs Committee, Network of Religious Communities, Buffalo, NY
- **Founding Member**: Citizen's Interfaith Council for Democracy, Erie, PA

EDUCATION

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

Rabbinic Ordination, May 1989 (New York campus)
M.A.H.L., May 1987 (Cincinnati campus)

Brandeis University – Waltham, MA

Graduate School, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies:
Biblical Studies, 1982-1984.

Haverford College – Haverford, PA

B.A. in English and Creative Writing, May 1982
Study Abroad, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980-1981

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Several selections in [Prophetic Voices: Renewing and Reimagining Haftarah](#), Rabbi Barbara Symons (Ed.), CCAR Press, 2023.

“How Can We Not? Temple Shalom Responds to the Refugee Crisis,” with Karen Green, in “For You Were Strangers: Our Responsibility to Refugees in the 21st Century,” [The Peoplehood Papers 19](#), June 2017, published by the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, and in [eJewishPhilanthropy.com](#), June 25, 2017.

“Let’s Uplift Our Synagogue Language,” [Reform Judaism Magazine, Fall 2013](#), p. 72

“The Secret of Jewish Survival,” [Reform Judaism Magazine, Winter 2008](#) (reprinted December 2016).

“Every Generation: A Jewish Approach to Questions of Genetic Research, Testing and Screening, and Gene Therapy,” in Monsen, R. B. (Ed.) [Genetics and Ethics in Health Care: New Questions in the Age of Genomic Health](#). Silver Spring, MD: Nursesbooks.org, December 2008.

“A Name for Ourselves: On Infertility, Struggle, Pain and ‘the Meaning of Life,’” UAHC Bioethics Study Guide, Fall 1999.

“In God’s Image: Judaism and Homosexuality,” in [Kulanu \(All of Us\): A Program for Congregations Implementing Gay and Lesbian Inclusion](#) UAHC Press, 1996.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Devoted husband to Julie Novick, and parent of Benjamin, Daniel, and Talia.

Leisure Pursuits: Travel, Science Fiction and Fantasy, Writing, Cooking, Hiking and Camping

**References and Complete List of Publications
Provided Upon Request**

PERSONAL STATEMENT

ואחר האש קול דממה דקה:
“*V’achar ha’eish, kol d’mama daka;*
And after the fire, a soft, murmuring sound
[a still, small voice].”

I Kings 19:12

One Shabbat morning, earlier in my rabbinate, as the father of a Bar Mitzvah student made his way towards the *bimah*, he suddenly turned to me and said: “Rabbi, there are so many non-Jewish children present. Is there any way we can involve them in the service?” In the next 20 seconds, we partnered to create a new ritual. We invited the Bar Mitzvah student’s friends to stand behind him as he led the final *aliyah*, the blessings and final verses of Torah.

I continue to use this custom today and I cherish both the excitement and reverence that it generates.

What makes this moment more than symbolic is what comes next. We turn to the assembled friends, and ask if there are any questions, about the scroll, about the service, about anything remotely relevant.

What follows, people say, is often a highlight of the service. Questions run from the curious to the profound, but the experience is almost always moving. The spontaneity can be... interesting. And even when unexpected, it feels fresh and genuine. It is a living expression of core values: inclusion, encouragement, openness, and helping everyone find their own voice.

Finding our voice. That is the goal when students in Confirmation write their own responses to the prayers and the Ten Commandments, and we weave the service from their own words. We promote honesty and authenticity – including struggles, disagreement and dissent. Attend a service like that and, even knowing no one, you quickly glimpse the inner world of these teens.

Finding our voice. That is the goal when we create communities that reflect the diversity of today’s Jewish experience: Jews-by-birth and Jews-by-choice; traditional, interfaith and multiracial families; same-sex couples, biological and adoptive parents, seniors, singles and couples without children. To be a space where everyone finds their place – that is the promise and potential of Judaism to me.

Finding our voice. It remains our goal as we balance a return to physical services while remaining accessible online. In some settings a Zoom feed is tied into the sound system; voices from around the world call out names of loved ones during prayers for healing and before Kaddish.

But once we open the doors, what comes next? Why is it so important that people feel they belong, that they are truly seen and heard?

I believe it is only when we feel welcomed – only in the midst of love – that we can be most open: to ourselves, to one other, and the questions and challenges before us.

Those challenges come in many forms: love and loss, the needs of our neighbors or strangers, questions of identity, evolving relationships with the Jewish community and Israel. They show up in how we interpret the past and envision our future.

The questions we ask now are pastoral and personal, social and moral, spiritual and existential. I have stood with families and communities after natural disasters and targeted violence, through the loss of children and the healing of rifts, in times of war and peace, while welcoming strangers and fighting for justice.

In our joy and our sorrow, in triumph and tragedy, we need not be alone. When we begin in a place of safety and welcome, we're better equipped to face the uncomfortable or painful. It helps us own who we were and grow into who we are yet to be. A safe space is the best place for transformation.

How can an ancient tradition face the future? How will Judaism not only survive, but thrive? By nurturing every soul, valuing every voice, embracing every individual. And by reminding each of us that we are part of something larger than ourselves.

It begins with us, and it grows beyond us; from the individual to the family, from community to peoplehood, and outward still – toward the unfamiliar, the unknown. We move from looking inward and to finding our voice, to looking outward, and, eventually, toward the Ultimate Voice – everywhere and nowhere, real and imagined – the Oneness at the heart of the world.

There are so many choices in the world today. With so many competing claims, perhaps we can never be sure if one path is more “authentic.”

But this is what I believe: Judaism demands of us *warmth*, and *depth*, and *breadth*. It is a vital part of an ongoing, ever-evolving conversation.

What is Judaism today? At our best, we use creativity and commitment to balance tradition with the ethical insight of conscience and the vision and values of our heart. We bring an awareness of history and science, and a sensitivity to the needs of the modern world.

It is a great honor, as a rabbi and as a Jew, to be part of that sacred balancing act. In every worship service, life-cycle event, and individual encounter, there is an opportunity to feel the powerful pull of Jewish identity. We do this through continuity and custom, through creativity and innovation, sometimes in solemn moments -- and often with warmth and smiles.

As a rabbi, I want to lift every person, to make room for every voice. I want to open us up to the threads and the web that connect us all. And I seek to strengthen the Jewish ties that bind us – as individuals, and as a people.