

## SCRJ Expands National Outreach to Congregations

One of the major priorities of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism is working with temples around the country to foster worship opportunities, educational programs and a renewed appreciation of the historic values and traditions of our American Reform heritage. We know that the ultimate impact of our mission is not merely the articulation of philosophical principles, but the way that we can influence synagogue life and support individual Jews in their religious experience. Our aim is to help congregations affirm the diversity within their communities, and try to serve the spiritual needs of those many temple members who remain committed to Classical Reform – as well as to raise awareness of the beauty and meaning of the heritage we all share as Reform Jews.

Rabbi Howard A. Berman, our Executive Director, has been invited to preach and lecture at many congregations around the country, sharing our message and encouraging the introduction of these kinds of alternative programs. Most of these are planned as weekend “Scholar-in-Residence” formats, with a complete cycle of Sabbath sermons, dinner discussion forums, teaching of Torah Study classes, meetings with temple staff and Religious School parents, and special reception gatherings with potential supporters of our work. We’d like to share some highlights from recent events.

*ATLANTA – November 20-21, 2009*

With a number of members who also serve on the Board of the SCRJ, Atlanta’s major Reform congregation, “The Temple”, formally known as the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, has been an important center of our work. This congregation has a distinguished history of leadership in Southern Jewry, and maintains a strong link to its Classical Reform heritage. At the invitation of Rabbi Peter Berg, a member and supporter of the SCRJ, Rabbi Berman spoke at the Sabbath Services. He shared the Society’s vision of the renewal of our Reform tradition as an important component of the broad and diverse worship and learning opportunities offered by this kind of large, metropolitan congregation. The Temple’s pluralistic membership includes a broad representation of the many different voices and perspectives in today’s Movement, and is seeking to serve the needs of all of its people. While using the new Prayer Book, *Mishkan Tefila* in its liturgy, The Temple also draws upon the rich tradition of Reform synagogue music, and many of its members, who are also active in the Society, are sponsoring a major restoration of its great sanctuary organ. A lively discussion followed the Service at a Sabbath dinner, with a particular focus on the SCRJ’s position of strong and warm support for interfaith families. Rabbi Berman also led the Shabbat morning Torah Study class, linking *Toledot*, the weekly reading from Genesis, recalling the early generations of Abraham and Sarah, to the preservation of our distinctive Reform inheritance.

*PITTSBURGH - February 5-6, 2010*

It was a distinct honor for Rabbi Berman to be invited by our member Rabbi Aaron Bisno to deliver the annual Harris Interfaith Lecture at Rodef Shalom Congregation, the great temple that is

revered as a landmark in the history of Classical Reform. Rodef Shalom hosted the 1885 rabbinic conference that drafted the *Pittsburgh Platform* - the pioneer statement of American liberal Judaism. For 34 years, the Harris Institute has brought hundreds of Pittsburgh area clergy of all faiths to learn about the different dimensions of Jewish life and thought from leading scholars and rabbis. About 175 ministers, priests and rabbis gathered to hear this lecture on "Pilgrims and Patriots: Religious Influences on our Nation's Founders." Rabbi Berman spoke of the important ways that the Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions shaped the early development of American democracy. Later, at Rodef Shalom's Sabbath Eve Service, his sermon developed the link between the weekly Torah reading from Exodus, recounting the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, with the historic Reform emphasis on ethical values and moral behavior as the essence of our faith. A dinner forum followed, as this theme was further developed with a discussion on the Classical Reform spiritual roots of our Movement's prophetic commitment to seeking justice in society. Unfortunately, Pittsburgh's worst blizzard in a generation came roaring into the region that night, and the rest of the weekend's programs were cancelled – with our Executive Director stranded and snowbound in the Steel City! Plans are being made for a return visit in the near future to complete the ambitious schedule of additional sermons and gatherings with temple members and staff.

#### *NEW ORLEANS - March 26-27, 2010*

In observance of the annual commemoration of the birthday of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), the father of the major national institutions of American Reform, Rabbi Berman delivered the sermon at Sabbath Services at New Orleans's historic Temple Sinai. Rabbi Edward P. Cohn, SCRJ Board member, leader of this important center of southern Jewish life, planned a variety of activities to help spread the Society's message. The Service, which featured the Union Prayer Book and the music of Reform tradition (although regretfully, no Big Easy jazz pieces!) was followed by a lively dialogue of questions from the congregation. A special gathering of temple and community leaders, to foster interest in the Society, was held on Sabbath afternoon, hosted at the home of a prominent member of the congregation.

#### *HOUSTON - April 8-10, 2010*

Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism was founded in 1957 as a distinct Classical Reform alternative in the community. Our SCRJ weekend in April was a great success, reflecting the deep commitment this temple has long had to our shared ideals. With the inspiring and energetic leadership of Rabbi Steven Gross, HCRJ has grown steadily in recent years, and is today a thriving center of historic Reform principles and worship, expressed in dynamic contemporary ways. The series of events began on a Thursday evening, with Rabbi Berman presenting a forum on the development of Reform Judaism in America. The enthusiastic discussion that followed reflected the clear understanding and attachment of temple members to our cause. The Sabbath Eve Service the following night was a truly beautiful testimony of how meaningful and engaging Classical Reform worship can be for a Jews today. Incorporating the Union Prayer Book - Sinai Edition, with organ and instrumental music – both the beloved melodies of the past blended with popular

current favorites – the Service was well attended by a broad range of people of all ages. Rabbi Berman spoke on the SCRJ's vision and challenged the congregation to take its rightful place nationally as a “flagship” of Classical Reform. We look forward to further cooperation with Rabbi Gross and the members of HCRJ.

*BALTIMORE - April 25, 2010*

Har Sinai, the “oldest continuously Reform congregation in America” celebrated its colorful history with a special tribute to its most famous rabbi, David Einhorn (1809-1879). Rabbi Berman, who served Har Sinai as a Rabbinic Intern in 1971-1972, shared the inspiring narrative of Einhorn's pioneer vision of the principles of liberal Judaism, first in his native Germany and then in the United States. Einhorn is regarded as the “Father of Classical Reform”, and laid the foundations for both the Union Prayer Book, as well as our Movement's commitment to a Prophetic vision of social action, in his legendary preaching against slavery during the Civil War.

*DALLAS – MAY 14 – 15, 2010*

Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, which boasts the largest number of SCRJ members of any congregation in the country, invited Rabbi Berman to be its prestigious annual “Levi Olan Scholar-in-Residence” with a series of sermons and adult education lectures over the weekend of May 14-15. The series began with the Temple's very popular monthly Classical Reform Sabbath Service, using the historic Union Prayer Book, accompanied by the 18 voice Emanu-El Choir. At the Shabbat Morning Torah Study, the theme was the intersection of the principles of Reform Judaism and the democratic ideals of our American heritage. The Dallas Chapter of the Society, constituted as “The Friends of Classical Reform,” hosted a special dinner program that enabled our active group of members to share an update of the latest progress of the SCRJ.

SCRJ Program highlights over the summer and fall of 2010 focused on our observance of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Reform Judaism with our pilgrimage to Germany in July, and the inauguration of our new programs at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, described in our Fall and Winter issues of The Reform Advocate.

*SAN ANTONIO – January 10 – 12, 2011*

The Society was invited to present an introduction to its work at the annual gathering of the Southwest Association of Reform Rabbis. Thirty rabbis from the region had the opportunity to learn about our mission and programs, and were hosted to a special reception. The major congregation in the San Antonio area, Temple Beth El, also sponsored a special gathering of its own leading members for a luncheon meeting, with a presentation by Rabbi Berman. Beth El, under the leadership of Rabbi Barry Block and Rabbi Emeritus Samuel Stahl, has long offered a

unique model of weekly worship opportunities - with both a Classical-style Service with organ and choir in its magnificent sanctuary, and a “contemporary Service” in its social hall- creatively reaching out to serve the diverse spiritual needs of all its members. The Society lauded this commitment to affirming the various understandings of worship, and seeks to challenge other congregations to follow this inclusive, pluralistic approach.

***Please let us know if you would be interested in helping to organize an SCRJ Service or program at your congregation!***