

(and sometimes an 11-piece live music ensemble heightening the experience). Holiday celebrations also feature visual worship. On Simchat Torah, while congregants read from a Torah scroll that's unrolled around the room, the verses are projected for everyone to see; on Purim, in between congregants' improvised comedic renderings of the Megillat Esther, Rabbi Dreskin projects clips from the comedy *Whose Line Is It, Anyway?* "Kids think [the visual service] is cool," says Rabbi Dreskin, "and older members appreciate not having to hold a prayer book" (although page numbers are shown on the screens for those who prefer to use one).

Rabbi Dreskin acknowledges that the preparation for visual workshop is "extremely time-consuming," with portable screens atop tables on each side of the ark, projectors on stands in front of each screen, wires and cables taped to the floor—and the rabbi's 14-year-old son Aiden controlling all projections with SongShow Plus software (www.songshowplus.com). He recommends that other congregations "gather folks interested in making this happen," experiment with how much text fits legibly on the screen (his choice: eight lines—four in Hebrew and four transliteration), network with others exploring visual technology ("to move this into the mainstream"), and make sure Hebrew is projected ("otherwise, it may feel 'Christian' to people who have only seen it on televised church services. Once Hebrew is up there, it becomes a Jewish experience.")

Like visual worship, lighting can play a critical role in enhancing the experience of prayer. As part of Philadelphia's historic Rodeph Shalom's recent restoration, the temple (<http://www.rodephshalom.org>) replaced broad fluorescent lights with

zoned, area-specific lighting, including sconces, ceiling-mounted fixtures, and fiber optics. Preset lighting designs, which require no training or expertise to operate, illuminate only parts of the sanctuary, facilitating the creation of settings for both small, intimate worship gatherings and larger High Holiday and other events. Likewise, the new building housing Congregation Bet Shalom in Minnetonka, Minnesota (www.betshalom.org) includes a system of easily adjusted light banks to create just the right ambiance for worship—fairly bright for *erev* Shabbat, natural light for Shabbat morning, and, for dramatic effect, almost complete darkness at first for Chanukah, except for the light from congregants' *chanukiot*.

Educating with Technology

Several years ago, to make his sermons and other teachings available to members who couldn't listen on the temple's schedule as well as give prospective congregants a feel for the synagogue, Rabbi Jim Egolf of Beth



HUC-JIR STUDENTS IN THE FIRST CROSS-CAMPUS E-LEARNING COURSE.

David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania (www.bdavid.org) began creating sermon podcasts. The first attempts were rough, he says, but feedback from lay leaders, experimentation with delivery styles (formal, informal, conversational), new equipment (including two microphones and a noise protection pop filter), music, no-cost Audacity audio editing and recording software (www.audacity.sourceforge.net), and lots of trial and error "all helped me refine the settings and create what a listener hears now." Today, nearly two years after his first try, some 75 Beth David podcasts, all available on the temple's website, have

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congregation was; and second, because they understood that everyone in the congregation has a story, just as they do. As one congregant wrote: "This [experience] makes me feel connected and compassionate. It actually opens my heart."

For the last two years, Rabbi Paul Tuchman of Congregation Or Chadash in Damascus, Maryland has also experimented with a very personal High Holy Day approach involving taking stock during Elul. In advance of Rosh Hashanah 5768, he asked congregants to write answers to "What are you optimistic about, and why?" Then, rather than delivering a Rosh Hashanah sermon, he asked congregants to read some of the responses (edited to preserve anonymity). In one case a man with grown children read the words of a young mother, and in another, a college professor envisioned the success of a Little League team—but, as Rabbi Tuchman says, "The overall message shone through: These are the hopes and dreams of a congregation on the verge of a New Year." Encouraged by positive feedback, before Yom Kippur 5768, he asked the congregation, "In the light of Jewish tradition, what do you stand for?" and before Rosh Hashanah 5769, "What blessings have you received? What blessing do you seek? What blessing can you give?" (note: Rabbi Tuchman recommends not repeating the process more than once a year after the first year so as not to water down a much-anticipated temple event).

"Worshippers came to see each other in a new way and on a higher plane," he says, "recognizing depths and values in one another that are rarely revealed in ordinary conversation...and concentrating on what is best about themselves."