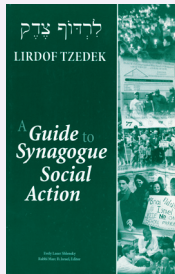


NEWS&VIEWS  OF REFORM JEWS**HELPLINE** Social Action

Q: Are congregations permitted to take positions on upcoming state ballot initiatives?

A: Although nonprofit organizations are limited in the amount of lobbying they can do, organizing for justice, joining coalitions, and taking positions on issues of concern—including state ballot initiatives—are all permissible. Congregations cannot take a position on candidates for public office or seek to influence an election; they can, however, provide *non-partisan* educational and informational programs, candidates forums, and “Get Out the Vote” activities. To learn more, read *Speak Truth to Power* and more at www.rac.org/vote.

Q: I am a new social action chair. Where do I start?



of Justice and *Speak Truth to Power* (<http://rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/>). For social action programming tools, click on the links (“Take Action,” “Program Bank,” “Resources,” etc.) at the Commission on Social Action site (www.urj.org/csa) and the “Congregational Tools” button on the Religious Action Center website (www.rac.org) for “Social Action Chair’s Resources,” “Mitzvah Day Manual,” and more. The Social Action Calendar (<http://www.urj.org/csa/takeaction/calendar/>) can help you plan the coming year’s program. We also recommend *Lirdof Tzedek: A Guide to Synagogue Social Action* (<http://rac.org/pubs/guidemanuals/>), available from the URJ Press.

A: For program ideas and advocacy assistance, visit two online guides: *K’hilat Tzedek: Creating a Community*

ACTION *continued from page 59*

had more than 8,000 “listens”—and not only in North America, but in Australia, Pakistan, Russia, Morocco, and South Korea. This technology, says Rabbi Egoif, “allows the sermon to have a life way beyond the *bimah*...”

Long an admirer of the megachurches and Chabad’s use of technology to communicate religious values, Rabbi Sanford Akselrad of Temple Ner Tamid in Henderson, Nevada (<http://www.lvnertamid.org/>) realized that he could use the online video sharing website YouTube to reach out and share his Jewish wisdom and values. “A high definition video camera and a software editing program are all you need to start,” he says. His “Virtual Rabbi” videos on YouTube (www.youtube.com) feature Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Chanukah, and Passover; a tour of the synagogue, including explanations of its various religious symbols; and clips of a congregational trip to Israel.

By his own admission, the “Virtual Rabbi” is not technologically savvy, so he leaves the filming to a congregant volunteer, who also edits the clips and adds music and voice-overs before emailing the link to the congregational community and uploading the video to the world at large. Rabbi Akselrad has learned to “think creatively, keep it short (under three minutes), use humor, and consult with teens in the congregation for technical expertise.... [You’ll] reach a lot of people in an effective, unique, and timely way.”

The Movement’s future rabbis are also being trained with new technology. This past year, fourth- and fifth-year rabbinical students at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles learned and interacted in real time with classmates studying at the seminary’s New York campus. Their professors—Dr. Tamara Eskenazi, a professor of Bible in Los Angeles, and Dr. Andrea Weiss, an assistant professor of Bible in New York—introduced team-teaching with a Smartboard (an electronic “blackboard”), high defi-

nition cameras, and ceiling microphones, allowing students to exchange ideas and, during a short class break, *kibbitz* across the miles.

Enhancing Community Space

When Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim (BJBE) in Glenview, Illinois (www.bjbe.org) moves into its new building this fall, the architectural and social centerpiece of the 75,000-square-foot facility, according to executive director Marc Swatez, FTA, will be the “village center, a virtual town square, modeled after a Middle Eastern *shuk* or marketplace.” Having a comfortable, welcoming, open place that draws people into a building to gather together has been an integral part of the synagogue’s strategic planning task force and, he says, was “at the heart of our decision to move.”

The inviting 5,000-square-foot interior space will serve as a central connector for all synagogue areas, with homey furnishings, a “Beit Café” coffee bar, and state-of-the-art technology: a wireless network, large screens for closed circuit and cable television projections, a self-contained sound system, and video monitors featuring a touch screen of the BJBE website as well as a scroll of temple events. Soon, Swatez envisions, people will be “coming and hanging” with their laptops and PDAs, and *schmoozing* while the kids are in religious school.

In Oviedo, Florida, Temple Shir Shalom (www.templeshirshalom.org/) promotes community through a short video on its homepage (also available on YouTube) that offers a glimpse into congregational life, describes the community’s values, and encourages membership. In Burlingame, California (<http://sholom.org/>), Peninsula Temple Shalom’s video promotes an upcoming trip to Israel and emphasizes the deep sense of inclusion and community the experience will cultivate.

Social Networking

Five years ago, when the online social networking site Facebook (www.facebook.com)