

facebook.com), was in its infancy, Rabbi Jonathan Blake started sending “friend invitations” to his former students, and, he saw, they accepted the invitations. Today, the associate rabbi at Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York (<http://www.wrtemple.org>) uses Facebook almost exclusively to maintain contact with young people, college students, and recent grads who are on their own for the first time, explaining that people between the ages of 14 and 28 conduct an estimated 98% of their communications through Facebook. “Often, I’ll drop a line [to college students] right before finals, wishing them luck and asking them to let me know when they’ll be back in town,” he says. Then, using Facebook, he coordinates social events, such as a college reunion dinner and a bowling night during Thanksgiving weekend.

While Rabbi Blake’s Facebook communiqués are not under official temple auspices, other congregations, including Temple Kol Emeth in Marietta, Georgia (www.kolemeth.net/Home.html), have established “official” Facebook groups. “We weren’t reaching all of our target audience through email blasts and monthly newsletters,” says Rabbi Steven Lebow, and “our teens already had a Facebook group presence.” The new initiative is now facilitating information-sharing about upcoming temple events and congregants’ *simchas*, as well as providing a forum for discussions on worship services and sermons. Rabbi Lebow encourages other temples to follow suit by “finding young people to set [Facebook] up for you and involving them in the process.”

In 2008, after “congregants started using the religious school email list to gather for pizza,” Temple Sinai in Oakland, California (www.oaklandsinai.org) established its Facebook presence. “The synagogue needs to be ahead of the curve or congregants will do it without you,” executive director Paul Geduldig explains. Gabby Volodarsky, the congregation’s membership liaison and program director, had also advised him that “prospective members will be looking

for the congregation on Facebook.” Now Geduldig has come to see that “as social media takes hold, [groups] form from the bottom up.... It’s where communication and community building are heading.”

Temple leaders are exploring the creation of specific Facebook groups for preschool families, teens, seniors, and job-seeking congregants that would extend the community beyond the synagogue’s members, as grandparents, for example, join the preschool group to stay abreast of the goings-on in their grandchildren’s lives. Temple information-sharing might also be targeted to individuals and families based on their interests and participation in particular Facebook groups.

With a limit of 140 characters per post, Twitter (www.twitter.com), a microblogging service that’s available both on the web and by text mail, keeps information-hungry parents up to date about what’s going on at Union camps. That’s how Henry S. Jacobs camp director J.C. Cohen provides short updates—often multiple times a day—to parents of Jacobs campers through the camp’s website. Congregational tweets—as Twitter posts are known—can also be used, Cohen says, “to demonstrate what a busy place a congregation is or to provide a glimpse into the work of some of the key folks. Just remember,” he cautions, “once you start, you have to keep it up. You have to make it a habit because true Twitter followers have high expectations.”

Matthew Lees, a member of Boston’s Temple Israel (<http://www.tisrael.org/>) and former chair of its technology committee, explains that “social media have benefits and drawbacks, issues and challenges.” Although they “tap into the energy, passion, and do-it-yourself attitude of members, synagogues also have needs, commitments, and responsibilities,” including protecting members’ privacy, maintaining organizational security, and overseeing both appropriate communications and the flow of information—to ensure, for example, that people who are not “wired” aren’t left out of the loop. (To

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NOTEWORTHY

Welcome, New Union for Reform Judaism Congregations: Philipstown Reform Synagogue, Cold Spring, New York; Temple Israel of DeLand, DeLand, Florida; Burquest Jewish Community Association, Coquitlam, British Columbia; and Congregation Har Shalom, Durango, Colorado.

Reform Jew Designs Inaugural Medal: Sculptor Marc Mellon, a member of Temple B’nai Chaim in Georgetown, Connecticut, designed and engraved Barack Obama’s image on the front of the official 2009 Presidential Inaugural medallion. Mellon says: “I wanted the portrait to somehow reflect what’s inside this man—the character, the personality, the values he stands for.”



Rabbi David Saperstein Is Serving on President’s Advisory Council: Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, has been appointed to President Barack Obama’s “President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.”

First Pluralistic Beit Midrash: On February 27, 2009, some 350 rabbis, scholars, and lay leaders from Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform congregations in Israel and Europe joined an equal number of North American Reform rabbis in the first international, pluralistic *Beit Midrash* (study program), a centerpiece of the Central Conference of American Rabbis’ 120th convention in Jerusalem. Together they explored issues of Jewish peoplehood through intensive study of Torah texts in an effort to increase mutual understanding and foster new, meaningful connections. ►