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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*Reform Judaism* is the official voice of the Union for Reform Judaism, linking the institutions and affiliates of Reform Judaism with every Reform Jew. *RJ* covers developments within our Movement while interpreting world events and Jewish tradition from a Reform perspective. Shared by 305,000 member households, *RJ* conveys the creativity, diversity, and dynamism of Reform Judaism.

DEAR READER

## Fight Global Whining

Let's fight global whining—particularly when the topic is the state of North American Judaism.

"Experts" keep telling us that we're in a time of congregational decline. Crippled by rising debt and declining demographics, buffeted by the apathy of the young, hammered by a loss of faith and a waning sense of peoplehood, the synagogue as we know it is being swept away by the tides of history.

The naysayers could not be more wrong.

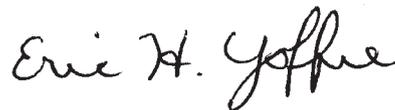
Yes, the synagogue has big problems. Congregations have been hard hit by the recession, and as more Jews move to urban centers, our suburban-based movement has not always found it easy to adapt. Nonetheless, no institution is better able to seize the opportunities that lie ahead than the synagogue. Consider these realities:

1. America continues to be a very religious country, and every study indicates that its religious dynamism emerges from congregational life, Jewish and otherwise. The Jewish affiliation rate remains high. In the 1930s, only about 30% of American Jews belonged to a synagogue; today, membership hovers between 40% and 45%.

2. North American Jews are desperate—yes, *desperate*—for what the synagogue provides: community, spirituality, direction on the meaning of their lives, and help with raising their children. If we can do a better job of communicating Judaism's tradition of caring, affirmation, joy, support, and hope, Jews young and old will be drawn to our synagogues.

3. At this time of accelerating technological innovation, much of the Jewish world is tied to old patterns and resists change. Not Reform Judaism. By our Movement's very nature, Reform synagogues are open, creative, daring, and inclusive. Moreover, my successor as URJ president, Rabbi Richard Jacobs, is a brilliant, learned, charismatic innovator and activist who understands that our collective future depends not on maintaining the status quo, but in preserving eternal Jewish values.

Reform Judaism came into being precisely in order to manage and master change. No one does it better. That is why I am so confident that we will take full advantage of the opportunities for transformation. Our best days are yet to come.



Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie

President, Union for Reform Judaism

> Your thoughts are welcomed. Add your own blog post: [www.rj.org/Yoffie](http://www.rj.org/Yoffie) and/or send a letter-to-the-editor: [rjmagazine@urj.org](mailto:rjmagazine@urj.org).



Photo by Henry Grossman