

HAPPENINGS

➔ **December 14-16:** Take part in the 2011 Education Summit, a Jewish educational assembly designed to raise the status of Jewish day schools, engage teens and families in Jewish life, involve all learners irrespective of disability, and strengthen every system of Reform Jewish learning. Gaylord National Hotel & Convention Center on the Potomac, Maryland. urj.org/educators.

➔ **December 14-18:** Celebrate, worship, debate, connect, and learn with thousands of Reform Jews at the 71st Union for Reform Judaism Biennial and the 48th Women of Reform Judaism Biennial. Gaylord National Hotel & Convention Center on the Potomac, Maryland. urj.org/biennial

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assurances from governments that the properties will be protected and preserved.

Although HUC-JIR presidents have been selected for special assignments by U.S. presidents (Rabbi Stephen S. Wise was a member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Advisory Commission on Political Refugees, Rabbi Nelson Glueck was invited to deliver the Benediction at the Inauguration of John F. Kennedy, and Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk was a member of the U.S. Holocaust Commission), Dr. Zola is the first HUC faculty member to be appointed to such a post by a U.S. president.

Dr. Zola believes that "this development is yet another indication of the significant historical resources that the American Jewish Archives and the Hebrew Union College proffer to the nation."

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and the University of Minnesota's Center for Jewish Studies.

How can your congregation best embark on a visioning initiative? Here are 10 tips from synagogue leaders and strategic planning professionals:

1. Make sure that the congregation's lay leaders, clergy, and staff "have a shared understanding of why the process is occurring, who will be involved, which core Jewish values ground the partnership, and what the desired outcomes are," says Judith Erger "By modeling a team approach steeped in such Jewish values as commitment to community ["My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people," Isaiah 56:7], the foundation is laid and the message underscored that the visioning process transcends anyone's ownership or administration and is foremost about the best interests of the congregation. To communicate that the leadership is 'on the same page,' the president and board members can talk about the visioning process in the temple bulletin, and the clergy can incorporate visioning vocabulary from the *bimah*. This combination will provide support for the effort and for each other."

2. Assemble a task force or committee to structure and guide the work of the congregation—but not to create the vision. The committee's tasks, Erger says, are to gain insight into the congregation's past and present, as well as its strengths and weaknesses; and to engage the congregation in "visioning" out loud in structured, meaningful ways. She recommends that the team consist of a chair or co-chairs who are available for the duration, about half a dozen people who represent a cross-section of the congregational community, plus the clergy and senior staff as ex-officio members—all of whom have a commitment to the process without bringing a personal agenda to it. Dale Glasser (**photo #6**), the Union's senior congregational advisor, concurs: "If the conclusion or outcome is anticipated or expected before the process begins, it's hard to have a process

with integrity. The outcome shouldn't be perceived as someone's agenda."

3. Involve the entire congregation in the process, being careful not to resort to the cultural ethos of top-down problem-solving. Erger points out that "culturally we are programmed to view congregational leaders as problem-solvers, which implies that a) there is a problem; b) there is a solution; and c) it is the leadership's responsibility to do the bulk of fact-finding and fixing, and present the congregation with a fully formed finished product. In contrast, effective visioning invites everyone on the journey and allows each member's 'vision' to be heard." Blue Wing Consulting founder Larry Dressler cautions against "having conversations with the usual suspects," which, he says, "fails to involve people who represent the true diversity of the congregation in terms of age, family structure, history, and interests."

4. Pay attention to who's talking and who's listening. "The most significant mistake occurs when leadership—with good intentions—forgets to listen and only talks," Erger says. A facilitator—a congregant with visioning expertise, a Union professional, or an outside consultant—can help. For example, at Temple Sinai in Brookline, Massachusetts, a consultant "brought a framework to the table, emphasized the importance of listening and engagement, helped us sort through the data, and provided perspective on how the process was going," says Harvey Cotton (**photo #7**), the congregation's president-elect during the visioning process. However, as Dressler points out, "When consultants are involved, it's important not to spend too much time having congregants listen to the 'experts' and not enough time sharing their own experiences, insights, and dreams with one another."

5. Be prepared for resistance. "It is human nature to be adverse to change," Erger says. "Visioning—which in and of itself suggests change—will inevitably be met with resistance. So figure out how to acknowledge and manage resistance as a natural part of the pro-