

cess. Be mindful that creative and innovative solutions are seldom discovered by like-thinking people. Lack of consensus can be constructive, where it encompasses the diversity of ideas.”

**6. Aim for low-hanging fruit.** “The visioning process, from start to implementation of steps toward a new future, often takes 18–24 months,” Erger says. “To maintain energy and momentum [during this extended period], celebrate the victories, find renewal in new people sharing the ‘vision,’ and start with a small change likely to engage the congregation. When people see positive change in which they’ve had a voice, they become more open to larger changes that may follow.” For example, to reinforce the new vision of the temple as “green,” one synagogue’s Men of Reform Judaism asked attendees to start bringing their own (non-disposable) coffee cups from home to the temple’s Sunday bagel brunch. In addition, Dale Glasser says, “give the congregation-at-large a clear timeline for the visioning process—beginning, middle, and end.”

**7. Implement an open, transparent communications plan,** making sure members always know what’s being done and why, Dressler says. “When communication about the visioning process is not timely and transparent, people can feel excluded and resentful.”

**8. Develop a vision statement that “evokes emotion and describes the deepest, most profound truth about the congregation,”** says Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, the Barbara and Stephen Friedman Professor of Liturgy, Worship, and Ritual at HUC-JIR and a co-founder of Synagogue 3000. Rabbi Hoffman calls this a “*Sh’ma* statement—an affirmation that can inspire the congregation to respond with a strong ‘amen.’”

**9. Pursue implementation skillfully.** The visioning process usually leads to a report of recommendations approved by the board and congregation (at which point the original team is disbanded and the process has ended), but “the living document and new behaviors that the process has engendered sometimes fail

to become part of the congregational culture and vocabulary,” Erger says, pointing out that implementation is “the most common area of weakness for visioning congregations. Reports can be written and data compiled, but if the suggested changes are too drastic, a new administration is not fully supportive, or the congregation is faced with ‘an issue,’ the next steps may be assigned a lower concern.” She recommends prioritizing action steps, establishing mutual goals and expectations within a set period of time, and maintaining ongoing communication to evaluate whether the goals are realistically achievable or need adjustment (such as recruiting new people to energize the process).

**10. Consult Union for Reform Judaism experts and publications.** Dale Glasser (DGlasser@urj.org), and Judith Erger (JErger@urj.org) are available to consult individually about your congregation’s visioning and strategic planning initiatives. And at [urj.org/cong/board/bylaws](http://urj.org/cong/board/bylaws) you’ll find *Cultivating the Future: Long-Range Planning for Congregations*, which guides synagogues through the long-range planning process, and *Hear, O Israel: Creating Meaningful Congregational Mission Statements*, which outlines a step-by-step process to create a mission statement that steers the congregation from the present into the future.

Visioning is vital, Erger insists. “The worst mistake you can make is not visioning at all, out of complacency or risk aversion, or by assuming that the future will shape itself as long as the day-to-day operations are handled. We need to think large, as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel has taught us (in *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology*): ‘A Jew is asked to take a leap of action rather than a leap of thought. He is asked to surpass his needs, to do more than he understands in order to understand more than he does....’”

—Jane E. Herman (*JanetheWriter* at [rj.org](http://rj.org)), writer and assistant to Union for Reform Judaism President Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie

## NOTEWORTHY

Committed to preserving a documentary heritage of the religious, organizational, economic, cultural, personal, social, and family life of American Jewry, the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives contains more than 15,000 linear feet of archives, manuscripts, nearprint materials, photographs, audio and videotapes, microfilm, and genealogical materials.

## IN MEMORY...

### Rabbi Jack Stern 1926–2011

For most of his career, Rabbi Jack Stern was the inspirational, beloved rabbi of Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York. A national Reform Movement leader as well, he served, among other key roles, as president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, as vice president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, as a member of the URJ’s Task Force on Jewish Ethics, and as a trustee of the HUC-JIR Board of Governors. After retirement, he moved to Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where he joined Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.

Passionate about social action, Jack served as a trustee of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, and of Construct Inc., which responds to the needs of the homeless. He was also revered for eloquence, as in this 1983 sermon: “Such is the meaning of faith—to know that the melody is playing even when we may not hear it....”

May his memory be a blessing.

