



**O**N JUNE 12, 2011, THE URJ BOARD OF TRUSTEES ELECTED RABBI RICHARD (RICK) JACOBS president of the Union for Reform Judaism, which serves 900 member congregations throughout North America. Ordained by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York in 1982, Rabbi Jacobs is the first Union president to have served most of his career as a congregational rabbi—nine years at Brooklyn Heights Synagogue and then for 20 years at Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York.

On the Movement-wide level he is a former member of the URJ Board of Trustees, the Joint Commission on Religious Living, the Joint Commission on Worship, the CCAR Executive Committee, the ARZA and WUPJ Boards, and the Reform Judaism Magazine Advisory Board. He has also been active on the boards of the American Jewish World Service, UJA-Federation of New York, the New Israel Fund, and Synagogue 2000, and is a senior rabbinic fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

Dedicated to social justice, Rabbi Jacobs traveled to the Chad-Darfur border area in 2005 to bring attention to the refugees' plight, and, upon his return, raised \$250,000 to aid genocide victims and delivered the opening prayer at the 2006 Darfur rally in Washington, DC (see "On the Edge of Life," RJ magazine, Summer 2006). He was the only rabbi to participate in the 2009 Brookings U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar, dedicated to building bridges of understanding between the West and the Muslim world.

He lives in Scarsdale, New York with his wife, Susan K. Freedman, sons Aaron and David, and daughter Sarah.

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**You are the Union's first bi-coastal president, having grown up in both New York and Orange County, CA, home of the radical John Birch Society. How did these experiences shape you?**

**W**hen I was 10, my family moved from New York to Southern California, where my parents opened a retail furniture business. Leaving a densely populated Jewish community to live in one with few Jews took some getting used to, but didn't stop me from becoming active in student government as a teenager in the 1970s. One experience in particular crystallized for me what it meant to be a leader. When I was a high school junior serving as commissioner of activities, I curated a series of student assemblies and wanted to broaden our offerings to include a lecture on transcendental meditation, which the Beatles had popularized, as well as political events addressing Earth Day and the Vietnam War. To proceed, I had to argue my case before the five members of the school board, three of whom belonged to the John Birch Society. Even though I knew my chances for success were remote, I went before the board, spoke as convincingly as I could—and got permission to do the series! The message I took away—that leadership means standing up for what you believe in, allowing you to achieve more than you can imagine—has informed me ever since.

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**In a 2000 Reform Judaism magazine article on synagogue transformation you wrote: "To tell you the truth, the Judaism I had experienced as a youth growing up in a large suburban Reform synagogue seemed shallow and uninspiring." If that was the case, why didn't you just drop out after bar mitzvah or Confirmation? What led you to the rabbinate?**

**M**y Jewish identity might have hit a dead end had it not been for the three summers I spent at the URJ's Camp Swig in Northern California. I found Jewish community there with a circle of friends, including members of a rock band I was part of—I was the drummer. Swig also opened me up to issues like civil rights. Labor leader Cesar Chavez spoke to us about our obligations to the migrant farm workers, and many of us, me included, stopped eating non-union grapes or lettuce. Protest folksinger Joan Baez showed up, impressing upon us that Judaism had something to

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