

NOTEWORTHY

Plaut Torah Commentary in Russian: Now, for the first time, Russian readers throughout the world will be able to study the Progressive Movement's signature Torah commentary—*The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (URJ Press), edited by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, z"l (see story "Remembering Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut," p.56). The World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) spearheaded the project, overseeing a cadre of Russian-speaking Progressive rabbis, Jewish scholars, and translators working at WUPJ headquarters in Jerusalem and at Progressive Movement sites in the Former Soviet Union.



To learn more, contact Ron Wegsman at the World Union office in New York, 212-452-6533, rwegsman@wupj.org. To order, contact the URJ Press at 212-650-4120, URJBooksandMusic.com.

Tri-Faith Campus Going Up in Omaha:

In December 2011, Temple Israel of Omaha, Nebraska co-purchased 35 acres of land in conjunction with the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska and the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture to co-create the world's first tri-faith campus. Houses of worship and study for the three Abrahamic faiths are being built on adjacent parcels of land. The Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha—comprised of all three organizations—is also constructing its own center to house social, educational, and conference programming



TRI-FAITH WORSHIP SERVICE, 2009.

ACTION *continued from page 51*

one another. At one camp-style service focused on social justice, Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" was mixed with *Mi Chamocha*; also, readings featured Martin Luther King, Jr. on racism, Mahatma Gandhi on gender inequality, and Paul Newman on sexual orientation inequality.

"When you give teens a space where they feel free to experiment with prayer without the watchful or judgmental eye of their parents or other adults," says Barrett Harr, director of high school and youth programs, "they engage in worship in ways that are meaningful to them."

Blue Jean Shabbat, another Epstein Communicate! Award winner, has proven that teens aren't too busy for Friday night services—typically 30 or more participate. Their relationships extend beyond the temple as they've added dinner together at a local restaurant following services. And many have become more active at temple, inquiring about leadership positions within the youth group or joining the youth membership committee.

Stock adds that being a service leader has "allowed me to step up in the community as a leader. I got a lot of confidence after that."



For 200-member Congregation Beth Am in Tampa (bethamtampa.org), building community on Shabbat starts with a strong cup of coffee on Saturday morning.

"I joke that the coffee has to be really good," says Rabbi Jason Rosenberg. "In the beginning we actually had someone bringing in an espresso machine and acting as a barista."

But Café Shabbat is about much more than coffee. Before services on the first Saturday of every month, the temple's *oneg* room is transformed into a lounge. Sofas are brought in from the youth group room, jazz or other soft music fills the air, and board games are spread out on a table. Sometimes the back of the sanctuary is transformed into a place for yoga, drumming, or Israeli

dance. Varied programming, organized by the coordinator and rabbi and carried out by volunteers, always includes something intellectual and something experiential, anything from gardening to music appreciation—all intended to expand members' notions of what it means to celebrate Shabbat, Rabbi Rosenberg says. Good supervised kids' activities enable young parents to mix with older congregants, and religious school students and youth groupers occasionally join in shared events.

"The goal is to get more people to synagogue and there feel part of the community," says Elizabeth Strom (photo #4), the program's founding coordinator. "Activities are there to be enjoyed, but participants can also feel comfortable sitting on sofas and chatting or reading, if that's their choice."

Before Café Shabbat, also a 2011 Epstein Communicate! Award winner, was conceived, on non-b'nai mitzvah weekends it was difficult to gather a *minyan*. Now the temple doors open at 9 A.M.—an hour and a half before services—and attendance ranges between 24 members to more than 50.

"Participants recognize that Shabbat encompasses a range of activities beyond prayer," Strom explains. "We exercise our minds and our bodies; we learn to bake challah. We participate in activities that are both familiar and special because they are done with a community, and because probably, if not for Shabbat, we would not have taken the time to do them."



As Shabbat ends, community-building at 680-member University Synagogue in Los Angeles (unisyn.org) is just getting started, by harnessing the power of *havdalah*.

"Often with Judaism, we start something but never finish it," says Rabbi Joel Thal Simonds. "Before we gather for a meal, we'll always do the *motzi*, but we never finish the meal with the blessing to end it. On Shabbat, many congregants were coming for Friday night services, but few were marking

Tri-Faith Service: Photo by Justin Limoges. Copyright The Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha.