

# The Reform Advocate

Volume III, Number 1: Spring 2011

THE SOCIETY FOR  
CLASSICAL  
REFORM  
JUDAISM

Renewing the Heritage  
of American Liberal Judaism  
for the 21st Century



Announcing *the* upcoming publication of  
**THE UNION PRAYER BOOK**  
A NEW REVISED EDITION TO BE PUBLISHED IN 2011  
BY CHICAGO SINAI CONGREGATION  
AND THE SOCIETY FOR CLASSICAL REFORM JUDAISM

The *Union Prayer Book, Sinai Edition*, was published in 2000 by Chicago Sinai Congregation as a contemporary language, gender-neutral liturgy for Reform congregations wishing to maintain the historic worship traditions of our Movement's heritage. Preserving the beloved texts and cadences of the 1940 *Union Prayer Book, the Sinai Edition* also embraced the newest developments in Jewish liturgical responses to the realities of our time – a heightened awareness of inclusive language and a recognition of the spiritual challenges of the transforming events of Jewish history in this generation.

Originally conceived as the liturgy for Chicago's historic Sinai Congregation, and edited by its rabbis, Michael P. Sternfeld and Howard A. Berman, the "Sinai UPB" has been adopted by many other temples throughout the country over the past decade.

We are proud to announce the upcoming publication of a new revision of this important work, under the auspices of Chicago Sinai Congregation and the Society for Classical Reform Judaism. This new edition will build upon the principles of the original version, offering:

- The renewed availability of prayers and meditations that have inspired generations of American Reform Jews with a deep personal faith and an ethically motivating spirituality
- New texts and translations, drawn from a variety of sources, including original compositions, that broaden the perspectives of worship
- Supplemental readings for special occasions, home observance, and personal reflection and study, with the texts of the most popular Hebrew and English hymns and songs used in contemporary Reform worship
- Transliterations of Hebrew texts on each page
- Attractive design that preserves the distinctive appearance of the historic Union Prayer Book from "blue cover to red ribbon..." with striking new graphic embellishments



The new *Union Prayer Book* is conceived to be used in a broad variety of ways – as a congregation's major liturgy or as an alternative resource for worship services reflecting the traditions of our distinctive Reform heritage – made available once again for those who cherish this tradition, as well as for a new generation seeking an accessible, embracing spiritual experience.

For further information and preliminary ordering information for the new Volume I (Sabbath, Festival and Daily Services) and the **currently available** Volume II (High Holy Days), please contact:

CHICAGO SINAI  
CONGREGATION  
312.867.7000  
[www.chicagosinai.org](http://www.chicagosinai.org)

or

THE SOCIETY FOR  
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877.326.1400 toll-free  
[www.renewreform.org](http://www.renewreform.org)

## Passover and the Classical Reform Tradition: A Special Section

In observance of the upcoming Festival of Passover, we offer the following readings, taken from the newly revised *Union Prayer Book, Sinai Edition*, as well as other reflections on the celebration of our great Festival of Freedom, from a Classical Reform perspective. The Society wishes all of our members and readers a holiday filled with blessing and inspiration as we affirm the timeless and universal message of liberation proclaimed by the Exodus story.

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### *For the First Day of Passover*

Eternal God of all the generations, we welcome this festival of freedom with joyful hearts. We have assembled together seeking Your presence. As You redeemed our ancestors from the slavery of Egypt and led them to the land of their inheritance, so have You been our Redeemer and Protector throughout the centuries. You have watched over us and guided us at all times.

We thank You, God, that our lot has fallen in this blessed land, dedicated to liberty and peace. May we be imbued with a deep sense of our duty as free people. When we gather in our homes with our families and friends, may we ever be mindful of those who still dwell in poverty and deprivation, who still eat the bread of affliction. May the good tidings of redemption soon be heard in every land. May those who hunger for freedom and justice be satisfied, and may all people be blessed with the joys of harmony.

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We rejoice now in the memory of our deliverance from bondage, and we celebrate the goodness we have known through the ages. For the strength our people has shown in the face of oppressors, we are grateful.

*We give thanks to You for the courage that sustained us in times of suffering.*

Not once but many times have we been delivered. Time and again we went from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy.

*In this season of liberation, we celebrate the freedom to live without fear, the freedom to earn our daily bread, the freedom to speak our mind.*

And we celebrate the season that brings new life to the growing world. We rejoice in the first harvest of the soil, the promise of life in every land, the flower and tree reborn.

*For now the winter is past, and flowers appear on the earth. The time of singing has come.*

The Eternal One is our Strength and our Song!

*We praise You, our God, Giver of freedom, Source of life.*

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### *For the Seventh Day of Passover*

This seventh day of Passover is the anniversary of our people's deliverance from the tyrant's wrath. That day, Israel first sang a song of praise to the God of freedom at the shores of the sea. Many times since then have we known oppression and bondage. Each time, we have remembered the message of Passover and taken it to heart. Never have we forgotten the bitterness of slavery; never have we despaired of the hope for liberation.

*O God of freedom, purify the hearts of all people. Free us from the destructive impulses of hatred and strife, of greed and the lust for power, and fill us with good will and the love of justice. Let us strive for that great Passover of the future, when sword and spear shall be broken, when freedom and peace shall reign forever. On that day, all shall come to know that we are of one human family, and gladly proclaim You their God and Redeemer.*

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## Thoughts on Classical Reform Practice for Passover

*Rabbi Howard A. Berman, Executive Director  
The Society for Classical Reform Judaism*

I have always taught and preached that beyond the Seder, "keeping Passover" from a Classical Reform perspective does indeed include the eating of matzah as well as abstinence from leavened bread - and, gastronomically at least - no more than this basic Biblical guideline. I believe that this symbolism is very compelling - and that it is completely separate from the rest of the totally optional dietary laws of *Kashrut*, which, of course, emerged far later in Jewish history - and have a completely different focus. The *matzah/no bread* issue is, I feel, directly related to the concept of using all our senses to "retell, relive and reaffirm" the Exodus experience personally... "in every generation" ... making the ancient story and its timeless meaning come

vividly alive for us. This is where the week-long (seven days only, of course) consciousness of the Festival's ethical and spiritual message can be made meaningful - as the taste and even the sound of the matzah, at home and in the workplace, become a constant reminder of the affliction of slavery and the holiness of freedom. This applies primarily to the *matzah/no bread* symbolism - and does not embrace the other more arcane traditionalist elements of holiday observance, such as separate dishes and commercial "Kosher for Passover" designations.

This aspect of the tradition has been, to my knowledge, one of those constants that the Classical Reform tradition has upheld throughout our Movement's history - perceiving in it a level of sanctity and meaning that rises above most other traditional rituals.

Temple worship on the Festival Days has also been an important part of historic Classical Reform practice. In American Reform, the First and Seventh Days were traditionally very important Services, and very well attended. I do feel that every congregation should make some effort to add the dimension of communal worship for Passover to the family-focused Seder experience. And of course the addition of the *Yizkor* Service on the Seventh Day, has important meaning, in acknowledging the personal memories that are so much a part of our holiday experience. It is also significant the Reform musical tradition includes glorious compositions for these Festival Morning Services.

While of course, the broad, universal ethical ideals of this Festival of Freedom must be the primary focus of any of its ceremonial observances, the authentic intention of the Seder and the symbolism of matzah have always been conceived to highlight these very values, and have consequently been cherished by all Jews, of whatever liturgical persuasion.

## Passover: A Festival of Freedom, Liberation and Renewal of Our Faith

*Rabbi Nadia Siritsky, Program Coordinator,  
The Society for Classical Reform Judaism*

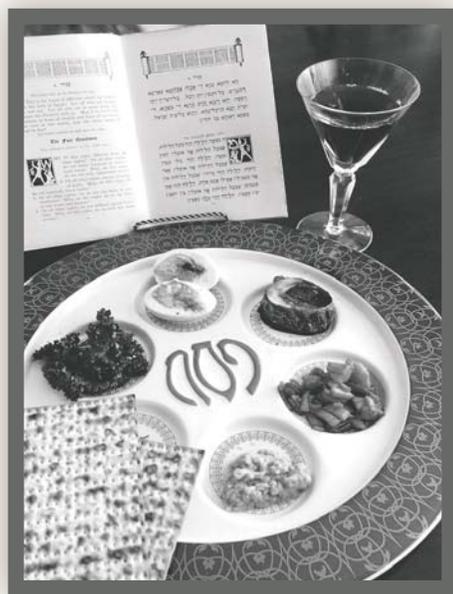
Occasionally, someone will say to me: "Rabbi, I am not very observant." Often, it is by very active members of the Jewish community. I remember last year, I met someone who pulled out his ham and cheese sandwich on matzah, and began to apologize to me for not being observant, even as the matzah crumbs were falling, and he continued discussing his plan to try and save the Jewish nursing home that had been in the community for years.

While this incident may reflect a particularly startling example of symbolic counterpoint, and even irony, I feel both angry and sad when faced with this kind of devaluation of self. I feel sad that someone who is clearly making a decision to observe those aspects of Torah that feel meaningful and inspiring has somehow been made to feel guilty for being non-Orthodox. And I am constantly frustrated at the ways in which the liberal voice had been supplanted by one that has become so dogmatic and judgmental.

The truth is, as Reform Jews, we know that there are many different ways of meaningfully observing Jewish traditions- especially one like the Festival of Passover. While one may choose to eat matzah, as a symbolic way of remembering the Exodus and paying homage to the fight for freedom that remains ever relevant in our own

day; one may also choose to eat meat and milk together as a statement that the more restrictive details of the Kosher dietary laws are no longer meaningful or binding - or, perhaps, that one wishes not to exclude one's self from one's neighbor, and that such archaic dietary prohibitions were intended to keep the Jewish community from being exposed to potentially subversive non-Jewish ideas. Thus, one might choose to eat non-kosher food as a way of expressing one's faith that we can be enriched by our relationships with people of all faiths. Reform Judaism is not a specific set of ritual behaviors, but rather a commitment to take our faith seriously, to learn and make thoughtful decisions about which practices help us to live moral and ethical lives, informed by God's ongoing revelation.

While Reform Judaism is far more than about what we eat, food often functions as a barometer of sorts for religious



observance. Never is this more evident than at Passover. The tenets of Classical Reform Judaism are particularly relevant at this season, because they highlight the ways in which an emphasis on ritual and legalistic Judaism can eclipse the very spirit of the holiday we are attempting to celebrate! Forbidden food, forbidden dishes, it hardly seems like a festival of freedom. And yet, everywhere we turn, we see highly priced food products marketed to the Jewish community, as a presumably normative observance of the holiday.

The Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder instructs: “In every generation, each person is commanded to understand the ways in which they personally were liberated from Egypt”. The word for Egypt is Mitzrayim, which literally means the narrow and confining spaces. In our generation, we see that far too often, our religious practices have become narrow and restrictive, sacrificing spirit for form. Looking around at much of Jewish practice today, we see that much of our heritage and observance have been hijacked by the most traditionalist voices in our community, and we have allowed the authentic diversity of interpretation, to be overshadowed by the use of such conventional labels as “not really Jewish...”, or “Jewish-lite.” This hands power to the right-wing positions on the broad spectrum of Jewish observance, and validates a standard of “religiosity” that we do not accept.

What standard is it that we wholeheartedly accept in our understanding of a faithful commitment to our Jewish heritage? We can borrow a lesson from Isaiah, the great teacher of the rich prophetic tradition of which we, Classical Reform Jews, are the heirs. Let us paraphrase his immortal words and ask: Is this the feast that God has commanded us to observe? To burn bread and pay three times as much for food that because an Orthodox rabbi supervised it? It seems to me that such waste is a travesty, and to call it observance of God’s Torah, a sacrilege. And, so, as part of our observance of the Passover holiday, let us, as committed Reform Jews say instead: Is not this the feast that God has commanded for us: to share of our bread, and indeed all our food, with those in need; to open the door and proclaim earnestly: let all who are hungry come and eat!

I believe that when we allow other people to define us, and fail to recognize the spiritual tenets of our own choices and behaviors, then our faith is impoverished. We have an obligation, no less than our biblical ancestors, to rise up, speak truth to power, and reclaim our faith traditions, proudly affirming the sacred tenets undergirding our choices and observances.

The biblical account for the Israelites’ descent into slavery, and often idolatry, depicts a slow and gradual process. They did not recognize it in the moment, and it was sanctioned by those in power, until ultimately, it became their own undoing, because they lost the essence of their faith. Their faith was flattened, like matzah. Easy to make, easy to break. We too have watched our own faith traditions become two-dimensional, with an overemphasis on the acquisition of Hebrew skills and mitzvot, at the expense of the deeper process of building communities of faith that wrestle with their calling to become a light unto the nations.

This is the vision of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism. Rather than focusing our religious lives on the “proper” observance of rituals and restrictions, and setting up exclusionary boundaries of faith, we offer an opportunity to learn about the rich and dynamic heritage that can revitalize our communities.

Let this Passover season renew our own vision for a Judaism liberated from the confines of shame and dogma, laws and rituals. Let us work together to reclaim our faith, reemphasizing the prophetic ideals of social justice and enlightenment of which we are heirs, and that are at the heart of our religious tradition.

## Meet the Leadership of the Society

While only three years old, The Society of Classical Reform Judaism has quickly grown to be an important and respected voice within the larger Reform movement. We are proud of our accomplishments, and grateful to all those who have supported us and enabled us to reach this moment. In this issue, we take the opportunity to introduce some of our staff and Board of Directors and will continue this series of profiles in upcoming editions.

### Rabbi Nadia Siritsky

*Joins our Staff as Program Coordinator*

Rabbi Nadia Siritsky joins our staff as Program Coordinator, where she will be working with our Executive Director, Rabbi Howard A. Berman and dedicated staff and board, to help to expand our programming, to facilitate communications, to do grant writing, fundraising and editing of our journal,



The Reform Advocate. She comes to us with a wealth of skills and experiences. Rabbi Siritsky was ordained by Hebrew Union College in 2002, and served for six years as a rabbi at *The Temple*, Louisville, KY. She was also trained as a chaplain, social worker and psychotherapist, and having worked in hospice and in various counseling settings, while completing her doctorate at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. She is passionate about working with interfaith families, and about building liberal Jewish communities that are accessible to Jew and non-Jew alike, welcoming the rich diversity of our Reform movement.

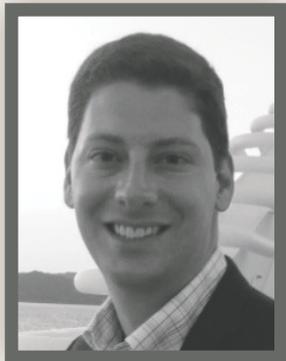
## The Society's Board of Directors

*The first in an ongoing series*

*of profiles of the leadership of the SCRJ*

### Dan Lissner

Dan Lissner has been a Board Member since 2010. He is a native of Richmond, Virginia, and currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts.



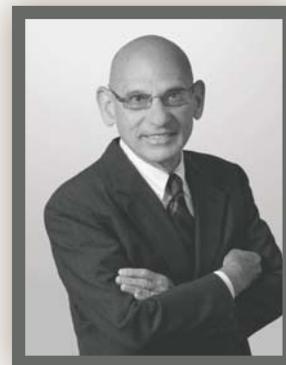
Dan was introduced to Classical Reform Judaism in 2004, when searching for a community in Boston where interfaith couples such as he and his wife, Adrienne Penta, would be welcomed enthusiastically and unconditionally. Classical Reform Judaism, as practiced at their temple, Boston Jewish

Spirit, has been an important dimension of their spiritual life since that time - providing a context in which both of their religious traditions are respected and in which their shared ethical values are promoted. Dan was one of the founders of Boston Jewish Spirit, and served as the congregation's President from 2006 to 2009. Dan is also a founding board member and current President of the Emmanuel Center, an interfaith partnership that develops educational programs exploring the intersection of spirituality and the arts. Dan also works as General Counsel of Free Flow Power Corporation, a renewable energy developer based in Boston.

### Larry Pike

Larry Pike of Atlanta served as President of *The Temple* (established 1867) and as a member of the Board of

Trustees of the Union for Reform Judaism, the Board of Overseers of Hebrew Union College - Cincinnati and the Reform movement's Joint Rabbinic Placement Commission. His love of Classical Reform worship styles and principles, and his disappointment in the direction of the Reform movement, led him to the Society for Classical Reform Judaism. An attorney, Larry believes that American Jews, like all Americans, should involve themselves in service to the community, and has among other activities served as President of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, of the local unit of the American Cancer Society, and of the Ansley Park Civic Association. He is a member of the St. Joseph's Hospital community leadership council, and the planned giving advisory council of Emory University. Larry currently co-chairs a committee at *The Temple* which restored the congregation's historic Aeolian-Skinner organ.



### Jan E. Stone

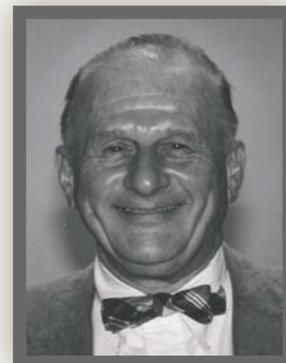
Jan E. Stone is a Vice President and senior estate administrator at Harris Private bank. She has served for five years on the faculty of the American Bankers Association's National Trust School. She received her B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, her M.S. from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and her J.D. from New York University School of Law. She is a past



member of the Board of Trustees of Chicago Sinai Congregation and served on its Executive Committee as a Vice President. She also is a past member of the Central Board of Directors of JCC Chicago (formerly the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Chicago) and chaired its Lay Leadership Development Committee.

### Max Edward Tonkon

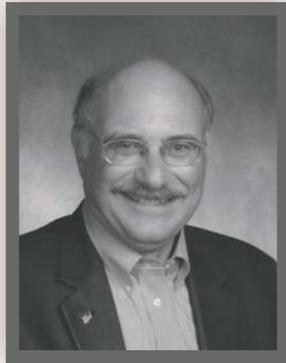
Max Edward Tonkon grew up at Temple Emanu-El, in Dallas, TX, with the *Union Prayer Book* as his spiritual guide through his Bar Mitzvah, Confirmation, Military



service and into adulthood. In addition to his many personal and professional accomplishments, he derives great pride from his dedicated leadership in the Society for Classical Reform Judaism, which he serves as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. His commitment to Classical Reform Judaism derives from his connection to his father, who arrived in America in 1906, and he believes that this mode of expression, one that integrates spirituality with civic, social and educational engagement helps him to feel more clearly Jewish and more authentically American.

### Chuck Udell

Chuck Udell, Treasurer of the SCRJ, is a senior partner with the Essential Action Design Group – a management productivity and training consultancy, and the former President of University of the Aftermarket – an operating division of Northwood University. Chuck received his MBA from the University of Rochester, and is the 2010 recipient of the AAIA Mort Schwartz Excellence in Education Award. Chuck lives in the Kansas City area, and is an active member of the Kansas City Jewish community serving twice on the Board of Trustees of Temple B'nai Jehudah, as well as a member of the New Reform Temple. He is also a member of the Kansas City Jewish Federation's Israel and Overseas Committee. Chuck is a current participant in the Federation's Helzberg Leadership Program. He and his wife, Ester have been married for over 30 years and have two sons, Jeffrey and Andrew.



### Victoria Woolner Samuels

Victoria Woolner Samuels is an artist and volunteer. She has served on many Boards and committees including Jewish and community organizations, arts organizations, educational institutions, condominium associations and private foundations. Since her teen years as an active member of the Youth Group at Westchester Reform Congregation in New York, Reform Judaism has been an important thread in her life. A past President and lifetime Board member of Chicago Sinai Congregation, she is currently Chair of the Art and Judaica Committee. Along with other temple members she worked to create the new congregational home in



downtown Chicago. She has also served on the committees that created the *Union Prayer Book - Sinai Edition*.

## SCRJ Continues to Expand National Outreach

One of the major priorities of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism is working with temples around the country to foster worship opportunities, educational programs and a renewed appreciation of the historic values and traditions of our American Reform heritage. We know that the ultimate impact of our mission is not merely the articulation of philosophical principles, but the way that we can influence synagogue life and support individual Jews in their religious experience. Our aim is to help congregations affirm the diversity within their communities, and try to serve the spiritual needs of those many temple members who remain committed to Classical Reform – as well as to raise awareness of the beauty and meaning of the heritage we all share as Reform Jews.

Over the past year, Rabbi Howard A. Berman, our Executive Director, has continued his extensive schedule of preaching and lecturing at many congregations around the country, sharing our message and encouraging the introduction of these kinds of alternative programs. Most of these are planned as weekend “Scholar-in-Residence” formats, with a complete cycle of Sabbath sermons, dinner discussion forums, teaching of Torah Study classes, meetings with temple staff and Religious School parents, and special reception gatherings with potential supporters of our work. We’d like to share some highlights from recent events.

### *HOUSTON – April 8-10, 2010*

Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism was founded in 1957 as a distinct Classical Reform alternative in the community. Our SCRJ weekend in April was a great success, reflecting the deep commitment this temple has long had to our shared ideals. With the inspiring and energetic leadership of Rabbi Steven Gross, HCRJ has grown steadily in recent years, and is today a thriving center of historic Reform principles and worship, expressed in dynamic contemporary ways. The series of events began on a Thursday evening, with Rabbi Berman presenting a forum on the development of Reform Judaism in America. The enthusiastic discussion that followed reflected the clear understanding and attachment of temple members to our cause.

The Sabbath Eve Service the following night was a truly beautiful testimony of how meaningful and engaging Classical Reform worship can be for a Jew today. Incorporating the Union Prayer Book - Sinai Edition, with organ and instrumental music – both the beloved melodies of the past blended with popular current favorites – the Service was well attended by a broad range of people of all ages. Rabbi Berman spoke on the SCRJ's vision and challenged the congregation to take its rightful place nationally as a “flagship” of Classical Reform. We look forward to further cooperation with Rabbi Gross and the members of HCRJ.

#### *BALTIMORE – April 25, 2010*

Har Sinai, the “oldest continuously Reform congregation in America” celebrated its colorful history with a special tribute to its most famous rabbi, David Einhorn (1809-1879). Rabbi Berman, who served Har Sinai as a Rabbinic Intern in 1971-1972, shared the inspiring narrative of Einhorn's pioneer vision of the principles of liberal Judaism, first in his native Germany and then in the United States. Einhorn is regarded as the “Father of Classical Reform”, and laid the foundations for both the *Union Prayer Book*, as well as our Movement's commitment to Prophetic ethics in his legendary preaching against slavery during the Civil War.

#### *DALLAS – MAY 14 -15, 2010*

Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, which boasts the largest number of SCRJ members of any congregation in the country, invited Rabbi Berman to be its prestigious annual “Levi Olan Scholar-in-Residence” with a series of sermons and adult education lectures over the weekend of May 14-15. The series began with the Temple's very popular monthly Classical Reform Sabbath Service, using the historic Union Prayer Book, accompanied by the 18 voice Emanu-El Choir. At the Shabbat Morning Torah Study, the theme was the intersection of the principles of Reform Judaism and the democratic ideals of our American heritage. The Dallas Chapter of the Society, constituted as “The Friends of Classical Reform,” hosted a special dinner program that enabled our active group of members to share an update of the latest progress of the SCRJ. The Society is deeply appreciative of the energetic leadership and generous support of our Dallas chapter, and sincerely welcomes the warm cooperation of Temple Emanu-El, its Senior Rabbi, David Stern, and the Temple staff in facilitating our ongoing programs there.



*Temple Emanu-El*

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*SCRJ Program highlights over the summer and fall of 2010 focused on our observance of the 200th Anniversary of Reform Judaism with our pilgrimage to Germany in July, and the inauguration of our new programs at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, described in our Fall and Winter 2010 issues of The Reform Advocate.*

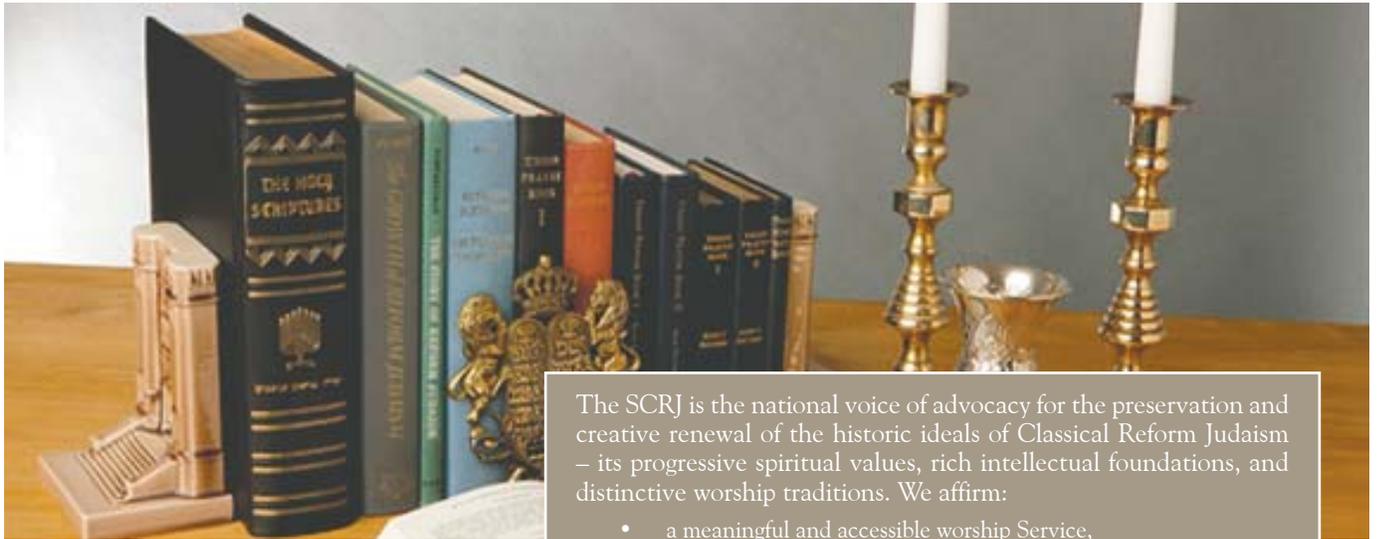
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#### *SAN ANTONIO – January 10-12, 2011*

The Society was invited to present an introduction to its work at the annual gathering of the Southwest Association of Reform Rabbis. Thirty rabbis from the region had the opportunity to learn about our mission and programs, and were hosted to a special reception. The major congregation in the San Antonio area, Temple Beth El, also sponsored a special gathering of its own leading members for a luncheon meeting, with a presentation by Rabbi Berman. Beth El, under the leadership of Rabbi Barry Block and Rabbi Emeritus Samuel Stahl, has long offered a unique model of weekly worship opportunities - with both a Classical-style Service with organ and choir in its magnificent sanctuary, and a “contemporary Service” in its social hall – creatively reaching out to serve the diverse spiritual needs of all its members. The Society lauded this commitment to affirming the various understandings of worship, and seeks to challenge other congregations to follow this inclusive, pluralistic approach.

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***Please let us know if you would be interested in helping to organize an SCRJ Service or program at your congregation!***



The SCRJ is the national voice of advocacy for the preservation and creative renewal of the historic ideals of Classical Reform Judaism – its progressive spiritual values, rich intellectual foundations, and distinctive worship traditions. We affirm:

- a meaningful and accessible worship Service, primarily in English
- the ethical values, grounded in the timeless, universal vision of our Hebrew Prophets, that inspire our personal decision making and communal responsibility as primary expressions of our religious commitment as Jews
- the centrality of the American experience in our Jewish identity
- a warm, unconditional welcome and support for interfaith families

The integrity and inspiration of our Classical Reform heritage have continuing vitality and relevance for a new generation of Jews today.

## THE SOCIETY FOR CLASSICAL REFORM JUDAISM

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*Rabbi Howard A. Berman  
Executive Director*

*B.H. Levy, Jr.  
President*

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