

One Big Reform Jewish Community

February Chaverim 2023

Last Shabbat, we welcomed Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, to speak during the sermon slot at the Friday evening service. Rabbi Jacobs spoke at length about the challenges and the successes of Reform Judaism. He addressed the traits and Jewish values that make our Reform Jewish Movement unique in the landscape of the Jewish Community today. However, what stood out to me were his remarks about our Baltimore Reform Jewish Community. As Rabbi Jacobs shared: “A service like this doesn’t happen in other communities.” Our Baltimore Jewish Community is unique, and that is something to celebrate!

As many of you know, Rabbi Jacobs didn’t speak from the bima of Bolton Street Synagogue this past Shabbat. We cancelled our service that evening, so that we could join together at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation with Har Sinai Oheb Shalom Congregation. This was the 7th Annual URJ Shabbat. Each year, the three Reform congregations come together in one location to pray, reflect, eat, and join as one community.

But that was not all! Earlier that day, the professional staff of the local Reform congregations: rabbis, cantors, administrators, education directors, and others gathered to learn and study with Rabbi Jacobs. Later in the day, the Executive Committees and other leaders of the three Reform congregations gathered for a dinner to meet each other and to reflect upon big ideas. These different opportunities allowed us to break down barriers, to focus on our similarities, and to recognize that we are stronger together than being apart.

This will not be the only opportunity to learn, pray, and build community with the other Reform synagogues of Baltimore. We will be welcoming Matan Koch, an expert on Judaism, inclusion, and disability, as a scholar-in-residence, March 24 – 26, 2023, for a weekend of services, study sessions, and gatherings at all three synagogues. In May, we will join together for a Zoom Tikkun L'eil Shavuot, a night of learning during the holiday of Shavuot. In addition, in just a couple of weeks, BHC and BSS teens will be traveling down to DC for L'taken, the Social Justice Seminar, where our teens can meet each other and speak truth to power to our government officials.

As Rabbi Jacobs shared, "A service like this doesn't happen in other communities." Too often, our synagogues and Jewish communities are territorial and don't play nice in the sandbox. Our success as a synagogue is connected to the strength of the broader community. We must continue to join together in worship, acts of justice, and building community. And we must celebrate the successes of our Baltimore Jewish community!