

## BETH ISRAEL TODAY

By Lawrence Krause



### THE CONTOURS OF BETH ISRAEL

changed along with its physical structure when the congregation arrived at its new University City campus in 2001. Located centrally in San Diego's Golden Triangle, bordered by three major freeways, the campus is close to many Jewish families in North San Diego. Its five buildings, totaling more than 65,000 square feet and set on a three-acre site, permit a great variety of programs, and the award-winning, attractive appearance of the campus – with its intended flavor of Jerusalem – is very warm and welcoming.

Jerry Goldberg was president of the congregation when Beth Israel moved to its magnificent new campus. Goldberg presided over the formation of the Stand with Israel Committee, the re-establishment of the endowment committee, and the formulation and adoption by the congregation of its first mission statement, a process chaired by Liz Levine. Goldberg also took personal pride in the commitment to bring more sanctity to the business of running and leading the congregation by including introductory prayers at board and committee meetings and engaging in Torah study as an integral part of those meetings.

Jeff Silberman followed as the 38th president, a term in which he strengthened the congregation's finances with balanced budgets, revitalized fundraising efforts and developed underwriting opportunities. Silberman also helped recruit future leaders and board members. He improved staff morale and provided a voice of reason and calm during rabbinic and staff transitions.

Starting in 2005, President Barbara Buchstane Haworth led the congregation through a highly innovative period that concluded 14 years of rabbinic turnover. Haworth co-chaired with Sandy Feldman

the rabbinic transition process and search that led to the election of Rabbi Berk. She negotiated a long-term contract with Cantor Bernstein, envisioned and developed the congregation's first long-range strategic plan, reorganized the executive director's responsibilities, hired the first development director, and conceived of the leadership development institute.

Also in 2005, internationally renowned architect Daniel Libeskind drew a packed house to Beth Israel to hear about his designs for the master plan to rebuild the World Trade Center site.

Haworth's successor, Amy Corton, presided over the successful transitions of Rabbi Berk and Executive Director Lesley Mills and oversaw a period of collaboration and partnership among lay leaders, clergy and staff. Rabbi Berk, Mills and Corton established sacred priorities to build trust, partnership and community. This list of priorities was then used for mutual and ongoing evaluation, the centerpiece of their working relationship. Corton also guided the board to create a *brit kodesh*, sacred partnership, between the senior rabbi and the board. She launched the current leadership development

institute, guided the updating of the mission statement, and started a review of the long-range strategic plan.

### GOVERNANCE

Governance was not an issue for much of Beth Israel's history, when the congregation was led by knowledgeable lay leaders without benefit of a rabbi. Today, the governance structure at Beth Israel has matured significantly. Strengthening governance was a high priority to Amy Corton during her 2007–2009 presidency. She instituted a governance committee, the



## Beth Israel's Mission

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL, the historic center of Jewish life in San Diego, is an inclusive Reform congregation that offers a warm welcome and a nurturing home to all who seek a meaningful and enduring connection to Judaism.

purpose of which was to create a board of directors that is stable, understands and maintains Beth Israel's mission, vision and core values, and aids the growth of a healthy organization.

Beth Israel's mission statement and bylaws are regularly reviewed and modified when necessary. Decision-making is vested in a board of directors elected by the membership. The board is led by a president who serves for two years and is advised by an executive committee made up of officers, past presidents and upcoming leaders. Sensitive issues such as personnel matters are examined by the executive committee and, if of major consequence, then brought to the board.

The congregation has gone a long way toward creating an effective institutional memory by researching and writing its history and keeping it up to date. The leadership development institute, taught by Rabbi Berk and chaired by Cindy Polger, identifies and trains promising future leaders.

Senior rabbis are nominated by a search committee and elected by vote of the congregation. Search committees have reflected a cross-section of the congregation, including current and previous lay leadership. Assistant rabbis and cantors are nominated by the senior rabbi and approved by the board of directors.

### MODELS OF CLERGY-LAY LEADERSHIP

In 150 years, Beth Israel has engaged 20 senior rabbis, 11 assistant or associate rabbis and rabbi/educators, and seven cantors or cantorial soloists. Some rabbis served for as short as a few months, several for a number of years, and one served for 20 years.

Three models might describe the relationship between senior rabbi and lay leadership. In one model, lay leadership is clearly dominant with the senior rabbi performing assigned functions. The opposite model involves a strong senior rabbi whose ideas and initiatives dominate the life of the congregation, with lay leadership serving in an advisory capacity. The third model is one of collaboration. Beth Israel has experienced successes

and challenges with the first two models. Currently it is enjoying *shalom bayit*, peace in the house, with the collaborative model in place and a strong partnership between Rabbi Michael Berk, Executive Director Lesley Mills and lay leadership.

The lay leadership-dominant model characterized the early years of the congregation. Even when a rabbi was engaged, his tenure usually was short-lived as economic conditions in San Diego rose and fell.

The congregation also has experienced the strong senior rabbi model. Rabbi Montague N.A. Cohen in 1912 was a strong senior rabbi. His very successful rabbinate at Beth Israel was cut short, though, when the president of the CCAR steered him to a larger Reform congregation in the east. The 20-year rabbinate of Rabbi Michael Sternfield (17 years as senior rabbi) evolved into a strong senior rabbi model.

Rabbi Jonathan Stein's education and experience equipped him to perform as a strong senior rabbi; he held an MBA from the Wharton School and had served a larger congregation than Beth Israel. From 1994 until 2001, Rabbi Stein initiated and oversaw many successful programmatic initiatives in social action, lifelong learning and camping. He instituted egalitarian language in the congregation's worship, while advocating for more traditional practice in worship services. In 1998, he requested that President Jerry Rosen create a Shabbat Worship Task Force composed of a cross-section of congregants, lay leaders and clergy. The task force, chaired by Jerry Goldberg, produced a comprehensive report on the strengths and weaknesses of worship practices, as well as alternatives for change and new directions.

There were also disappointments. Rabbi Stein was concerned about the privatization of b'nai mitzvah services and sought to establish a single community Shabbat worship service by combining the Minyan service with the b'nai mitzvah service, doing away with the optional afternoon bar or bat mitzvah service, and requesting that b'nai mitzvah students share leadership of Shabbat morning services. These changes were unpopular with Minyan regulars and with many b'nai mitzvah

parents. The experiment did not ultimately succeed and was abandoned. To this day, the bar/bat mitzvah service remains essentially a private affair that seldom attracts many congregants. This is a challenge, however, felt by the entire Reform Movement.

A collaborative model was the goal of both the search committee and Rabbi Paul J. Citrin in 2004. Rabbi Citrin was seeking a rabbinate in which he could remain until he retired, and the search committee agreed that rabbinic stability was desirable. Early on, however, issues arose concerning rabbinic prerogatives and domain. This led to disappointment on the parts of both the rabbi and lay leadership, and after two years of service, Rabbi Citrin announced that he would not seek renewal of his contract the following year.

When the search committee for yet another new senior rabbi convened, members were understandably cautious. Telephone interviews, on-site visits by rabbinic candidates, and reference checking ensued. Eventually the committee narrowed its focus to one candidate, Rabbi Michael Berk. Rabbi Berk was invited to Beth Israel on several occasions to meet with senior staff and lay leadership. The search committee performed extensive due-diligence and Rabbi Berk did the same of Beth Israel. While this search process was exhausting for participants, it clearly established that both Rabbi Berk and lay leaders shared the desire for a collaborative approach.

Rabbi Berk's experience prepared him well for a collaborative rabbinate. He brought with him a successful, long tenure as a congregational rabbi and 10 years as a regional director for the URJ. Rabbi Berk was elected senior rabbi and joined Beth Israel in July 2007.



*Rabbi/Cantor Arlene Bernstein, Rabbi Michael Satz and Rabbi Michael Berk backstage at the Civic Theatre before High Holy Days services in 2011.*

## PARTNERSHIP AMONG THE CLERGY

Rabbi Berk, Rabbi/Cantor Arlene Bernstein, and Assistant Rabbi Michael Satz constitute Beth Israel's

current clergy team. Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein's longevity has enabled her to enjoy meaningful, longstanding relationships with many members for whom she has performed life-cycle events over the years.

Rabbi Satz, the newest member of Beth Israel's clergy team, came to the congregation in 2009. He gives a great deal of attention to the young people in the congregation as supervisor of the youth director and youth programming. He has also made his presence felt at services, in classrooms with youth and adult learners, at Torah study, and in outreach to young unaffiliated Jewish adults. Rabbi Satz takes sermonizing seriously, and his intellect and integrity have earned him the trust of congregants and colleagues.

Beth Israel is fortunate and quite unusual in that both Rabbi Berk's wife, Aliza Berk, and Rabbi Satz's wife, Janice Elster, are also ordained rabbis. Though each has her own professional career, both women participate frequently in programs and services at the congregation.

## RABBI BERK'S VISION OF A CARING COMMUNITY

In 2011, Rabbi Michael Berk outlined his vision to build a culture of caring at Beth Israel. "Now, forgive the chutzpah, but I want to tell you what I'd like as my anniversary gift [for the 150th anniversary year]," Rabbi Berk suggested in his Yom Kippur sermon. "I would like each of you to present a gift to your community to celebrate our sacred relationship with each other."

Rabbi Berk called for every member to find one caring mitzvah about which the member feels passionate and is willing to give to others at Beth Israel. He told the congregation that the temple plans to develop, over time, an infrastructure to better identify members in need – whether physically, emotionally, spiritually, or financially – and to try to connect them with other members who can help.

Rabbi Berk's caring community initiative accords with the congregation's strategic vision process conducted over the prior year, which identified caring community as a central focus of congregants' shared goals and dreams. This part of the vision seeks to build community by strengthening pastoral services – offering compassion, support and acts of loving-kindness – by unleashing the energy of members who are eager to be a friend, a neighbor, a fellow Jew to those in need.

Earlier, on Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Berk spoke about a multiplicity of doors to the temple, each with a mezuzah.

“Look at them and they remind you that when you cross the threshold you connect with the best teachings of your family, your friends, your community and your ancestors. They are all in our mezuzot.” Metaphorically, he talked about replacing the walls of the synagogue with hundreds of open doors so that all can find their way in and become engaged with meaningful worship, purposeful volunteer and service opportunities, creative programming and close chavurot.

The strategic visioning process of 2010–2011 was led by board members Heidi Gantwerk and Mitch Siegler and involved clergy, staff and lay leadership. Scores of priorities, goals and dreams were identified, and from those, three areas of synagogue life emerged as the central focus: community (described above), youth and lifelong learning.

In the area of youth, the vision is to make Beth Israel a second home to the congregation’s youth by providing social, educational, musical, cultural and spiritual connections. In the area of lifelong learning, the vision is to inspire members to keep learning about Judaism at every stage of their lives by creating innovative and compelling opportunities in Jewish education, music and arts, bringing congregants closer to Torah, Israel and our roots as a people.

#### RABBI/CANTOR ARLENE BERNSTEIN

In 1997, Rabbi/Cantor Arlene Bernstein came to Beth Israel, beginning the longest tenure of a cantor and close to the longest tenure of any rabbi in the congregation’s history. She was invested as a cantor and received her Master’s degree in sacred music from the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, New York campus in May 1993. After serving as cantor in a Classical Reform congregation on Long Island, then-Cantor Bernstein enthusiastically embraced the prospect of coming to Beth Israel because she looked forward to the worship and pastoral opportunities available in a congregation this size. She also welcomed the opportunity to work closely with a staff of rabbis, educators and other Jewish professionals.

Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein has served Beth Israel during the tenures of four senior rabbis and four assistant rabbis. During the interregnum between senior rabbis in 2004, she and Associate Rabbi Goloboy carried full responsibility for worship services and for the pastoral needs of the congregation. She capably wears many hats at Beth Israel. She leads services, officiates at life-cycle events, teaches in the religious school, founded and

guides the popular youth and teen choirs, and encourages members of the congregation with musical talents to participate in the musical life of the congregation. She created the family service Tizmoret (orchestra) and helped create the Chai Band that play at Erev Shabbat services and other temple events. She helped design the meditative and entirely musical Shabbat service known as Soul Food Shabbat. She works with preschool children teaching prayer, song, Hebrew and dancing, and helps prepare their concert programs three times each year. She prepares children for bar and bat mitzvah, teaches and mentors in the adult b’nai mitzvah program, and works with candidates for conversion. She teaches high school students Hebrew through American and Israeli children’s literature, and she teaches courses for adults.

Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein has exposed the congregation to a broad range of musical styles through the music she chooses for Erev Shabbat services, sermons in song, and special musical programs for Shabbat Shirah, S’lichot, and



*Rabbi/Cantor Arlene Bernstein sings with Beth Israel’s youth choir at A Night in Jerusalem.*

festival celebrations.

Among the musical events that have taken place during Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein’s tenure at Beth Israel were an Artist-in-Residence Weekend featuring Danny Maseng in May 2007, and a Ugorsky Family Concert in January 2005, featuring Eugene Ugorsky, 14-year-old violin prodigy, presented by Women of Beth Israel, with Ellen Edwards and Elaine Simon co-chairing the event. Women of Beth Israel also sponsored cantorial concerts and Cabaret Nights with the cantor, her colleagues and other performers. Some of the artists included Cantors Evan Kent, Jonathan Grant and Sheldon Merel, soloist Heidi Gantwerk, pianists Andy Mayer and Robert MacLeod, and the Chai Band. Iris and Matt Strauss hosted many events at their home over the years, including a concert by Cantor Bernstein in November 1999 to honor Century Club members. In June 2004,

## Arlene Bernstein: Cantor, Rabbi, Pastoral Presence

By Sandy Feldman and Emily Jennewein

PASTORAL KINDNESS IS as near and dear to Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein as is her music. She has touched the lives of countless children and adults through her friendship, skillful one-on-one listening, and careful guidance grounded in Jewish values and Torah. Love of Judaism and Torah as well as pastoral responsibility were among her motivations for entering rabbinical school. For seven years, while continuing to work full-time as Beth Israel's cantor, she drove to Los Angeles many times each month to attend classes at Hebrew Union College. In May 2011, at a beautiful and moving ceremony at the historic Wilshire Boulevard Temple, she was ordained a rabbi.

At the ordination service, Rabbi Michael Berk, Rabbi Michael Satz, Rabbi David Katz and Rabbi Aliza Berk walked in procession with dozens of other clergy from across the west. Each graduate was presented by a rabbi mentor – Cantor Bernstein was presented by Rabbi Jonathan Stein – and then blessed by Rabbi David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College.

In his introduction, Rabbi Stein noted that our cantor has an “extraordinary ability to connect with people of all ages and stages.... How fortunate for the Jewish people that you decided to become a cantor and now a rabbi. You could have been a therapist, musician, teacher, singer or coach,” he said. “Arlene is a Jew with a flexible spirituality, open to new ways of expression, welcoming to all while maintaining high standards.... Her innate ability to understand others, her good judgment, considered opinions, and gentle support and encouragement have made her a loyal mentor and role model.”

Nearly 600 people gathered in the Glickman-Galinson Sanctuary a week after her ordination to congratulate Rabbi/Cantor Arlene Bernstein on her sacred achievement. Affectionately called “The Cantor” for years at Beth Israel, her official title changed to Rabbi/Cantor Arlene Bernstein, but many, especially the youth, have taken to calling her “Rabbi the Cantor” or simply “RC.”

A native of Washington, D.C., Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein grew up in a traditional home. She was surrounded by Jewish music and culture, including the voices of some of the great cantors of Washington, D.C., the folk music of Israel, Theodore Bikel and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. As a young woman growing up in a traditional Jewish culture, she faced the reality that neither the cantorate nor the rabbinate was open to women at the time. She chose to pursue a musical career, receiving a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Maryland and a master's degree in



*Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein was honored for her first 10 years at Beth Israel with a concert and tribute attended by close to 1,000 people.*

performance from the New England Conservatory of Music. She played bassoon professionally for 12 years, and her work included freelancing throughout New England as well as playing principal bassoon in the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra of Israel from 1988 to 1989 and freelancing with the Jerusalem Symphony from 1988 to 1990. All of her education and performance in classical music, sacred music, Hebrew and Judaism prepared her well for synagogue life.

Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein is well regarded in the greater Jewish community. She served on the Board of the American Conference of Cantors, has sung as a soloist and in ensembles at the conventions of several national Jewish organizations, sang as a soloist with the San Diego Symphony Orchestra in a concert featuring Jewish music and Jewish performers, raised money to buy musical instruments for young Israelis through a concert featuring the youth and teen choir, led a joint Beth Israel/Federation trip to Israel, and led a trip to Israel for choir members, Chai Band members and families during which the choir gave concerts throughout the Holy Land. She has also served as Jewish clergy for the Casa de Mañana retirement home in La Jolla since 1999, spreading good will to people of all faiths through her music and pastoral kindness.

Beth Israel's love for Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein was perhaps most evident on a special evening and concert honoring her 10 years at Beth Israel, chaired by Emily Jennewein. Nearly 1,000 people packed the Glickman-Galinson Sanctuary and the David and Dorothea Garfield Social Hall to hear congratulatory remarks by Rabbi Michael Berk and Rabbi Jonathan Stein and musical tributes by renowned Jewish composer Danny Maseng, Cantor Emeritus Sheldon Merel, Beth Israel's youth, teen and adult choirs, the Chai Band, and of course, her own exquisite voice. A themed reception called *A Night in Jerusalem* capped the milestone event – a fitting tribute to a rabbi/cantor who calls Jerusalem her spiritual home and Congregation Beth Israel her family.

the American Conference of Cantors, in San Diego for its annual conference, brought an exciting concert to the Beth Israel *bimah*. In the fall of 2011, the Jewish Community Orchestra performed at Beth Israel with Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein as soloist. There have also been cantorial concerts in Yiddish and Sefardi music, special concerts on S'lichot and Yom HaShoah, and Purim spiels.

## SENIOR STAFF

The senior rabbi leads Beth Israel's clergy—senior staff team, which consists of the three clergy, executive director, program director, early childhood education director, and religious school director. The senior staff meets as a group each week, and the senior rabbi meets individually with each senior staff member and the president as well.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The executive director manages and oversees the temple's budget and finances as well as facilities, operations, membership, personnel and human resources, marketing, development and strategic planning.

The first executive director at Beth Israel was David Mitchell, who arrived in 1962 and helped define the position. After setting up a management system at Beth Israel, Mitchell was lured away by Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel near Philadelphia. A series of executive directors then served for no more than five years each until Stuart Simmons became executive director in 1988. Simmons served Beth Israel for 19 years, through the terms of five senior rabbis. Simmons was awarded the honorary title of executive director emeritus when he retired in 2007. He currently handles sales of cemetery

## Beth Israel's Membership Committee Extends a Warm Welcome

by Kaylee Brogadir

BETH ISRAEL'S MEMBERSHIP Committee is dedicated to creating a caring, warm and connected community. The committee, currently chaired by Kaylee Brogadir and Cynthia Fram, meets monthly with the temple's membership and caring community coordinator to advance initiatives designed to retain and increase membership. Its goal is to touch members directly and let them know the congregation cares about them.

The Membership Committee welcomes new Beth Israel members with a gift bag containing candles, a mezuzah, a coupon for a challah, and information on chavurot, adult classes, the Men's Club and Women of Beth Israel, the religious school, and upcoming activities. Judi Schwartz, a longtime active congregant and former board member who became membership coordinator in 2011, calls all new members after about a month of membership, and volunteers also call to welcome them and answer questions. The congregation reaches out to new members by inviting them to a Shabbat dinner and service dedicated especially to them.

The Membership Committee sponsors a free summer Shabbabaque each year, to which hundreds of members and prospective members are invited. An abbreviated

service on the grass is followed by a casual dinner of hot dogs and burgers, with music and visiting with friends. Board members, volunteers, Beth Israel Temple Youth members and staff greet all guests.

Volunteers and board members phone the entire membership at the High Holy Days. This small gesture is often well received. One member related that with his children grown he had lost connection to the temple, but that the phone call made him realize there were still opportunities for him to be involved.

The Membership Committee also coordinates quarterly congregational potluck dinners after services, which provide an opportunity to welcome new members, for chavurot to gather, for members to get to know one another and the rabbis better, and for the temple's youth to strengthen their friendships. Every Friday evening during the Oneg Shabbat, congregants welcome newcomers to Beth Israel at the Shalom Table.

The Membership Committee piloted a program in 2011 to bring neighbors together informally. Audrey and Steve Levine invited families in Carmel Valley to bring their own picnic suppers and get to know one another. Rabbi Berk led havdalah, and Youth Director Daniel Brenner led the group in song. Neighbors expressed interest in creating carpools, a congregational directory, and social opportunities for school-aged children. With the success of this first gathering, neighborhood meetings and dinners are being planned for other areas.

## The Chavurah Program at Beth Israel

FOR MORE THAN THREE decades, chavurot at Beth Israel have created smaller communities that often feel and function like extended families. Beth Israel adopted chavurot early. In fact, it was the first Reform synagogue to introduce chavurot as part of its programming. Chavurot provide an opportunity for members to get to know one another outside the synagogue while building lasting relationships within the synagogue. In a large, diverse congregation like Beth Israel, the personal relationships cultivated by chavurot have proved particularly important.

The chavurah movement began on the East Coast in the 1970s when independent groups were formed by Jewish families who were not affiliated with synagogues. Rabbi Harold Schulweis of Valley Beth Shalom, a Conservative synagogue in Encino, California, is considered the founder of the synagogue-based chavurah movement. Rabbi Jerry Levy started Beth Israel's first chavurah. Nadine Finkel, in 1978 and 1979, formed 18 Beth Israel chavurot.

The members of each chavurah create its individual personality and decide on its own blend of Jewish learning, observance of holidays and festivals, socializing, sharing of *simchas* and difficult times, and performance of mitzvot together.

Chavurot are open to members of Beth Israel and consist of approximately 8 to 10 family units – usually 15 to 20 adults, plus children – who meet monthly in members' homes and are responsible for planning their own calendars, agendas and activities based on the interests of the group. The program director oversees the complex process of placing new members in existing groups, forming new chavurot and devoting attention and nurturing to ensure that

all groups continue to thrive interpersonally and programmatically. *The Chavurah Bible*, an orientation booklet, helps chavurot with everything from ideas for get-togethers to suggestions for chavurah names.

Quarterly chavurah coordinator meetings are held to renew the groups' synagogue connections and to present programming ideas from the Beth Israel calendar. Chavurah coordinators share program ideas with one another and discuss challenges groups may be facing.

Through the years, many congregational events have honored chavurot, including a chavurah b'nai mitzvah service and reception that celebrated 13 years of chavurot at Beth Israel, a lecture by synagogue-based chavurah founder Rabbi Schulweis, celebration of chavurot in 2005 with the folk and jazz group Vocolot, and a musical weekend and concert with Danny Maseng. Chavurah Shabbat services have also provided opportunities for congregants to hear about the value of being in a chavurah as members describe what their chavurah has meant to them. Currently, Randy Savarese serves as chair of the chavurah task force, which is endeavoring to promote the benefits of chavurah membership to the entire congregation.



*Many chavurot become extended families with unique and special personalities.*

plots and mausoleum crypts for the temple.

During the years when the temple was raising funds and planning its University City campus, Simmons helped significantly with fundraising, design/development work and construction, and he oversaw the logistics surrounding the move from Third and Laurel to Towne Centre Drive. Simmons' wife, Debbie Simmons, also

was on staff for approximately 18 years, primarily serving as *Tidings* editor and coordinating other publications, and later also handling membership intake and special projects. Search committees turned to Debbie Simmons for her able assistance in planning candidates' visits and managing the many logistics of a search process.

Stuart Simmons' successor is Lesley Mills, who had

joined Beth Israel's staff a year earlier as the temple's first development director. In just a year in that position, Mills conducted a fundraising assessment, established a development advisory council that drew on the expertise of development experts within the congregation, implemented Beth Israel's first annual giving campaign, and began revitalizing the synagogue's marketing.

With more than 20 years in for-profit and non-profit sectors, including serving as director of operations and human resources for Jewish Family Service of Seattle, Mills is a career administrator who has added considerable professionalism to temple operations. Among her many accomplishments as executive director of Beth Israel, she established committee charters, created the temple's first official organizational chart, and reallocated resources to enable the temple to hire its first membership director. Mills also played a key role in writing Beth Israel's first strategic plan, including work plans for its implementation. In addition, she was instrumental in bringing best practices into budget planning and accounting controls, and she has partnered with lay leaders to develop and execute endowment-building strategies.

#### PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Bonnie Graff has served as program director at Beth Israel since 1982. In her many years of service to the temple, she has engaged hundreds of new and longtime members in rewarding committee work and organized classes, programs, fundraisers and special events that have touched thousands.

Part of the excitement and challenge the program director faces is to incorporate new and innovative programs with essential core programming. Graff and her committee members keep their eyes open for new ideas across the entire Reform Movement. They regularly review existing programming to make sure it fulfills congregants' needs and the temple's mission. Planning takes place for six months of the year in order to fine tune ideas that will attract a broad spectrum of participants. Committee discussions help set priorities, and surveys emailed to participants for feedback after programs help in planning and decision making.

The strength and success of programming at Beth Israel lies in the cooperation and connection between committee and board members and the program director. Committee members give generously of their time and

## *Older Adult Programming*

THE CHAI CLUB, formed in the late 1970s, was Beth Israel's original social and speakers group for seniors. The club held weekly Monday breakfast meetings in the temple center. Speakers addressed the interests of the group, which included medical, insurance, hospital, financial and legal matters.

As the members of the Chai Club aged and became ill, the group diminished. Eventually Rabbi Sternfield asked Louie Vener, who was on Beth Israel's staff at the time, to begin a new group called Yasher Koach, meaning "may your strength increase." The group got off to an excellent start. Yasher Koach offered dynamic programming for independent seniors and was open to Beth Israel members and non-members alike. Over time, the program became known for inventive forays into the entire community, including trips to Jewish Tijuana, behind-the-scenes tours of the San Diego Opera and San Diego Symphony's Summer Pops, and walking tours of downtown, Balboa Park, UCSD and Torrey Pines.

In 2008, the group identified a need for daytime seniors programming that would provide spiritual, intellectual and social connections. DayTimers' monthly programs were immediately successful, with such speakers as university professors, individuals prominent in the San Diego arts and cultural community, and others able to speak knowledgeably about law, politics and the restaurant scene. The vibrant committee that plans each program has made hospitality a top priority, with catered dessert receptions and greeters stationed throughout the courtyard before activities.

In keeping with its mission to include the entire community, DayTimers invited Brandeis National Committee, San Dieguito Chapter to co-sponsor three programs each year and a successful collaboration was born.

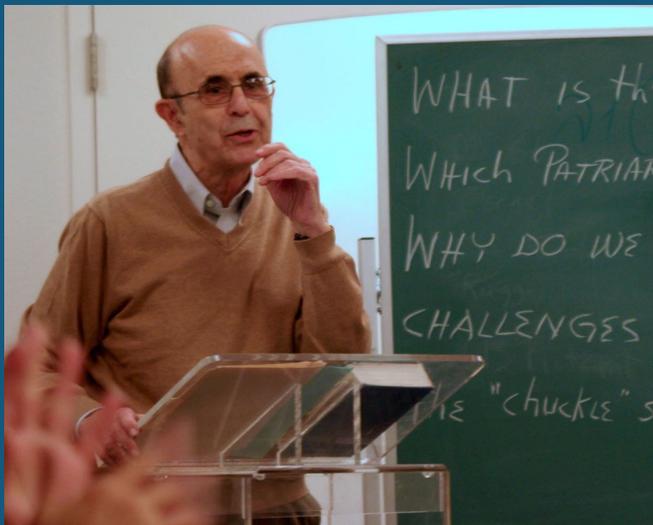
# The Adult Learners Network

By Liz Levine

FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, Beth Israel's adult education programming was headed by the senior rabbi with a small Adult Education Committee, staffed by Bonnie Graff, and a small Scholar-in-Residence Committee, staffed by Barbara Goldman. For the most part, these two committees offered a limited number of classes and programs, taught primarily by the senior rabbi and sometimes by the assistant or associate rabbi.

Eventually the Scholar-in-Residence Committee merged into the Adult Education Committee. Jerry Goldberg, who later became president of the congregation, served as the Adult Education Committee's chair for many years, and it was under his chairmanship that the committee changed its name to the Continuing Education Committee.

When Rabbis Sternfield and Coskey left the congregation in 1993, the Continuing Education Committee took on new importance. In the absence of rabbinic leadership, lay people began to propose courses and programs, find teachers (often committee members), and bring in notable scholars and speakers. With close collaboration between the program director and lay leaders, adult education programming expanded, and the Continuing Education Committee became the ALEINU Committee. This name came from the Hebrew word *aleinu* – “it is our duty” (to continue to study throughout our lifetimes) – and served as an acronym for Adult Learners Network. Liz Levine chaired the committee at this pivotal time.



*Bible classes taught by Sydney Wexler and other scholars consistently draw devoted adult learners.*



*Among the many popular ALEINU/Adult Learners Network programs was an annual Shabbaton held in Julian at the mountain home of Marge and Joe Rubenson.*

It was at this same time that the ALEINU Committee developed its own fund with a \$1,000 challenge grant from an anonymous donor and began printing brochures listing its complete annual offerings. From a small 8 ½ x 11 trifold to a multi-panel, four-color brochure, the Adult Learners Network's catalogues of classes, programs, and special events testified to the congregation's growth and maturation in adult education programming.

Over the years, the ALEINU Committee has become a jewel in Beth Israel's crown. Because of the popularity of its programming and the high profile of adult education in the congregation, congregants often wish to join the committee. With limited seating around the conference table and the wish to have active participants on the committee rather than those just wanting to give advice, the committee occasionally has had to limit committee membership, only half joking that it is looking for worker bees, not drones.

The approximately 20 members of the Adult Learners Network/ALEINU Committee not only suggest programs, but also help bring them to fruition. ALEINU courses, programs and special events range from Introduction to Judaism, a multi-week course, to an adult b'nai mitzvah program, a two-year course of study. Hebrew is offered every year, as well as Bible courses, book discussions, speakers on a wide variety of topics, an annual Scholar-in-Residence weekend, numerous four-to six-week classes, and an annual interfaith dialogue, including Jewish, Protestant, Catholic and Muslim clergy.

Other adult education offerings have included Judaic arts classes, such as Digital Photography (with a Jewish eye), No-Sew Tallit, Image Transfer, and Write Your Own Haggadah. Meditation workshops, email courses, and Israeli dancing have all been offered. Members have gone  
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on bus trips to Tijuana and the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles. Shabbat Lunch 'n' Learn programs are taught by clergy and lay leaders on a variety of topics, and Torah study (though not specifically under ALEINU auspices) is held every Shabbat morning before services.

The committee also premiered live broadcasts via satellite from the 92nd Street Y in New York City, outdoor films in the summer, and Café ALEINU, an innovative and highly successful program of 45-minute courses with music and refreshments in the temple courtyard. During the congregation's 150th anniversary celebration, ALEINU classes and programs focused on the Torah, dovetailing with Beth Israel's Torah project. The committee arranged programs with *Soferet* (scribe) Julie Seltzer explaining how a Torah scroll is written and the tools and processes she uses. Other programs with the scribe looked at mystical understandings of the Hebrew letters and the nature of Torah and revelation. One novel event was a challah workshop conducted by



*Participants in Jacqueline Jacobs' 2005 tallit-making course model their handiwork.*

Seltzer with participants creating edible art based on the week's Torah portion.

Chairs and members of the Adult Learners Network/ALEINU Committee have been especially dedicated to Jewish education and continued Jewish learning. A number of ALEINU Committee members went on to serve on Beth Israel's board of directors, and many have also served on San Diego's Agency for Jewish Education board (now part of the Center for Jewish Culture). In this way, the ALEINU Committee has had an inestimable impact on congregation-wide learning, and on lifelong learning in the wider Jewish community.



*Al Ray's beginning Hebrew classes introduce adult learners not only to the Hebrew alphabet and common Hebrew words, but also to Kabbalah, Jewish law, lore and legend.*

talent because they have faith that their efforts will culminate in well attended and well respected programs. Committees frequently develop a spirit of *chavurah*, friendship, essential in such a large congregation. Members get involved and stay involved in committees and temple activities because they love and take pride in the work they do and the programs they attend, and because their contributions and involvement strengthen their sense of Beth Israel as a home and family.

Under Graff's direction, Beth Israel has been

recognized nationally for its outstanding Outreach to Interfaith programs, which won the URJ's Belin awards in 2003, 2005 and 2009. The congregation has received numerous other national awards for programs she directed, including the Irving J. Fain Social Action Award Honorable Mention, the Congregation of Learners Award for Adult Education, and the Belin Award for chavurah programming.

In 2009, the congregation honored Graff for 25 years of outstanding service with a special Shabbat

service and dinner called *Bouquets for Bonnie*. During the celebration evening, Graff expressed that Beth Israel is her second home, her calling, and that the blessings she has received as program director have been many. To show her appreciation, she donated a beautiful piece of art to the congregation depicting the joy and celebration of the Torah. She gave this gift “with love and gratitude for giving me both a career and a second home for the past quarter century.” Graff is widely acclaimed by the Reform Movement and has served twice on the national board of Program Directors of Reform Judaism. She speaks regularly on panels at national and regional URJ Biennials.

## RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

The high priority on religious education of Beth Israel’s children has not wavered since Marie Blochman established the congregation’s first religious school in 1886.



*Children enjoy dressing up as dreidels for a Chanukah presentation.*

## The Scholar-in-Residence Program

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL’S first scholar-in-residence was Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, in February 1969. In the decades since, the congregation has continued to bring exceptional scholars and thinkers to San Diego every year for engaging and thought-provoking programs. At its beginning, the Scholar-in-Residence program was named in memory of Murray D. Goodrich and was the single adult educational focal point of the congregation. Since that time, adult education has expanded exponentially, but the SIR program remains a highlight in the congregation’s programming.

In the 1970s, the Continuing Education Committee inaugurated a unique month-long Scholar-in-Residence program that lasted for several years. Retired rabbis were engaged to live in San Diego and lecture, teach and sermonize during that period. Among them, Rabbis Harold Saperstein, Roland Gittlesohn, Herbert Bronstein, Jerome Malino, and Jack Reimer came to speak to chavurot, teach classes, and give talks, sermons and *divrei Torah*.

SIR weekend programming typically includes an Erev Shabbat dinner and service with sermon, programs on Shabbat morning and afternoon, and occasional Saturday evening lectures preceded by havdallah; the weekend is capped off by Sunday brunch and a final lecture. A standout in educational programming, the weekends draw as many as 160 attendees and produce a feeling of *ruach*, spirit, and spirituality that add immensely to the scholarship.

Scholars have included Rabbis Marvin Tokayer, Gunther Plaut, David Woznica, Irwin Kula, and Devorah Weisberg as well as Steven Berk, Tamar Eshkenazi, Judith Abrams, Nathan Laufer, Paul Liptz and Richard Elliot Friedman, among many others. A range of topics address Jewish history, Bible, spirituality, Israel, the Holocaust, the Reform Movement and more.

During the congregation’s 150th anniversary celebration, the highly acclaimed Speakers Series brought not just one, but seven, notable scholars to Beth Israel throughout the year. These speakers included Dr. Deborah Lipstadt, Rabbi Lennard Thal, Rabbi David Wolpe, Rabbi David Saperstein, Dr. Kenneth Stein, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, and Rabbi David Ellenson.



*Madrichim serve as assistant teachers, song leaders, junior counselors and role models for younger religious school students.*

Helene “Eemah” Schlafman was a transformational leader of the religious school. In her almost 20 years as director – and many more years before and after – she designed programs to instill in students and adults a commitment to Jewish continuity. A loving atmosphere within the school promoted attachment to the congregation and to the Jewish people. Moreover, Schlafman developed programs that linked school life with congregational life. Among her many successes were a Hebrew Center, enrichment programs, the madrichim program, Show BIS, and overnight and weekend camping opportunities.

After Schlafman retired as director in 1995 to return to teaching in Beth Israel’s schools, the religious school was led by several directors. Jane Cohen, Schlafman’s assistant, served as interim director in 1996, and Rabbi Dana Magat and Susan Stein coordinated the religious school the following year. Rabbi Sheryl Nosan served for three years starting in 1997. She was followed by Michael Kessel, then Dr. Harvey Raben, both of whom also directed Beth Israel Day School until it closed in 2006.

From 2008 to 2011, Rabbi David Katz directed the religious school while serving in a new, short-lived senior staff position as director of congregational learning. He formed an advisory council and sounding board composed primarily of parents who were educators. Rabbi Katz initiated activities to bring a sense of excitement to Jewish learning, including Honey Cake Happening before Rosh Hashanah, another day when staff and clergy dressed as Bible heroes to welcome children to religious school, the Hebrew Kids’ Choice Awards, and Lehrhaus, three Sunday mornings during which adults learned together in informal spaces.

Anna Newton organized and revitalized the library in 2009.

Ava Keenen Kurnow, with more than 30 years of experience leading religious schools in Phoenix and Albuquerque, joined Beth Israel part-time as director of Hebrew studies in 2010 and became the congregation’s full-time religious school director in 2011. Her first challenge was to establish clear definition of responsibilities and improve accountability and record keeping. Kurnow rebalanced class time to favor the teaching of Hebrew and increased efforts to include special needs students. She also set a goal of implementing a variety of teaching techniques to improve learning.

Kurnow developed plans to enhance the school with parental participation, collaborate with Rabbi Satz and the youth director to integrate educational and social programming, involve the rabbis regularly in teaching students and parents, and absorb the mitzvah of social action as part of religious education.

In 2010, as a result of a major gift to the temple’s endowment campaign, Beth Israel named its school the Lee and Frank Goldberg Family Religious School. Approximately 450 students are currently enrolled in kindergarten through grade 12. Kindergarten through sixth grade classes meet Sunday mornings, and grades four through seven meet an additional afternoon each week. High school classes meet one evening a week, beginning with dinner.

The religious school program is designed to create a Jewish social environment that will encourage and build interpersonal relationships and contribute to students’ positive sense of belonging to the Jewish people and Beth Israel. Ties between youth groups and the religious school have been strengthened in recent years.

A newly formed Youth Engagement Think Tank has brought together parents and educators in the preschool, religious school and youth department to re-envision the way families connect to congregational educational programs. With guidance from Rabbi Satz, Kurnow and Director of Early Childhood Education Tammy Vener, the group is strategizing about the needs of families in order to engage them more fully in congregational life.

Sunday mornings during the school year Café Beth Israel transforms the David and Dorothea Garfield Social Hall into a comfortable gathering place for parents and other adults. Friends congregate on couches and at tables to visit, play games, study, read or knit while they enjoy bagels and coffee provided by the Men’s Club and Women of Beth Israel during religious school hours.



*Exuberant children perform on stage at Beth Israel at Third and Laurel.*

## From Nursery School to Early Childhood Education

*I*N 1951, BETH ISRAEL committed to opening a nursery school with the intention of having a place for the congregation's youngest children to learn about the Jewish holidays. Later, in 1977, when a preschool was reinstated, it was named the Sid Rubin Preschool, and with the move to the new campus it became the Bill and Sid Rubin Preschool.

Marline Gendelman was the director of the Sid Rubin Preschool for 20 years. When she retired, Tammy Vener was hired to coordinate all of the Bill



*Early childhood education has continued to evolve since Marline Gendelman opened Beth Israel's preschool in 1977.*

and Sid Rubin Early Childhood Education programs and give them a central place and connection.

Vener has made changes over the years to meet the needs of a changing community. *Mommy, Daddy and Me* is now *My Family and Me*. Applications ask for the names of Parent 1 and Parent 2. Extended care is available to meet the needs of working parents. These are all important expressions of the congregation's desire to meet the needs of families of all kinds and make them feel welcome.

The past decade has demonstrated growth and understanding about the influence of early childhood education. Families that engage in synagogue life through ECE are more likely to remain connected for the long term. When families begin their Jewish journey with their children at an early age, they make lifelong friends and are vested in a commitment to and understanding of the importance of Jewish life.

The URJ has made a tremendous commitment to ECE, hiring a full-time early childhood director to serve the needs of Reform congregations looking for help in either starting or improving their early childhood programs. ECE-RJ (Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism) is an affiliate organization of the URJ. Tammy Vener is a founding member and currently is honoring Beth Israel with her service as president of this national organization.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Tammy Vener has directed the very successful Bill and Sid Rubin Early Childhood Education (ECE) program at Beth Israel since 1998. She had been a fourth-grade teacher for three years in Beth Israel Day School, and after her first child was born, she continued as the science teacher and as the unit head in charge of the older campers at the former Camp Beth Israel, where her husband, Louie Vener, was the director.

Heart and soul of the thriving ECE department, Vener is the engineer of Early Childhood Education's remarkable growth and creative programming at Beth Israel. The congregation is known throughout the country for cutting-edge Jewish programming that engages children and their families.

The Bill and Sid Rubin Preschool provides children with a warm, loving environment that helps them transition from family to school, is rich in Jewish culture, tradition and values, and offers two-, three- and five-day programs, as well as extended day care. The ECE program also offers Beth Israel Toddler Transitions (BITTS), a weekday program for children 6–24 months and their parents; My Family and Me, which features Jewish-themed songs, art and cooking activities; and a popular summer camp for preschool-aged children.

Vener's goal for all Bill and Sid Rubin Early Childhood Education programs is to engage the entire family in Jewish life. Every child, parent and grandparent is warmly recognized, welcomed and encouraged to become involved in Jewish life and in the life of the congregation. Reaching out to the community, the preschool supports the Adopt a Family program of Jewish Family Service at holiday times, and preschool classes interact with participants in the Senior Center at Beth Israel sponsored by JFS. Both age groups delight when the little ones play with seniors.

These early childhood education programs are also intended to fit seamlessly with the congregation's religious school, and many religious school children are graduates of ECE programs. Vener meets with Kurnow on a regular



*Tammy Vener directs Beth Israel's Early Childhood Education program and serves as the national president of the Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism.*

basis. In addition, Beth Israel's clergy frequently attend the preschool's Friday morning Shabbat services, and Rabbi/Cantor Bernstein provides music training to the children.

For many families new to San Diego and without local relatives, Beth Israel – and particularly the ECE department – becomes an extended family. The department maintains wait lists for its school and programs, determined to keep the programs small enough to sustain their warmth and celebrate the individuality of each child.

## Welcoming Newcomers to Judaism

*By Karen Shein*

BETH ISRAEL HAS A proud and distinguished history in the area of outreach. At the time of the congregation's founding and throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century, Judaism's major movements viewed intermarriage as a threat to the future of the Jewish people. Then, in the 1980s, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC, created great controversy by calling for Reform congregations to approach intermarriage as an opportunity rather than a threat. Pointing out that intermarriage was a natural consequence of America's open society, he advanced the idea that non-Jewish partners who were actively welcomed into synagogue and Jewish life would prove to be a great gift to the Jewish community.

Beth Israel enthusiastically embraced this approach, becoming an early pioneer in outreach. Our program directors worked with clergy to provide a warm and welcoming environment for interfaith families. Our first program, called Mixed Doubles, debuted in 1978 under then-Program Director Nadine Finkel. The group met monthly in homes, at synagogue and at appropriate program venues such as field trips to Jewish museums. Together, they celebrated Jewish holidays, cooked Jewish foods, learned prayers, attended weddings, baby showers, *brit milah*, baby namings, and conversions. Interfaith couples were integrated into the chavurah program as well and made longstanding connections to one another and the congregation. Many of the congregation's leaders

today and over the years are graduates of Mixed Doubles.

Within a few years, under the leadership of Program Director Bonnie Graff, Beth Israel had an active Outreach Committee. Programs were designed with an emphasis on welcoming and inclusivity and marketed to the entire community. The intention was to make Beth Israel known for its open door policy. Most programs were offered free of charge and all were open to the community. Our outreach programs have included how-to workshops to teach newcomers to Judaism how to celebrate Shabbat and Havdallah, Chanukah, Sukkot, Passover, and the High Holy Days. Synagogue tours led by clergy offer an up-close look at the Torah scrolls and other ritual items and take the mystery out of Shabbat services.

In recent years the Outreach Committee enhanced Basic Judaism classes, encouraging student integration into the life of our synagogue community. Discussion groups for interfaith couples and grandparents of interfaith children were facilitated by therapists; topics included the December Dilemma and how to raise children in an interfaith family. A unique conversion mentor program offered mentors to individuals going through the conversion process, and an Outreach Shabbat dinner and service annually celebrates the contributions of those who have become part of our community from many backgrounds and through various journeys to Judaism.

In 2003, our outreach programming became a model for Reform synagogues nationwide when Beth Israel earned the URJ's prestigious Belin Award for excellence in outreach programming. The congregation earned a second Belin Award in 2005 and a third in 2009. The several awards recognized the connection between our outreach programs and our very successful chavurah network, as well as the excellence of our website marketing to interfaith families.

In recent years the Outreach Committee tried a different and very effective strategy of merging the Basic Judaism curriculum with outreach programs. This not only enhanced attendance at programs but also meshed the didactic classes with more experiential programs.

Through our outreach programming, Beth Israel has welcomed hundreds of individuals who have made

the decision to explore Judaism, to convert to Judaism, and/or to raise Jewish children. Jews by choice make up a significant percentage of our membership today. The impact these individuals have had on Beth Israel and our Jewish community is profound. They are among our most active members, reading Torah in our



*Beth Israel offers a warm welcome and a nurturing home to all who seek a meaningful and enduring connection to Judaism.*

services, teaching in our schools, serving as committee chairs, board members, board presidents and distinguished leaders in the larger Jewish community. The non-Jewish partners in our interfaith couples often play pivotal roles in the creation of Jewish homes, transporting children to religious school, observing Jewish traditions, supporting and encouraging Jewish choices.

Beth Israel's outreach program is a direct response to the Torah's reminder to "welcome the stranger, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt." Like Naomi in the book of Ruth, who responds with a warm embrace when Ruth declares, "Wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God," Beth Israel expresses its welcome to newcomers through the commitment in our mission statement to be a "welcoming home to all who seek an enduring connection to Judaism." As we mark our 150th anniversary, we celebrate this proud tradition and our reputation as a synagogue committed to opening the doors of Judaism to all who seek to enter.

## BETH ISRAEL TODAY

Ron Simon was elected president in 2009. His proudest accomplishment was the renewal of Rabbi Berk's contract, which assured the stability of the congregation's senior clergy for many years to come. Simon also worked with two major supporters of Beth Israel to develop significant gifts that initiated the endowment campaign and allowed the temple to name the Lee and Frank Goldberg Family Religious School and install the Sophie and Arthur Brody Tree of Life in the Price Family Courtyard. Simon also presided over a year of planning the 150th anniversary celebration, chaired by Past President Mary Ann Scher, and an endowment campaign, chaired by Past Presidents Jeff Silberman and Amy Corton.



*Children and adults enjoyed a festive cupcake reception as part of Beth Israel's 150th Opening Event.*

For several years before he became president, Simon chaired the temple's finance committee, which meets monthly to review operating results, investment results, and the annual audit. The committee reviews each year's budget, prepared by the executive director, and originates ideas for dues structure and investment activities. Operating a large synagogue and funding its many programs and services takes significant resources. Since membership dues no longer can be counted upon as the primary source of revenue to operate a synagogue, and no one is turned away for inability to pay full dues, the finance committee strongly supports the campaign to grow Beth Israel's endowment. An enhanced endowment will enable the temple to continue to provide leading programming in the areas of synagogue life that are the central focus of its strategic vision: community, youth and lifelong learning.

When elected president in 2011, Emily Jennewein inherited a stable congregation. The rabbinate was secure, the membership was steadfast, and the staff was dedicated, energetic and hard working. Lay leadership,

clergy and senior staff enjoyed a cooperative, positive partnership. Jennewein had the luxury of inheriting a congregation whose strength derives from its commitment to building community, to helping people find ways to connect to Judaism and to one another.

Jennewein herself was responsible for moving Beth Israel into the digital age in 2002. She built a website for the religious school, and in recognition of its value she was encouraged to create a comprehensive website for the entire congregation. In time, *www.cbisd.org* became an integral part of Beth Israel's communications network, and *Tidings* Editor Karen Shein became the congregation's first staff webmaster. Jennewein also introduced the congregation's first e-newsletter. Several blogs have been established to enhance communication with members, including a day-by-day account from participants on the Israel trip led by Rabbi Berk in March 2011. The congregation is active on Facebook and Twitter, as well.

Chief among the challenges that remain is to set Beth Israel's finances on a sound footing. The 150th anniversary endowment campaign was designed to significantly enhance the congregation's financial foundation so that Beth Israel, the historic center of Jewish life in San Diego, will continue to serve the Jewish community, in the words of our mission statement, "as an inclusive Reform congregation that offers a warm welcome and a nurturing home to all who seek a meaningful and enduring connection to Judaism." A substantially larger endowment will be a powerful mechanism to propel Beth Israel into the next 150 years.



*Jerry Goldberg, Torah Project chair, and Rabbi Michael Berk were among the first to scribe Beth Israel's new Torah with Soferet Julie Seltzer.*

## LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Beth Israel's 150th anniversary year was conceived as a time to remember and retell the stories of the congregation's history, and a time to dream about the stories yet to be told. Under the guidance of 150th Anniversary Chair Mary Ann Scher, Beth Israel celebrated its 150th year with prominent speakers and memorable programs. At a spectacular Opening Event, the congregation was honored by the mayor of San Diego, three U.S. congressmen, three leading mayoral candidates, the sheriff, and several other dignitaries. Hundreds of people sang and danced in the aisles at the concert by Jewish music superstar Craig Taubman. A festive courtyard reception capped this extraordinary day in September 2011.

Throughout the year, a Speakers Series brought seven renowned Jewish scholars to Beth Israel for inspiring, thought-provoking evenings that also served as opportunities to honor the congregation's leaders and members for their contributions to the temple and community. A highlight of the year was the three-temple tour that took members to each of the synagogue's homes for special events centered on Beth Israel's history.



*Women of Beth Israel board members participated in a Torah dedication ceremony as Elaine Moser placed her hand on the scribe's hand.*

Finally, throughout this historic year, the congregation participated in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and mitzvah of creating a new Torah scroll. Members of all ages dedicated letters, words, verses, Torah portions, and more, working one-on-one with *Soferet* Julie Seltzer in letter fill-in ceremonies. One of only two women to have scribed a Torah scroll, Seltzer became familiar to congregants as a warm and outstanding teacher who presented enriching educational programs.



*Men's Club President Ben Schneider is shown scribing with *Soferet* Julie Seltzer as Men's Club board members observe.*

## THE JOURNEY

Congregation Beth Israel has evolved from 10 men trying to hold on to their Jewish identity in the wild west of the 19th century to a vibrant, multifaceted Jewish religious institution of the 21st century. San Diego itself has evolved from an isolated settlement in the extreme southwest corner of the United States to America's eighth largest city during the same time span. These two phenomena are closely related.

For many years, Beth Israel was the only Jewish congregation in San Diego, and its fortunes rose and fell with population swings. The 21st century presents challenges to Beth Israel as well as to San Diego, but the prospects are bright. The congregation is thriving with a wonderfully committed clergy, lay leadership and professional staff. Understanding and responding to the challenges and the opportunities will occupy all parties until the next chapter of this remarkable story is written.

If the past is any indication, it will be a dynamic story, filled with the contributions of dedicated individuals following the footsteps of those who have brought us to this time.



