Looking Forward—
The Optimistic Leadership of
Rabbi Deborah Waxman

PLUS:

A Meeting of the Minds—
The Reconstructionist Plenum

Making the Most of
Shabbat and Holidays
CONTENTS

2 BOARD OF GOVERNORS

3 A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

4 A MEETING OF THE MINDS
   Rabbi Nina Mandel, ’03, discusses how the movement plenum appeals to her Reconstructionist ideals—and how it makes sense to her inner anthropologist.

7 DIVE INTO THE DIALOGUE
   Rabbi David Teutsch, Ph.D., and Rabbi Richard Hirsh, ’81, invite readers into a lively conversation about practices for Shabbat and Jewish holidays in Volume Two of A Guide to Jewish Practice.

9 LOOKING FORWARD
   Rabbi Deborah Waxman, ’99, Ph.D., brings to the post of president a sharp mind and a sense of optimism continually inspired by the people around her.

13 A MOMENT OF HOLINESS: IT’S IN YOUR HANDS
   The updated Ritualwell.org offers you new possibilities.

14 ANY SPACE CAN BE SACRED
   Student Nathan Weiner finds holiness in hospital rooms as well as on the bimah.

15 JUDAISM ON CAMPUS, BUILT TO LAST
   Student Kami Knapp creates a vital Jewish presence at Temple University.

17 CHANGE IS IN THE AIR
   At Camp JRF, summer is the season of transformation—and fun.

19 ESTHER’S LASTING LEGACY
   We remember the vibrant Esther Neustätter Bates, z”l, a generous benefactor.

20 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

21 IT’S A MATCH!
   Your gift to the New Minyan Match can truly make a difference.

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We’ve Made the Switch
This year, for the first time, you can read our annual report only here, online. But we’re open to your feedback for next year. If you prefer a print edition, email us at info@rrc.edu and let us know.
You can also download a printable PDF here.
THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST
RABBINICAL COLLEGE
CULTIVATES AND
SUPPORTS JEWISH
LIVING, LEARNING
AND LEADERSHIP
FOR A CHANGING
WORLD.

Approved by the board of
governors on October 6, 2013

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W hen I applied to RRC more than 20 years ago, I had a much clearer sense of the “peoplehood” component of being a rabbi than I did about the expressly religious component. I knew that I wanted to be with people at moments of intensity—celebrations, such as weddings and baby namings, and more challenging times, such as illnesses and shivah minyans—to help them find meaning and connection. I also wanted to help people find deeper meaning in the quieter, less intense moments of life. To my mind, then as now, Judaism provides a rich framework for living, in its orientation toward big questions: Why are we here? What should we do while we are here? But beyond the study of theology, I was most interested in conversation and community building—across generations and, even more, among contemporary Jews. I was a bit startled when, at my rabbinical school interview, a member of the committee asked me about my personal theology. To myself, I said, “But you’re the Reconstructionists! You’re not supposed to even ask me about God.” To the committee, I said, “I experience the divine in the faces of my family and friends.”

My rabbinical studies and my rabbinical work since then have given me ample opportunity to explore my relationship with God, both as a private individual and as a Jewish leader. Through study, through conversation with peers and teachers, and through chaplaincy training and congregational work, I have discerned conceptualizations of the divine that nourish me and that are the bedrock of my conversations with others about questions of ultimate meaning.

Yet after all these years, I still find my deepest experience of the divine in my encounters with other people. My first months as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities have been filled with encounters that feel infused with holiness. As I have traveled around the country visiting Reconstructionist lay leaders and rabbis, and when I return home to the staff, students and faculty congregated in Wyncote, PA, I am struck again and again by the integrity and intensity of the individuals who are drawn to a Reconstructionist approach and by the inclusive and embracing communities we are able to create.

One of my highest priorities is to fulfill the potential of the restructuring that we undertook in 2012. Reconstructionist Judaism is uniquely poised to offer leadership at this moment in Jewish history. I am excited to be implementing a strategic plan that was created expressly for the combined organization and is designed to increase our efficiency, our effectiveness and our impact. There are many exciting initiatives across our movement, some of which you will learn about in this report.

It is a great honor to serve as president. Thank you for your trust in me. I pledge to you that I will lead accountably, transparently and collaboratively. I look forward to working with you to continue to advance the Reconstructionist movement.
A Meeting of the Minds

By Rabbi Nina H. Mandel, ’03

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST PLENUM IS A LIVELY GROUP THAT BRINGS TOGETHER REPRESENTATIVES FROM EACH OF OUR AFFILIATED CONGREGATIONS AND HAVUROT TO DISCUSS IMPORTANT ISSUES—SOME INTERNAL TO THE MOVEMENT AND SOME THAT GROW OUT OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD. THE PLENUM VOTES ON VARIOUS MATTERS AND INFLUENCES THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF RECONSTRUCTIONISM. THE CURRENT ASSEMBLY CONVERSES ON FACEBOOK ON AN ONGOING BASIS AND GATHERS FOR BUSINESS MEETINGS TWICE A YEAR IN A VIRTUAL FORMAT. IN FALL 2013, AT THE PLENUM’S FIRST MEETING UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE MOVEMENT'S COMBINED ORGANIZATION, 53 VOTING REPRESENTATIVES—A NUMBER FAR EXCEEDING THE 27 NEEDED TO ACHIEVE A QUORUM—CAME TOGETHER VIA AN ENTHUSIASTIC TELEPHONE CONFERENCE. IN THIS ESSAY, RABBI NINA MANDEL, ’03, DISCUSSES HOW THE PLENUM, WHICH DEMONSTRATES VALUES-BASED DECISION MAKING AMONG A BROAD ARRAY OF STAKEHOLDERS, APPEALS TO HER RECONSTRUCTIONIST IDEALS—AND HOW IT MAKES GREAT SENSE TO HER INNER ANTHROPOLOGIST.

Before coming to RRC, I worked in community development, putting my academic background in anthropology to good use. My jobs were all about helping communities to identify their wants, needs and priorities, and helping them to turn those into a plan of action. Whether the goal was to create a new soup kitchen or to support a board as it undertook strategic planning, the approach was the same: I made opportunities for needs to be heard and explored ways to craft the most effective strategies. And I did a lot of listening.

When I decided to become a rabbi, I was immediately attracted to the Reconstructionist movement because it honored the same approach to community I knew to be successful. Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan’s idea that Jewish peoplehood is the compelling factor for an evolving religious civilization made sense to me. The anthropologist and social scientist in me understood that communitas could be compelling and that subgroups of a larger culture need to have control over their manifestations of shared symbols and meanings. In other words, Jews feel affinity with and responsibility toward one another simply because we are Jews. And each community of Jews will likely have a different relationship to the traditions and practices of Judaism based on its own wants, needs and priorities.

As I became more knowledgeable about the movement, I was even more impressed that Kaplan’s vision of peoplehood seemed embedded in its operating structure. The concept of a values-based decision-making process, which engages various...
stakeholders and brings to the fore the core values of the Jewish people, affirmed my understanding of how to empower communities. I was also moved by Reconstructionism’s commitment to understanding the roots of Jewish tradition and by its vision of how to thoughtfully and consciously invoke change within it.

Nearly 20 years have passed since I chose the rabbinate and the Reconstructionist path. As a student, as a rabbi, as a member of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, and as a board member of RRC and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities, I have both witnessed and participated in the active engagement of this community-based process. I know that at times it seems ponderous, and sometimes the results are imperfect. But I still believe that broad-based engagement, with innovation that uses the values of the Jewish people as its touchstone, has served us well.

Most recently, this was affirmed for me when I served on the new Congregational Services Committee and participated in the first plenum of the combined organization. In the early meetings of the committee, I was profoundly grateful for the opportunity to hear how the representatives from congregations, the College and the movement overall expressed their hopes and concerns about how the new movement structure would develop.

By the time we got around to the plenum conference call, it was clear that hearing the voices of all constituents and doing so within a Jewish idiom had remained a priority for us and for the new leadership. We were able to unite Jews across the country on a computer-supported phone call and to use social media to introduce and follow up the conversation. Yet there was something ancient—maybe even Talmudic—about the plenum. The Talmud can be understood as a virtual conversation—across time and place—among people who are interacting and exchanging ideas, and creating a resource for Jews to best use Jewish tradition in service to their own communities. With our plenum call we were following in the footsteps of generations of Jews who were deeply invested in making sure the Jewish people would be able to adapt and stay vital in changing environments. The rabbi and the anthropologist in me could not be more proud.

The next plenum meeting will be held on May 4. Additional information is available at www.jewishrecon.org/plenum.

Nina Mandel is the rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Sunbury, PA.
Congregations and havurot make up the Jewish Reconstructionist Communities. All are rooted in tradition and committed to egalitarianism and inclusion, but they grow in many different soils and come in different varieties.

**How do our communities sort out by size?**

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<th>Size</th>
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<th>Medium</th>
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<tr>
<td>(more than 300 households):</td>
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**When does our Shabbat start and end? It depends...**

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**LONGEST AFFILIATED** with Reconstructionist Judaism is the Society for the Advancement of Judaism.

**AFFILIATED IN 2013–14** with Reconstructionist Judaism are Beit Chaverim (North Palm Beach, FL), Selah (Stamford, CT), and Temple Emmanuel (Wakefield, MA).
Briefly, what was the original impetus for these Guides?

TEUTSCH: It is foolish for us to say that Judaism is a way of life unless we help people understand the way it can speak to us every day. Also, congregations, individuals and rabbis need guidance in making decisions. But they don’t want to be told what to do; they want help to think things through. That’s why the Guide takes a values-based approach and is not univocal. Readers can enter into the dialogue happening right on the page, rather than feeling like they’re confronted with an authoritarian author.

The pages have the feeling of Talmud. Was that your intention?

TEUTSCH: When Volume One came out, someone said, “This is like a new Talmud, because it’s opening up the dialogue without the assumption that the previous practice has to be repeated.” In the Reconstructionist movement we say, “Tradition has a voice, not a veto.” In order to give tradition a full voice, you first have to explore what it says and why. This book, like the first volume, opens you up to do that. And then you say, “Okay, here are all these wonderful pieces of tradition. Which ones fit into my life, and how?”

The book opens with Rabbi Jacob Staub, ‘77, Ph.D., offering 12 different kavanot (intentions) for Shabbat. Do you have a favorite?

TEUTSCH: Jacob wrote the best essay I’ve ever seen on contemporary Jewish Shabbat practice. What he does so powerfully in this essay is to say, “Here is an incredible array of ways that you can very gradually make Shabbat part of your life, without having to feel like you’re compromising the other things you really care about.” The richness of different points of view is huge. We’re certainly trying to say that your whole life can be transformed by a completely different awareness of your sense of time.

You’ve been trained as a rabbi, an organizational manager and an ethicist. Which of those “hats” do you wear most often when you work on these books?

TEUTSCH: I make no separation at all. Asking people to live lives of greater richness and fulfillment and moral responsibility is not three different things; it’s all the same thing. For example, I’m a meditator—
not because it’s a Jewish thing to do but because it adds to my life. I can bring the wisdom and experience of my Jewish life to that meditation, and I can also interpret what’s happening in meditation through a Jewish lens.

Judaism is not instead of anything you’re already doing that provides meaning, joy and satisfaction. Think of all the parts of your life as ultimately fitting together so that each piece enriches every other piece. That’s precisely the challenge for anyone interested in the future of American Jewish life today. It will need to be more rigorous, spiritually deep and emotionally satisfying than it has been. The sources are there; our role is to help people discover them.

In what ways do you think Reconstructionist philosophy has most changed our observance of Shabbat and the holidays?

TEUTSCH: One of Kaplan’s really big insights was: If we want to pass on the tradition, we have to put much more emphasis on what you need to do, not what you need to avoid. That’s important for the holidays! Making a sukkah is a lot more important than whether you stay home from work on the first day of Sukkot.

The second piece is how to make observance an anchoring experience for family life and for Jewish communal life without sacrificing the search for personal meaning in it. We want to help people discover ways to do Shabbat and holidays that add substantially to their lives, rather than just going through the motions. We want Judaism to be a source of uplift and personal sustenance.


“Judaism is not instead of anything you’re already doing that provides meaning, joy and satisfaction. Think of all the parts of your life as ultimately fitting together so that each piece enriches every other piece,” says Teutsch.
On a Saturday morning in 1979, Deborah Waxman stood before congregation Beth Hillel in Bloomfield, CT, as a bat mitzvah, thinking it was perfectly natural for her to be there. She had been schooled in the words of the prayers as part of her preparation at this small, progressive Conservative congregation, and by that morning, Waxman, a quick study, knew the entire service.
“I didn’t realize it was a big deal that there was a girl up there on the bimah,” she says. “I also did not know that there was any restriction on women becoming rabbis—that in the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, women had been ordained for less than a decade, and that it wasn’t possible in the Conservative movement.”

It was only later that she learned there had been a congregational meeting at which her mother, who was active from the local to the national level in the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, made sure that Beth Hillel would consider counting women in the minyan and allowing girls to have aliyot. Her father also advocated; he was out of town but sent a letter saying, “I want my daughter to have the same opportunity that my sons have.” The positive vote was achieved with little controversy, and on that Saturday morning Waxman stood in the sun of an inclusive Judaism she considered a right, not a contested privilege. It was simply what she expected.

THAT OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF JUDAISM would serve her well; the years that followed held positive Jewish experiences but also challenges. As a high school junior, she loved attending the Alexander Muss High School in Israel program. The program was her first immersive, interactive learning experience, and she was thrilled. Columbia College brought more intellectual adventure. But Waxman, who majored in religion, also found herself just six blocks from the Jewish Theological Seminary, which was sending mixed messages to women. “In 1982, JTS had made a decision to admit women into the rabbinical program but did not count them as part of the minyan in the seminary’s synagogue,” she remembers. “I was struck by the dissonance.” Waxman could still enjoy visiting her family synagogue—now Congregation Beth El in Fairfield, CT, as her parents had moved. But in New York, there was no synagogue that she called home; it was the Jewish feminist scene and the havurah movement that ultimately attracted her.

After college, Waxman debated between the academic path and the rabbinate. She landed a job as assistant to the grants development officer at Columbia’s Teachers College; after six months the officer left, and she moved into that very big post at 24. The ideas she was supporting excited her. But once a grant was approved, her involvement ended. “I was an administrator, in a distant role,” she says. “That clarified for me that I really wanted to work with people. I wanted to work with people at moments of meaning.”

She decided to go to rabbinical school and, having concluded that Jewish feminism was most alive in the Reconstructionist movement, started looking seriously at RRC. She entered the rabbinical program in 1993.

BY THAT TIME, CHRISTINA AGER, PH.D., had been teaching in the education department of Beaver College, just down the road, for two years. Originally from Sellersville, PA, she was the first person in her extended family to go to college. At her Lutheran church, she remembers, “I was into the big questions: Why are we here? What are we supposed to be doing?” As an undergraduate at Temple University, she got to know her first Jewish friends. Attracted by the intellectual discourse, she converted to Judaism through the Reform movement in 1993. “Judaism felt like I was coming home,” she says. “It was as if I had been born into the wrong religion and had to find my way back.”

Waxman and Ager met in 2001, at the formal celebration of Beaver College’s renaming as Arcadia University. Waxman was then serving as the assistant to the president of RRC, Rabbi David Teutsch, Ph.D. On a hot day in July, she represented RRC at the event, wearing full academic regalia and a kippah.
At one point she heard a voice behind her say, “A woman with a kippah! I need to know who you are.” She turned around and smiled at Christina for the first time.

Waxman was able to bring a certain level of optimism to her romantic life. She had come out to her parents during her first year of rabbinical school, when her older brother was getting married. “He and my wonderful sister-in-law were very celebrated, emotionally and concretely. Late one night, talking to my mother, I said, ‘I don’t think I will ever have this. I don’t know if I will ever find anyone, and if I do I don’t know if the community will celebrate me this way.’ ” Her mother worried that being a woman rabbi was hard enough and that also being a lesbian would be too hard. But the very next day, she told Waxman, “You make Shabbat every week. So this coming Hanukkah, your father and I would like to buy you dairy dishes”—just the kind of gift Waxman would have received at a wedding shower.

“My parents’ response was, We accept you and we celebrate you. Though they didn’t state it this way, really what they were saying was, We will point the way for how the community should sustain you, whether you are partnered or single.” (Waxman and Ager did have a big Jewish wedding in 2004 and a small civil ceremony in 2013.)

Waxman first telephoned Ager the week of September 11, 2001, spurred on by a talking point she had offered to rabbis when they suddenly needed to recraft their High Holiday sermons: carpe diem.

As they began to date, the two found a wonderful balance of Jewish interests. Ager’s passion is theology; Waxman’s is ritual and history. Ager is happiest going to the text study before services; Waxman still revels in the service itself.

And their professional philosophies also interweave to great effect. In addition to serving as a professor, Ager founded and directs the program at Arcadia known as BBEST: Building Behavioral and Educational Support Teams. The central idea is that by offering positive behavioral support, teachers can help students with emotional and behavioral issues succeed in the classroom. Early in her career, Ager came to understand that “behaviors are skills, which we can teach kids—but you have to approach it as learning rather than punishing their mistakes.”

In her work and in her religious life, she says, “I’m a behaviorist—behavior is what matters when we live in community. Am I kind, whether I like you or not? Every person is made b’tzelem elohim, in the image of God.”

“Christina has a picture of a redeemed world that is extremely inspiring to me,” Waxman says. And Waxman, too, aspires to sail a rising tide along with others. True, she is known for her driving intellect. While serving as RRC’s vice president for governance from 2003 to 2013, she played a central role in strategic planning, in work with the board of...
governors, and in academic accreditation. She wanted to develop still more robust critical thinking, and in 2010 she completed her Ph.D. in American Jewish history at Temple University.

But through most of her tenure as vice president, she also served as High Holiday rabbi for Bet Havarim, a small havurah in Syracuse, NY. Marty Morganstein, a leader at the congregation, still remembers the very warm relationship she established with members, and how in 2012, at the services the group knew would be its last, she left everyone feeling they had accomplished good things. Asked about her most outstanding memories of her time as a rabbinical student, Waxman immediately cites her Clinical Pastoral Education work experience at the Abington Memorial Hospital intermediate care unit, where there were 25 deaths during her tenure. “I learned how to show up for people,” she says.

Rabbi Debra Rappaport, ’07, has known Waxman as a teacher and also served as student representative on the presidential search committee to find Teutsch’s successor, which Waxman staffed; Rappaport now serves on the board of governors. She has always been struck by Waxman’s balanced strengths: “I have been impressed and moved by the depth of her intelligence—raw intellectual horsepower and also emotional intelligence,” she says.

Waxman’s major endeavors as vice president called for collaborative leadership. And she feels that was natural preparation for her presidency. “I can’t do the job by myself. Out of pragmatics and out of Reconstructionist philosophy, it has to be about collaboration, about creating opportunities for other people and their ideas,” she says.

WAXMAN DID NOT PRESUME she would be offered the opportunity to be president of the major organization of Reconstructionist Judaism. As she considered applying, she sought out conversations with 25 different people who have been important in her life. Ultimately she decided to throw her hat in the ring.

“I’m endlessly interested in the ideas of Reconstructionism,” she says. “It’s what I wrote my dissertation about. On a theoretical and practical level, I think that these are the most important, engaging ideas in progressive Judaism. I thought, I don’t want to be over somewhere else wondering, Why aren’t they doing this, or why are they doing this? That meant I had to apply to be the one convening the conversation.”

While she loves the Reconstructionist world and has made traveling to congregations a priority, Waxman also is highly interested in working with other organizations toward shared goals and in raising the profile of progressive religion generally. Rappaport praises Waxman’s capacity “to look both inward and outward—toward the organizations of the movement and also to all the organizations that have an important place in contemporary Jewish life. She is reaching out and talking to them.”

Waxman has set her sights both on further engaging Reconstructionist Jews and on providing an avenue into Jewish life—cultural, religious or activist—for anyone who is searching. She believes the Reconstructionist movement is still discovering what it means to have combined its seminary and congregational union in 2012. “We are still at the beginning stages of our transformation, our understanding of the enormous potential,” she says.

She brings to the endeavor both thoughtfulness and a sense of adventure. “This restructuring positions us very well in a volatile landscape. It allows us to leverage integration—from idea to training to program to services—in a way that other movements can’t necessarily do. We have a lot of ground to cover, and I want to get there with others. How do we help people move forward?”
A Moment of Holiness: It’s in Your Hands

Whether you’re hiking to the top of a mountain or pausing in the middle of a busy day, Ritualwell can help turn any experience into something holy.

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Student Nathan Weiner
Any Space Can Be Sacred

BY ELLEN SCOLNIC

S

Sometimes a rabbi’s job is to create a holy space in the midst of fear or turmoil—a space of emotion but also spirituality and comfort, says third-year student Nathan Weiner. Through his RRC internships, Weiner has worked to create that space in hospital rooms and on the bimah.

Weiner was a recipient of a John Bliss Scholarship for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), a national chaplaincy certification program. Last summer, the scholarship enabled Weiner to serve as a chaplain on call for the intensive care units (ICUs) at Wilmington Hospital in Delaware.

He often would go to an ICU to be with the family when a patient’s death was imminent. “Just holding that space for them, listening to their fears and their memories, and being with them at a difficult time was my job,” he explains. “I learned that part of a chaplain’s duty is to provide a safe, nonjudgmental space for the people you are serving to experience a range of emotions.”

For a congregational rabbi, that space can be a Friday night service, a funeral or a bar mitzvah. In his current placement as student rabbi at Congregation Beth Tikvah in Marlton, NJ, Weiner finds that he draws on his chaplaincy experiences nearly every week. “In a spiritual space, no matter where that space is, people come and take what they want, listen to what they want and, hopefully, get something out of it,” he says.

Another valuable aspect of his chaplaincy experience was counseling people of different faiths. “The multifaith aspect was beautiful. Christians tend to be much more open to talking about God,” Weiner says. He laughs as he recalls one day when he knocked on a patient’s door and identified himself as a chaplain. “The woman shouted out, ‘Come right in. I’m always happy to talk about the Lord!’ I’ve never heard those words come out of a Jew’s mouth.”

Such incidents have given Weiner a new perspective. “I have non-Jewish congregants, and now I think about how I can be their rabbi, too,” he says. “My chaplaincy work gave me multifaith training in an immediate, emotional way like nothing else could have.

“Receiving the scholarship to work at the hospital made that position a viable summer option for me,” Weiner adds. “Without the support of donors, I could not have done the work I did.”

Although he’s not planning on a chaplaincy career, his hospital experiences were vital to enriching his rabbinical background. “I learned so much—how to offer something spiritual and meaningful when people need to talk, how to just be there for people at stressful times, how to listen,” Weiner says. “I will always be grateful that I had those opportunities.”

You can help make student internships possible. Tell us what you’re passionate about—multifaith projects, social justice causes, or growing and empowering congregations—and we’ll tell you how your gift can help shape the next generation of Reconstructionist rabbis.

For more information, please contact Barbara Lissy, assistant vice president for development, at 215.576.0800, ext. 155, or blissy@rrc.edu.
Encouraging college students to look at the world through a Jewish lens is paramount for second-year student Kami Knapp. Knapp receives funding through the William Flesher Community Internship Program to serve as the rabbinic intern at Hillel at Temple University in Philadelphia—organizing, praying, cooking, volunteering, studying and more with the students.

Temple students take on a myriad of projects, everything from donating blood or feeding the homeless to tutoring children. Knapp challenges the students at Hillel to make the natural connection between their projects and Jewish values.

“So many of their social action projects embody central ideas in Judaism, like gemilut hasadim [acts of loving kindness] or tikun olam [repairing the world],” she says. When she teaches those concepts, she explains, students can come to realize that by choosing these activities they are also acting Jewishly.

College is a time when young people are exploring their identities, and Knapp feels it’s vital to have a Jewish presence on campus. She’s grateful to the donors who make her work possible. “If it’s Friday night and a student feels like going to services or having hallah, it should be available to them,” she says.

Knapp works with students using traditional means, like supporting Shabbat services. Every week she meets with students, introducing them to liturgy and materials. Often, however, student-led services are anything but traditional. “Whatever the students want Shabbat services to look like, that’s what they are,” Knapp explained.
For Knapp, this work with young adults is an important step toward becoming a rabbi who can connect with people of all ages, through all of life’s stages. “If I understand how emerging adults come to decide what they will carry into their adult lives, this will help me understand why adults behave and believe the way they do,” says Knapp, who is also the education director at Temple B’nai Abraham in Bordentown, NJ. “I see the full spectrum of spiritual and intellectual growth, and that is so valuable.”

Knapp hopes her students will remember their Jewish college experiences. “If we do it right, we won’t have to think of ways to reach out again in 10 years, when these people are deciding how to get married or where to put their kid in preschool,” Knapp says. “My goal is to have students come out of Hillel at Temple and say, ‘I’m Jewish, I’m proud, and this is how I live my Judaism.’”

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<tr>
<th>RRC’s 48 matriculating students</th>
<th>are thoughtful, passionate and open minded. On the road to becoming rabbis, they gain knowledge and experience in many different ways.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 work with community organizing and social-justice groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 teach religious school at area synagogues; one works with a family-education program for children with special needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 juggle the responsibilities of parenthood as part of their busy lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>36 are able to pursue their rabbinical training with the crucial help of scholarship support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 students led High Holiday services in a variety of settings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 study, pray, hang out, cook, advise and mentor young people through their internships on university campuses.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
When I started working at Camp JRF, I couldn’t have imagined how the next 13 years would quite literally change my life: I met my wife during our first summer working here, and, God willing, we will introduce our first child to camp this summer. While things don’t change for everyone in such grand ways, the essence of our story is not unique. In more than a decade at camp, I have seen time and again how our joyful and welcoming community transforms lives.

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At Camp JRF, summer is the season of transformation—and fun.
At least once a summer, I hold my breath as a camper walks onstage to perform. I imagine he won’t be very good and that the other kids won’t respond as we’d like. Yet the room stays quiet, and, at the right time, everyone breaks into applause. Once, when a camper with Asperger’s brought the house down singing Frank Sinatra, the cheers were so enormous that I began to cry. It’s moments like these that remind me of the transformative power of camp—not only for the performer but for everyone present. In these moments, the strength and beauty of our community shine through.

Our parents consistently tell us that this sense of community is our greatest strength. After praising the way camp helps her children “to look at the world through a lens of cooperation, community and acceptance,” one parent went on to say, “If there were a JRF boarding school, I would sell my house to send my children there!” Parents pick up their children after a summer session and discover how the children they bring home have changed, how they have grown into their best selves. They ask us how we do it. And we tell them the truth: The campers themselves set (and maintain) a high standard for behavior at camp.

Of course, our staff is part of this, too; and over the course of the summer they, too, are changed. “The work that we do here produces such tangible results,” one staff member wrote recently. “Camp is magic—you can see the impact you make on your campers and feel the impact that they have on you.” I know this to be true; as much as I may offer to camp, I receive so much more in return. When I see the look in a camper’s eye, the smile across a staff member’s face when her camper succeeds, and the tears running down parents’ cheeks when they see how their children have grown, I realize how blessed I am to be part of this special community.

If you want to be part of it, too, come celebrate our bat mitzvah season on August 3—you’ll be surprised how quickly you can be transformed!

We are grateful to the many supporters of our camp programs and exciting new Eco-Village, who make possible the transformative power of Camp JRF.
Esther Neustätter Bates, z”l, was born in Germany in 1926; her family narrowly escaped the Holocaust. Esther and her husband, Marty, z”l, settled outside Buffalo, NY, where they raised three children and lived for 60 years. Fluent in four languages, Esther taught in synagogue and public schools. She loved theater, archaeology, Israel and schlepping her kids to cultural sites. She reveled in welcoming foreign-exchange students, foster children, family and friends to her home, opening her heart and making lasting friendships. Here we remember this vibrant woman, who also was a generous benefactor.

Esther Bates told us: “When I was growing up, my family was not observant but was very knowledgeable. I was brought up to think of women and men as equals, so I was impressed with Reconstructionist Judaism’s insistence on gender equality. I also like the idea of strong involvement of everyone, with the rabbi as a learned facilitator, not an authority. I’ve always had a mind of my own. When Marty and I joined Temple Sinai, we realized that Reconstructionism is very rational, so we did not have to leave behind our scientific training. In college, I wrote a paper on Kaplan’s ideas. I got an A.”

Rabbi Alexander Lazarus-Klein, ’04, of Congregation Shir Shalom (now merged with Temple Sinai), told us: “Esther Bates was the heart and soul of Temple Sinai for more than 50 years. She and Marty ran everything from the newsletter, to adult education, to ritual practice. Esther was a passionate Reconstructionist who promoted the ideas of Mordecai Kaplan to anyone who would listen. She was generous and community minded: never afraid to voice her opinion, but always thinking of the needs of others.”

Ron Bihovsky, her son, told us: “My parents were among the earliest members of Temple Sinai. The synagogue was central to their lives as they learned, taught and celebrated Shabbat and holidays. They cherished the liturgy and philosophy of the Reconstructionist movement. Esther served on the board of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, and they both enjoyed attending Reconstructionist conventions. My brother, Dave Bates, my sister, Becki Bates, and I are pleased that my mother decided to make a bequest to perpetuate the ideals of the Reconstructionist movement, which meant so much to my parents and so greatly enriched their lives.”

Reconstructionist Judaism encourages us to bring our whole selves to living Jewishly, and Esther Bates embodied this philosophy. Hers was a Jewish life, an American life, a scientific life, a mother’s life, a grandmother’s life. It was also a philanthropic life. Esther supported the movement throughout her life and, in a final act of generosity, left a bequest in her will. With this gift, she perpetuated her values. Your bequest will also help sustain the Reconstructionist movement in the future. Please consider leaving a gift in your own will. It is a simple yet profound act and easy to do.

For more information please contact Sara Crimm 215.576.0800, ext. 143, or scrimm@rrc.edu, or go to rrc.edu/plannedgiving.
# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## ASSETS
- Cash and Equivalents $2,947,121
- Accounts Receivable, Pledges Receivable and Other Assets 4,164,556
- Beneficial Interests in Trusts 3,647,367
- Investments
  - Operating Funds (including Restricted Funds) 712,570
  - Endowment and Trust Funds 14,968,325
- Land, Building and Equipment 5,975,697

**Total Assets** $32,415,636

## LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

### Liabilities
- Accounts Payable and Short-Term Liabilities $109,314
- Deferred Revenue and Other Liabilities 114,622
- Note Payable 3,236,580

**Total Liabilities** 3,460,516

### Fund Balances
- Operating Funds (including Restricted Funds) 9,998,018
- Endowment and Trust Fund Balances 18,957,102

**Total Fund Balances** 28,955,120

**Total Liabilities and Fund Balances** $32,415,636

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*Statement of Financial Position (audited) as of August 31, 2013*
IT’S A MATCH!

Create a spark with your donation of $1,000 and we’ll double it! An anonymous donor has offered to match new gifts of $1,000 or more through the NEW MINYAN MATCH program—up to $125,000 in total matching funds. Please join our minyan now. Everyone counts in a minyan. Your gift will truly make a difference.