Michelle Greenfield grew up in Fair Lawn, NJ. In 2005, she graduated from Brandeis University with a Bachelor of Arts in French. Before coming to RRC, she worked as an aide for children with significant special needs. She sees a great connection between that work and her current efforts to create more aware and inclusive Jewish communities. As an RRC student she has had the opportunity to serve people with special needs in many Jewish contexts. She has been a chaplain for Jewish Family and Children’s Services, taught in various religious schools, helped to pilot the Celebrations! program at Reconstructionist congregation Mishkan Shalom, and taught and led services in various congregational settings. She also has discovered her own deep love for Rabbinic texts and has spent countless hours in the RRC Bet Midrash learning and teaching them. She is grateful to her family for their support; to her teachers for sharing their guidance and their love of Torah and Talmud; to her friends, who have accompanied her on this journey; and to her students, who constantly change how she sees the world around her.

From each person whose heart impels him you are to take My offering.
—Exodus 25:2

This commandment is given, by way of Moses, to all of the people of Israel. It is the job of the community and its leaders to accept offerings from any member of the community. When all of these offerings are brought together, the mishkan—the holy space where God’s presence dwells—can be built. Although each person is invited to bring a gift, the commandment is given in the plural; it cannot be the work of only one person to accept these gifts. The gifts that each person brings into a holy space are what God refers to as “My offerings.”

To create space for the offerings of all the members of the community is the beauty and the challenge of living in a fully inclusive religious community. As I become a rabbi, I am in the unique position to help remove obstacles in the communities I serve. Much of my work with people who have physical, cognitive, social and emotional challenges has been about removing barriers and building communities where each person’s strengths are recognized as an offering. I bring my own gifts of creativity, patience and love for our traditional texts when I bring crayons and paper to visit a hospice patient or when I help a student chant Haftarah in English. I envision communities where everybody who chooses to connect to Judaism is welcomed and where each person’s gifts become part of God’s offering.