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# Half Title

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This guide is the successor to the Commission on Social Action's *Social Action Manual: A Practical Guide for Organizing and Programming Social Action in the Synagogue*, edited by Rabbi David Saperstein and published in 1983. Indeed, several sections of the guide are taken almost verbatim from it. And thus we owe a debt of gratitude to all those who contributed to that manual.

Like its predecessor, this guide is also the product of numerous hands. And like its predecessor, this guide would not have been possible without the vision and support of Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center (RAC). He provided important comments and suggestions and contributing in numerous ways throughout the process. Leonard Fein, then-director of the Commission on Social Action (CSA), Rabbi Daniel Polish, current director of the CSA, Mark Pelavin, associate director of the RAC, and Judge David Davidson, chair of the CSA, all provided helpful insights along the way.

Al Vorspan, director emeritus of the CSA, Jeff Mandell, past legislative director and communications coordinator at the RAC, and Rabbi Eve Rudin Weiner, director of NFTY, all contributed sections to this guide. The Eisendrath Legislative Assistant class of 2000-01 – Danielle Hirsch, Rachel Labush, Sari Laufer, Evan Moffic, Rachel Orkand, Michael Silver, and Ariana Silverman – compiled the information and annotated the "Resources" section of the guide, and summer intern Ben Shapiro provided immeasurable logistical help as we moved to the final stages of publication. Lauren Schumer, current legislative director of the RAC, whose command of English grammar and careful eye make her a wonderful line editor. She saved us from countless spelling, grammatical and syntactical errors. (That being said, we take sole responsibility for any errors that remain.)

Those of you who have used the 1983 Social Action Manual will note many changes in this guide. Perhaps most notable is its appearance. While the technology of the 21st Century certainly make creating better looking and easier to read documents much simpler than twenty years ago, this guide benefited tremendously from the creative design, skillful work, and tireless effort of our graphic designer, Phil Torsani.

Finally, this guide is a reflection of the wonderful practices of synagogues and social action committees across the continent, whose work each day to improve their communities and the lives of those who live in them inspires us. Most of what we know about synagogue social action is derived from the practical experience of these dedicated institutions and individuals. While it is often difficult to track down the origin of a particular program or concept to an exact congregation, the congregations of the UAHC and their members deserve the credit for most of the ideas contained within this guide. It is for all those who seek to emulate their work that this guide is intended.



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## INTRODUCTION

### THE RELIGIOUS PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

By Evelyn Laser Shlensky and Leonard Fein

Judaism offers a path to righteousness: with many signposts along the way, its teachings point toward conduct that will transform the world into a more Godly place. To attempt to shape our ordinary, wondrous, and sometimes degraded world into a place closer to the one we think God has in mind reflects our deepest religious aspirations. This social action guide is intended to assist synagogues and their members in turning aspirations into effective actions to repair the world.

But why the synagogue as a locus for social justice? In a sense, the ladder of Jacob's dream is an apt metaphor for the synagogue: an interactive vehicle with all sorts of coming and going, connecting heavenly values with earthly needs. In our synagogues, those connections are made through prayer, study, and the pursuit of social justice, each leading to the other and then back again.

We know that for Judaism to be whole, to be holy, it requires each of its pillars: *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *Gemilut Chasadim*. Yet, our lives and our institutions become compartmentalized. After all, we live in a bureaucratized society; we work through committees, we keep hourly calendars, our meetings rely on agendas that frequently are not only itemized but also organized by the minute.

This fragmentation has been a particular problem for those of us devoted to the prong of Judaism that emphasizes the work of social justice. Why? Because much of the work of social justice looks like political advocacy, social services, or community organizing. One might miss the fact that social action is also religious action – an essential prong of Judaism – and that misperception can allow synagogue social activists to be marginalized.

With this guide we hope both to address the work of *tikkun olam*, and to offer ways of integrating that work into the total fabric of synagogue life. We begin the process of integration by turning to teachings of the late Rabbi Alexander Schindler (z"l), former President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as he reflected on connections between ritual and ethical imperatives of Judaism:

‘Our central mission?’ What is that – *tefilah*, prayer? But the Talmud declared it forbidden to pray in a room without windows, for when we pray, we are to hear the world's weeping; when we pray, we are to see the poor huddled at the Temple's gates.

What then is ‘our central mission?’ – *limud*, study? But Rabbi Akiba declared study to be the mission of Judaism only if it leads to action. We are to teach our children Torah, not just to know Torah, nor even to teach Torah, but above all to be Torah. Even as they energize us, prayer and study sensitize us to our role in the world.

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As Rabbi David Saperstein said in his address at the 1999 UAHC Biennial:

The heart of our Reform Jewish understanding is that we do not have to choose between these commitments, that we are not confronted, not at all, with a set of ‘either-or’ choices. The core of our insight is that serious Jewish study inevitably leads to the soup kitchen; that serious prayer, among other vital things, is a way of preparing to do battle with injustice; that social justice without being grounded in text, without a sense of God’s presence, is ephemeral and unsustainable. The heart of the argument is that there is no such thing as social action Judaism, that the thread of social justice is so authentically and intricately woven into the many-colored fabric we call Judaism that if you seek to pull that thread out, the entire fabric unravels, that the Judaism that results is distorted, is neutered, is rendered aimless.

Jewish history also is our text. For all its richness, it is a painful chronicle of human suffering – suffering not as the ancient experience of our long-ago ancestors, but of each new generation. For it is we who were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt; we, now, not only they, then. It is we who were expelled from Spain and wandered as strangers in strange lands, we who therefore know in our bones what it is to be a stranger. Thirty-six times in the Torah we are reminded that we were strangers in Egypt; alas, our history has provided even more reminders.

We often teach: “Judaism permits us to be rich; it forbids us to be comfortable.” Jewish texts and Jewish memory relentlessly insist that the Other has an enduring claim on our attention, our regard, even our love. That claim is entirely independent of our own situation of the moment, be we bathed in luxury or afflicted; it stems from the central theme of the Jewish narrative.

Consider: Once there lived a man named Abraham. Now this Abraham, when he learned that God was preparing to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gemorah, this same pious Abraham, chose to intervene. And the words of his intervention thunder through history, shape our collective memory:

Will You really sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? Perhaps there are fifty innocent within the city, will You really sweep it away? Will You not bear with the place because of the fifty innocent that are in its midst? Heaven forbid for You to do a thing like this, to deal death to the innocent along with the guilty, that it should come about: like the innocent, like the guilty. Heaven forbid for You! The Judge of all the earth – will He not do what is just?

Genesis 18: 23-25, as translated by Everett Fox in  
*The Schocken Bible Volume I: The Five Books of Moses*

The first Jew offers us the first example of the first station on the way to justice – the readiness to speak truth to power. At our best, we have been doing that ever since, whether in arenas intellectual or political, by challenging prevailing wisdom, challenging prevailing habits, and calling ourselves and others to account. This is no contemporary fad; it is who we are.

# A Guide to Synagogue Social Action

Who, then, are we?

We are a people that believes that all human beings are made in the divine image of God, and as such are endowed with infinite value. The rabbis of the *Mishnah* asked: Why begin the story with one couple, with Adam and Eve? (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:5) Their answer teaches us: to demonstrate that no one and no people has priority, seniority; we are all descendants of the same ancestors. In the same vein, the rabbis taught: Adam was made from dust gathered from the four corners of the earth. (*Yalkut Shimoni* 1:13) Hence we advocate for human rights, everywhere; hence we advocate for liberty, and equality, for all humanity.

We are a people that believes “The earth is the Eternal’s and the fullness thereof,” (Psalm 24:1) and from that simple sentence we understand that what we “have” is ours in trust, and that we must be faithful stewards of God’s world.

*A contemporary Jewish political sensibility derives from several key principles. While there are many different formulations, the following was written by Michael Gottsegen, a Senior Research Fellow at CLAL:*

First in priority is the principle of the respect that is due the human being who is created *b’tzelem elohim*, in the divine image, and, as such, is of inestimable worth. From this also follow the ancillary principles of justice and equity. In the political realm, this first principle gives us the criteria of procedural and substantive due process. Thus, of any proposed policy, it can be asked whether it is compatible with the equal dignity of all who stand to be affected by it.

Second in priority is the principle of the respect that is due to the entire non-human realm or creation because it is *ma’aseh b’reishit*, or “the work of the beginning” (the work of God) and as such possesses intrinsic dignity. From this principle, a Jewish ecological sensibility arises. In the political realm, this principle leads us to ask whether a given policy does gratuitous damage to that part of nature which would be drafted into service on behalf of human ends.

Third in priority is the principle of *brit*, or of covenant, which signifies the covenantal basis of human society and the norms of covenantal mutuality and covenantal reciprocity which should inform social and political life...The practical political upshot of this principle asks of any policy proposal whether it is compatible with the principle of social solidarity and oriented toward the common good.

Fourth in priority is the principle of *rachamim*, or mercy, which lays upon the individual and society the obligation to care for the weak and vulnerable. In the political realm, this principle leads to the following question of any policy proposal: Does it trample upon, or does it uphold, the weak and vulnerable?

*Reprinted with permission from Sh'ma - A Journal of Jewish Responsibility (www.shma.com) November 24, 1995 76:502*

So, then, we set out to place our religious principles in the service of society, as is our sacred obligation. There could be no more fitting locus for the pursuit of justice, mercy, and peace than the synagogue.

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**Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (Conservative) taught: “To be a Jew is not simply to be, but to stand for.”**

**Rabbi Leo Baeck (Reform) wrote: “We are Jews for the sake of humanity.”**

**Professor Isadore Twersky (Orthodox) observed: “One cannot claim to be a God-intoxicated Jew without a passion for social justice.”**

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We are a people that believes that history moves from slavery towards freedom, that there is a goal to human affairs, and that the good life is a life lived in furtherance of that goal. The goal? To help complete the work of creation; to mend the world; to hasten the advent of a Messianic age.

THE SYNAGOGUE AS A SETTING FOR THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Our synagogues are houses of study, of prayer, and of assembly. We establish synagogues not as oases, but as sites for Jewish activity, places where we gather to learn, to express our religious aspirations, to perpetuate Judaism, and to be in community with other Jews. The fully realized Jewish life that synagogues seek to foster requires opportunities for congregants to study, to pray, and to pursue social justice.

One can, of course, do these things outside the walls of the synagogue. But it is in the synagogue, where 2000 years of Jewish history have been linked with the present and future; where the sense of Jewish “community” has been and continues to be forged; where study, prayer, and social action take on a special *kavanah*, expressing the community’s holy intention.

These days, synagogues plainly have a preeminent role with regard to the Jewish future. Jewish parents, young adults, and children look to the synagogue for guidance and for inspiration; they perceive the synagogue as the central institution of Jewish life. It is especially important as a place – and as a community – that provides a living expression of Judaism’s most critical values. If the synagogue neglects the pursuit of justice as a compelling priority for the activities it sponsors and encourages, Jews will conclude that the pursuit of justice is a peripheral rather than a central commitment of our people. If the Judaism our synagogues offer does not speak to the moral dilemmas of our people’s lives or the great moral issues of the world in which they dwell, then it will fail to capture the loyalty and imagination of significant numbers of Jews, especially over time.

And yet, from time to time, we are challenged to explain ourselves, to justify the synagogue as a locus for the work of social justice. Synagogue social activists may be asked: “What does social action have to do with the synagogue?”

Many people who engage in social action through their synagogues have had to deal with versions of this question. While the question may express the questioner’s objection to the action that is being contemplated or undertaken, it may also reflect the poorly understood linkage between justice and Judaism. Whatever prompts the question, it deserves a serious response.

Following the lead of Leviticus 19, which presents both ritual and ethical acts as necessary to the formation of a holy community, a number of contemporary thinkers have sought to integrate Jewish religious life and the social justice pursuit it requires. Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin explained the linkage in spiritual terms:

Spirituality is about social action. In Judaism there is no dichotomy between the inner and the outer, between action and contemplation. Homelessness, the plight of children, and the loss of compassion and values in our society are spiritual issues. We connect spirituality with social action when ‘God’ becomes more than a cheerleader on the sidelines of our ethical striving. When we legitimately use ‘God’ in a sentence that describes our action, then social action becomes a spiritual path. I am working in this soup kitchen because feeding the hungry is a *mitzvah* ordained by God. I am involved in a Black-Jewish dialogue because God created one person at the dawn of creation, and therefore all people are endowed with immeasurable dignity. I am working against violence and pornography in the media because those things violate the image of God.

*Reform Judaism, Fall 1995*

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Besides making more explicit the religious dimensions of what we do in the pursuit of social justice, there are ways of proceeding to develop a social action program that will help bring the congregation into a supportive role. Many are discussed in the section that deals with implementing effective social action programs. At this point, suffice it to say that successful social action programs are established over time. Trust and understanding take time. Early programs should focus on issues that unite the congregation. More difficult, perhaps controversial programs, can follow when the congregation has begun to understand the importance Judaism places on helping to shape a world that is just, merciful and peaceful.

REFORM JUDAISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A DISTINGUISHED HISTORY, A DISTINCTIVE COMMITMENT

The Reform Movement has created a religious culture in which social justice is a particularly integral component. Social justice in Judaism dates back to the Bible. Reform Judaism, growing as it did out of the “Age of Reason” with its religious stress on ethics, elevated still further the position of social justice in Jewish life. But how and when did that concern become a major institutional thrust of modern Reform Judaism in North America? Here, in broad strokes, is the modern history:

Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Reform rabbinate increasingly spoke out on social issues. In the years following the upheavals of World War II, the Reform Movement experienced explosive growth and deep soul-searching as to its mission and program. A lay leader from Portland, Oregon, Roscoe Nelson, demanded to know why social justice seemed to be left to the rabbis and was not part of the active program of the UAHC. The recently elected UAHC President, Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath – a leader personally committed to the vision of a prophetic Judaism – responded to the challenge by organizing a joint UAHC-CCAR Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism (CSA) in 1951.

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The CSA's first director was Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman; in 1953, Albert Vorspan, a visionary and eloquent young staffer from the National Jewish Community Relations Council (the Jewish community's umbrella organization, now called the Jewish Council for Public Affairs), joined the CSA staff.

The joint Commission was established to apply Jewish ethics to modern social and economic issues in North America and the world. In practice, that meant persuading congregations to establish social action committees and publishing program materials addressing crucial "issues of conscience" and pamphlets on urgent issues such as the Genocide Convention, civil rights, immigration policy, capital punishment, church-state separation, and the security of the state of Israel. Within a decade, most Reform synagogues had developed some form of a social action committee. These were developed not only in response to the urging of the CSA, but also because of the national controversy over civil rights and, in the 1960s, over Vietnam. Responding to the leadership of the CSA, both the UAHC and the CCAR adopted resolutions in support of federal civil rights legislation and against the war in Vietnam.

Perhaps the most bitter controversy accompanied a decision by the UAHC in 1959 to accept a gift from Mr. Kivie Kaplan of Boston (an honorary vice-chair of the UAHC and the president of the NAACP) in order to establish a Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C. Many felt we had to bring our prophetic ideals to the place where America's decisions are made. Others argued that no one could, or should, claim to represent all Reform Jews to America's political leaders. Because of the intense controversy, implementation of the plan was postponed so delegates to the UAHC Biennial Convention in Washington, DC in 1961 could fully debate and resolve the issue. By an overwhelming margin, after a dramatic and emotional debate, the General Assembly voted to establish the Center. When the Center opened, its dedication was highlighted by a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, at which President John F. Kennedy received an historic Torah from Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath. When then-Secretary of Labor (later Supreme Court Justice) Arthur J. Goldberg chided the President for not wearing a hat, the President smiled and replied, "Arthur, I'm a Reform Jew." It should be noted that it was Justice Goldberg, then a member of the CSA, who is credited with the original suggestion to establish a Center in the capital of the United States. And it was Senator Howard Metzenbaum (later chair of the CSA) and his family who were the first signatories in the 1961 dedication book.

The Religious Action Center's founding director was Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch. He served until becoming the director of the World Union of Progressive Judaism in 1973. CSA director Al Vorspan served concurrently as director of the RAC from 1973-74, until he became vice-president of the UAHC. Since 1974, the RAC's director has been Rabbi David Saperstein, under whose leadership it has become the premier Jewish social justice voice in the U.S. capital. There, coalitions of decency have been marshaled for church-state separation, economic justice, nuclear disarmament, environmental integrity, aid to Israel, help for Soviet Jewry, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, and a host of other issues that have

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seized the conscience of the Reform Jewish community. The RAC staff has trained thousands of young men and women for careers of rabbinical service and for work in the political arena, education, law, and social service.

The first special tenant in the Religious Action Center's home was the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the broad-based coalition that spearheaded the passage of landmark civil rights laws in the 1960s. Indeed, several of the major civil rights laws were drafted in the conference room of the Religious Action Center by such now historic figures as Joe Rauh (prominent civil rights attorney and member of the CSA), Clarence Mitchell (legendary lobbyist of the NAACP), and Arnold Aronson (an outstanding Jewish leader, who with Roy Wilkins and A. Philip Randolph, founded the LCCR).

Historically, ardent support for social action has emanated from the highest leadership of the Reform Movement. For Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath (president, UAHC, 1943-1973), commitment to social justice was a central feature of his tenure. Rabbi Alexander Schindler (president, UAHC, 1973-1996) championed its importance, calling it "applied Judaism." He also elevated, Albert Vorspan (who was, and remained, director of the CSA) to be vice-president of the UAHC, giving social action an even higher profile within the Movement.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie (director of the CSA before he became president of the UAHC in 1996), described social justice as "the Reform Jewish crown jewel." In an address to the UAHC Board of Trustees Executive Committee on February 2, 1998, he outlined a core of distinctively Reform religious principles, saying:

Yes, now more than ever we embrace ritual and prayer and ceremony; but like the prophets, we never forget that God is concerned about the everyday and that the blights of society take precedence over the mysteries of heaven. In these self-indulgent times, too many turn inward; but we know that there can be no Reform Judaism without moral indignation; and we know, too, that a Reform synagogue that does not alleviate the anguish of the suffering is a contradiction in terms.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) has been no less fervent in its demand for social justice. Every platform, from the original 1885 Pittsburgh statement forward, places the *mitzvah* of *tikkun olam* at the heart of Reform Judaism. Many of the CCAR's presidents and other prominent figures were leaders at the front lines of the great social struggles of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American life: Rabbis Steven S. Wise, Jacob Weinstein, Arthur Lelyveld, Roland Gittlesohn, and Balfour Brickner are names writ large on the social history of America and hundreds of other played and continue to play leadership roles on vital local and national issues.

Indeed, historically, the CCAR Committee on Justice and Peace was one of the most assertive and influential committees of the CCAR. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it supported progressive economic justice causes such as trade



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כִּי בֵּיתִי  
בֵּית תְּפִלָּה  
לְכָל הָעַמִּים

For My House shall be  
called a House of  
Prayer for all peoples  
*Isaiah 56:7*

unions, the 8-hour day, child labor legislation, anti-trust legislation, social security and civil rights – and it did so while these were still radical ideas in the society as a whole and in the congregations as well. Rabbi Joseph Glaser, the CCAR’s long-time executive vice-president and a distinguished activist, saw the pursuit of social justice as central to a Jewish religious life, a tradition carried on by his successor, Rabbi Paul Menitoff. The Reform rabbinate then – and now – represent one of the most progressive and passionate voices of civic reform and economic justice in the continent.

While national social action leadership has been and remains essential, the devotion to and work towards *tikkun olam* by synagogues is no less important. Their understanding of the inextricable link between social justice and Judaism is demonstrated by the pervasiveness and inventiveness of synagogue social action and social service programs; the readiness of Reform rabbis, cantors, and educators to feature social action from the pulpit and lace it through synagogue educational programs; the many notable projects of Reform youth and the vital activism of the Women of Reform Judaism are but a few of the holy sparks.

The Reform Movement at all levels has given high priority to its mission of advancing social justice. It has put its budget and resources where its values and words are. It has risked much by taking stands on highly charged and polarized issues such as nuclear disarmament, gay and lesbian rights, affirmative action, and Middle East peace issues. But in doing so, the Reform Movement, its synagogues, and social action committees, have acted in their institutional capacities with full respect given to those individual members, rabbi leaders who may disagree with the Movement’s positions. Beyond the risk factor, bringing these matters to the fore has energized Reform membership, has heightened the sense that our congregations are directly relevant to our lives, has provided resources to rabbis and social activists in all congregations, has gained the respect of other faith groups, and has inspired informed debate and, often, cooperation among Jewish groups across the divides of denomination and politics.

THE UNIVERSALISM/PARTICULARISM QUERY

Social action programs that address particular Jewish concerns and needs (e.g., serving the Jewish elderly and advocating for Jews in other lands) are, at once, valuable to the populations they serve and greeted appreciatively by the congregation and its leadership. Programs that focus Jewish energies primarily on the needs of non-Jews (e.g., services to the destitute, international human rights, and tutoring) sometimes draw questions from the congregation.

An eloquent response to such questions was offered by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis:

Those who counsel Jews to distance themselves from the anguish of other peoples are ignorant of the Biblical, prophetic, rabbinic, and



Jewish philosophic traditions that mandate an active empathy towards the submerged communities of non-Jews. Those advisers do not appreciate the radical choice of the rabbinic tradition that selected the story of Hagar’s banishment and God’s protection of Ishmael, no favorite son of Israel, on the first day of the Jewish New Year. They have no ears for the rabbis’ reading of the Book of Jonah on the Day of Atonement in defense of Nineveh the enemies of the Jews. They do not understand the example of Abraham in defense of the non-Jewish citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Is active concern for the dispossessed a mark of Jewish assimilation? Is Jewish humanitarianism an ideal derivative from the Enlightenment philosophers? Jewish universalism derives its conviction from the Jewish prophet, ‘the first universal man in history’ (Heschel) who addresses all men and nations – Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites and Moabites, Israel and Judah. (Amos 1:3–2:16).

*Reprinted with permission from Sh'ma - A Journal of Jewish Responsibility  
(www.shma.com) October 14, 1988, 18:359*

INTRODUCTION

The Concept of “The Stranger” and Its Implications for Universalism

The most frequently repeated *mitzvah* in the Torah relates to the stranger, the resident alien. Our people is instructed no less than 36 times that we are to attend particularly to those who were not born into the tribe, but who reside in our land. We are to treat them as the home-born, even to love them. This concern is linked to our own memory of being oppressed strangers in a strange land; in our case, the land of Egypt. The *ger*, the stranger, thus joins the protected classes, along with others among us who are particularly vulnerable, especially widows and orphans.

Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen reasoned that with ancient Israel’s inclusion of the stranger among the protected classes, true religion began. Other ancient religions only had cared for their own. But the Israelites took the quantum leap toward a universalistic compassion.

Our History and Its Lessons

The concern for the “other” derives not from sacred texts alone, but also from the lessons of our history. Our experience has taught us that the attitude of a host population has often made the difference between our ability to thrive and our desperation. Furthermore, protecting the stranger, we have learned, is also a matter of self preservation; we have seen, all too often, that once hatred bares its ugly head against one group, all minorities are likely to suffer its consequences. Our challenge is to apply these historical lessons to contemporary situations, situations that call for us to demonstrate our own *menschlichkeit*, our willingness to live for values and people beyond the pale of self.

וְאָהַבְתֶּם אֶת הַגֵּר  
כִּי גֵרִים הֵיִיתֶם  
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

You shall love the  
stranger, for you were  
strangers in the  
land of Egypt  
*Deuteronomy 10:19*

INTRODUCTION

Combining Particular and Universal Concerns in  
Your Social Action Program

Social action programs that thrive and enjoy widespread support within the congregation frequently are those that combine particular Jewish concerns with issues that affect the larger community. A congregation that knows it is serving the Jewish elderly and the needy both within its own membership and in the broader Jewish community is likely to demonstrate generosity of spirit when it is asked to respond to hunger and housing and health needs that embitter the lives of everyone in the community, but particularly the impoverished. By involving itself with universal *and* particular needs, the congregation is apt also to draw on the diverse interests of its membership, some wishing to serve primarily the Jewish community, others drawn to service beyond the community. Both interests are commendable, for the needs of both populations are undeniable.

## BUILDING A SYNAGOGUE SOCIAL ACTION STRUCTURE

### A STARTING POINT: ESTABLISHING A STRONG COMMITTEE

The following recommendations are aimed at synagogues that are just beginning a social action committee. While existing committees may pick up helpful hints, it is likely that they will have already worked through many of these issues.

Currently, there are two schools of thought on how to make social action an integral part of a congregation and not just the province of a few active individuals and the rabbi. The traditional school, and, by far, the most common in Reform congregations, is to establish a specific committee whose role is both to educate the congregation about Jewish responsibility for the pursuit of social justice and, at the same time, to develop mechanisms within the congregation to express that responsibility. (For information on the other school of thought, turn to “A New Model: The Social Action Non-Committee.”)

That committee is called by various names in different congregations: Social Action, Religious Action, *Tikkun Olam*, Social Justice, Community Concerns or Ethics. The committee is generally a committee of the synagogue board, in some cases with a social action trustee or social action vice-president on the board, sometimes with a budgetary allocation from the board. These two provisions – a seat on the board and a budget line – are significant statements that the board regards the work of social justice as an important function of the congregation, just as it does education and religious observance.

### Procedures for Organizing a Committee

1. Appoint a strong chair to lead the committee. Ideally, the chair would be someone who is highly respected in the congregation and community, well informed and deeply interested in issues of social justice, capable of drawing others into the work, and able to provide effective leadership to a diverse committee. While in most cases, the chair will bring only some of these qualities, passion, hard work, and willingness to empower others often compensates for lack of experience. Select carefully, however, for the success of the program will depend in large part upon the caliber of the chairperson.

There are at least two routes for designation of a chairperson of the social action committee. One procedure is for the president of the congregation, in consultation with the rabbi, to appoint a chairperson(s) of the social action committee (or similarly named committee). Another procedure is to rely on a nominating committee to select the chairperson.

2. The chairperson, in consultation with the president and the rabbi, should then appoint or invite at least 10 people (think of it as a “*mitzvah minyan*”), a few less if the congregation is quite small, a significantly higher number if possible, to become part of the committee. These numbers will allow for the repre-

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sentation of diverse interests in order to reach into many corners of congregational life. Some large congregations have found it best to set up special task forces or subcommittees, each of which is responsible for working on a specific issue or project. In such cases, the social action committee is charged with coordinating the activities of the sub-groups.

To recruit for committee membership by simply offering a blanket invitation to join may be less effective than identifying strategic individuals and contacting them to explain the goals of the committee which they, in particular, could help advance. Such an individualized approach could be accompanied by a wider letter of invitation to members of the congregation. The synagogue bulletin, while a valuable vehicle for informing the congregation of the committee's work, has generally proven less effective in recruiting participants. It may also be helpful to ask the targeted individuals for additional names.

3. Towards the goal of integrating social justice into the entire fabric of synagogue life, where affiliates exist, official representatives should be selected for membership in the social action committee by the sisterhood (Women of Reform Judaism), men's group, youth group, seniors' group and other relevant constituencies (e.g., preschool parents, *chavurot*, and education committee). If those affiliated groups have their own social action component, (e.g. a critical issues chairperson for the sisterhood or social action chair for the temple youth group), the chair for that program would be a good choice. To touch all aspects of synagogue life, every synagogue committee should be encouraged to designate a representative to the social action committee.
4. A close relationship should be maintained between the committee and the synagogue board, as a supportive board can facilitate the program and, conversely, a board which has not been brought into the process can become an obstacle to the committee. Some board members should be invited to serve on the committee and, as mentioned above, it is useful for the chair of the committee to be appointed to the board. Some synagogues have a social action vice-president. One technique for enlisting the interest and support of the board is to arrange for board members to participate at least once a year in a project of the committee.
5. Regular meetings with synagogue professionals, for those synagogues so blessed, are quite beneficial and a good way to integrate social action into the heart of the congregation. Try to arrange, at least semi-annually, a meeting with the rabbi, cantor, educator, administrator, youth worker and any other relevant staff members to discuss how they can help strengthen the social justice programming throughout the synagogue.
6. The precise structure of the social action committee is a matter for each group to determine in light of its own circumstances. Suffice it to say that most people have limited time for volunteer activities and want to spend that time in ways that are useful and fulfilling. If the committee chair can plan meetings that lead to action in a timely way, people are likely to feel their time is well

spent. As for the interpersonal dimension, people want to know that their opinions matter and that the group values what they can offer.

7. The committee should report regularly to the synagogue board and utilize the congregational bulletin and other vehicles of communication to inform the membership of its work. No public statement or official action should be undertaken without approval of the board, unless other procedures have been established by the board. (See the “What the Congregation and Rabbi Can and Can’t Do” and “Speaking on Behalf of the Synagogue” sections of this guide.)

### The First Meeting of the Committee

1. Begin with introductions of participants, setting a tone of caring about group members, thereby facilitating the development of group cohesion.
2. By starting the first and subsequent meetings with Jewish study relating to social justice, participants will increase their understanding of the religious underpinnings of the work on which they are about to embark. (See the UAHC’s Department of Adult Jewish Growth’s “Go and Study” series or the introductory section of this manual.)
3. A brief discussion about the importance of social justice in Judaism generally (using the “Introduction” and “The Religious Pursuit of Social Justice” sections from this manual) and in Reform Judaism in particular (using the “Reform Judaism and Social Justice” section) will assist in developing the context for the committee’s work.
4. A few examples of programs undertaken by other congregations may be cited, assuming that some on the committee will be unfamiliar with the notion of social activism in a religious setting. (Such programs can be found in the “Significant Social Action Programs” of this guide, the Commission on Social Action’s newsletter, “*Tzedek v’Shalom*,” in the Program Bank section of the Religious Action Center’s website, or in recent Irving J. Fain Social Action Award publications.)
5. The initial meeting will be a good opportunity to do some brainstorming on possible areas for study and action. In order to assure a constructive discussion, the chair might come in with specific suggestions for programs to consider. A general rule: Do fewer things, making sure to do them well, in the beginning. Nothing breeds success like success. (See the “Twenty Techniques for Establishing Effective Programs” and “Selecting Programs to Further Your Objectives” sections of this guide.)
6. Finally, the committee should determine its future meeting schedule. Many committees meet once a month, but others appoint subgroups to work on projects and bring the committee itself together less frequently. The subcommittee or task force system has the virtue of investing participants in the work, whether it

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is exploring an issue in order to decide whether and how the congregation might become involved with it, or educating the committee and/or the congregation about an issue. However, do not create subcommittees just for their own sake. A committee with three functioning and three non-functioning subcommittees can become demoralized. Especially in the beginning, establish subcommittees only where there is enthusiastic commitment from participants. In the initial phase of building a social action program, regular meetings of the entire committee may help build a cohesive, devoted group.

A NEW MODEL: THE SOCIAL ACTION NON-COMMITTEE

In deciding to do social action without a committee, the congregation or its leadership establishes the position that all aspects of synagogue life should have a social action dimension and may believe that setting up a separate committee will have the unintended effect of limiting social action programming to only one locus within the congregation. If your congregation chooses this route, we recommend that a vice-chair or other member of every committee be assigned to lead and coordinate social action activities within each committee, and that the board appoints a social action vice-president to work with the various vice-chairs.

Below are examples of the way that a social action program can be advanced without a separate committee, using the existing structures of the synagogue instead. Much of this will be expanded upon in the next section, “Integrating Social Justice into the Whole Life of the Synagogue With or Without a Committee.”

- The women’s, men’s, senior’s, and youth groups each can dedicate aspects of their programs and activities to social service and social justice. This can mean having some type of social justice activity at each event (letter-writing, collecting donations for a worthy cause, etc) or it can mean that each of the constituent groups will dedicate one or more of their major events dedicated to a social action theme. Ideally, it will mean both.
- The religious school can establish both a *tzedakah* program and social service projects. Involving as many students as possible in decisions about *tzedakah* allocations will be an important educational process. Linking social service projects to holidays can emphasize the traditional social justice themes connected with the holidays.
- Synagogues can require “*mitzvah* projects” for *bar/bat mitzvah*, for confirmation, and for high school. Some may require only the students to participate, some the whole family. In addition, the curriculum for almost every subject (history, holidays, *Tanakh*, etc.) can make explicit Judaism’s emphasis on justice. All of these will enhance the students’ understanding of Jewish obligation.
- *Tzedakah* and social action components can be integrated into all life-cycle ceremonies to deepen their meaning for the participants. At a minimum, all families and synagogues can contribute to MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

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(or other worthy organizations) at such ceremonies. (By raising funds principally from Jews nationwide who donate 3 percent of the cost of weddings, *bar/bat mitzvahs* and other joyous events, MAZON is able to provide for those who are hungry today as well as to help alleviate the poverty that causes hunger. See “Resources” section of this guide.)

- The Ritual/Worship Committee and rabbi can focus on social issues as part of religious observances. They can lift out and highlight the social justice themes in Jewish ritual and liturgy, both in general worship and in developing special liturgies and services.
- The adult education group can take responsibility for educational programs and/or courses on Judaism, social justice, and peace that teach both the history of our values and the ways those values can be played out in today’s world.
- The Caring Community Committee can offer opportunities for members of the congregation to serve the elderly, the poor, and the sick in the larger community as well as the synagogue. Both are vital social justice concerns.
- The synagogue’s Personnel Committee can examine the personnel practices of the congregation with an eye to assuring that proper benefits are offered to synagogue employees, and that employment practices – by the synagogue itself and by any outside contractors it hires – are fair and compassionate.
- The Building Committee can examine the synagogue’s facilities to determine their accessibility to people with disabilities, their energy efficiency, and their environmental integrity. Building Committee members can also establish guidelines to ensure that all the products the synagogue uses – from building materials to light bulbs to coffee – are produced in accordance with the tradition of social justice.
- The Membership Committee can assess membership practices that either invite or discourage participation by some segments of the Jewish community, (e.g., poor Jews, people with disabilities, singles, the elderly, gay and lesbian Jews. The UAHC guide for gay and lesbian inclusion, *Kulanu*, will assist the congregation in reaching out to the latter group. See the “Resources” section of this guide.)
- Individuals throughout the congregation can be encouraged to exercise leadership, bringing to the attention of the board, the rabbi, or other appropriate leaders projects and issues in the community in which the synagogue might wish to become involved.
- The board and/or social action committee should, every few years, oversee an “Ethical Audit” of the synagogue, using the UAHC’s superb synagogue ethics manual.
- When your congregation receives the CSA’s newsletter *Tzedek v’Shalom*, take some time, either at a board meeting or at a special meeting of the rabbi, president, social action chair, educator, administrator or presidents of affiliates, to discuss one or more of the articles and/or program suggestions. Decide how your congregation might be able to implement your own projects based on what you have read.

### BUILDING A SYNAGOGUE SOCIAL ACTION STRUCTURE

I was recently asked by a not very astute journalist if my call for a return to God and Torah means that the ‘social action fad’ of the 70’s is finally over...I responded that he had gotten it precisely wrong. For Jews, I explained, God is not in another world, but in this one—the world of the everyday. And that a God who is concerned only with me and my needs, but not with you, is not a God at all but an idol. And that when a synagogue is not moving toward social justice—when it is not feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, then in that synagogue God is dead.

UAHC President  
Rabbi Eric Yoffie,  
1997 UAHC Biennial

INTEGRATING SOCIAL JUSTICE INTO THE WHOLE LIFE OF THE SYNAGOGUE

Whether or not a congregation chooses to do social action with or without a designated committee, a good social action program utilizes all of the human and programmatic resources available at the synagogue and, subsequently, maximizes the number of members that the program reaches. This section details how you can integrate synagogue professionals and key laity into the social action program and how to integrate social action into the ongoing functions of the congregation.

EXPRESSING TIKKUN OLAM THROUGHOUT SYNAGOGUE LIFE

Education

Adult Study Focused On Social Justice

To build a congregational culture that expresses the linkage between Judaism and social justice, adult study can lay important foundations. Adult study courses could focus on the Hebrew Prophets, Jewish ethics generally, or Jewish ethics related to a particular issue (e.g., environmental concerns). The latter course might look at the history of the Reform Movement’s involvement with social issues and examine recent resolutions of the UAHC to understand their ethical underpinnings and implications. This course might even include a “lab” component, asking participants to design and implement a social action project based on what they’ve learned. *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice*, by Al Vorspan and Rabbi David Saperstein, lends itself particularly well to adult and high school confirmation classes, combining discussion of public policy issues, Jewish perspectives on contemporary problems, and “real dilemma” discussion modules based on actual decisions the Jewish community has made on some of the great political dilemmas of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Social Justice Curriculum

Every book publisher has texts and/or curricula focusing on social justice, ethics, or Jewish values. Some of these will be of great value for your religious/day school, for your programs, and for general social action study components of your activities. Working with your synagogue’s education committee is critical to ensuring that social justice is taught either as a separate subject or as an integral piece when teaching other courses, such as Bible, history, or holidays. Ideally, it will be both.

The Synagogue Bulletin and Website as Educational Tools

Congregational bulletins or social action newsletters distributed to the congregation are a valuable means for stimulating interest in the social action committee and its projects, while promoting understanding of its work. Most synagogue bulletins have regular features on the congregation’s educational programs and worship opportunities. Similarly, social action articles in the synagogue bulletin remind the congregation that the work of social justice is a central feature of Judaism and a commitment of the congregation.



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Similarly, most synagogues now have extensive websites. It is vitally important to maintain a visible social action presence on that site, as, more and more, this is the portal through which potential members first encounter the synagogue. Ideally, social action will have its own page on the site, with a link from the homepage, which both makes it easy to find out what is happening in the congregation and is another way to send the message that social action is a central component of the synagogue's mission. (The RAC's website maintains a list of links to congregational social action pages. To have your site listed on it, contact the RAC's communications coordinator.)

In either medium, articles should be well-written and succinct. They should discuss a specific social issue, note why the issue is of concern to Jews, and detail current or proposed actions on the issue. Finally they should list a contact for readers who want more information, want to register an opinion, or wish to become involved.

The Social Action Packets sent to every congregation several times a year by the CSA and RAC are a good resource for sample bulletin articles. Each packet focuses on a single issue, offering background and Judaic source material related to the issue, as well as program materials and action suggestions and includes a sample bulletin articles.

### Visual Reminders of Jewish Social Responsibility

Learning takes place not only through what one hears and reads, but also through what one observes. When one enters a synagogue that displays posters, literature, or objects that portray social needs, one learns that the synagogue cares about its responsibility to society. Whether it is a *tzedakah* box outside the sanctuary, a poster with images of poor or elderly Jews, literature about Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger, or a crib for collecting clothes and toys destined for a children's hospital or local shelter – all of these are visible reminders that promote a culture of caring.

### SHABBAT OBSERVANCES

There are a number of ways that Shabbat worship can move the congregation to focus on Judaism and social justice. The traditional Shabbat liturgy, music, and sermons all offer such opportunities on a weekly basis. In addition, your congregation can designate a series of Shabbat services with a special social justice theme. You might consider the following ways to incorporate social justice into your synagogue's Shabbat programs:

- Plan an annual Social Action Shabbat. With careful advanced planning, a Social Action Shabbat can serve as a launching time for congregational involvement with a new issue and/or with new commitment to existing social action projects. It will offer an important time to elicit new interest and to tap members who have been energized by the experience. A sub-committee of the social action committee or a specially created task force might focus on the

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...Is there any institu-  
tion that holds out a  
greater hope for  
[human] progress  
that the Sabbath?

Rabbi Abraham  
Joshua Heschel,  
*The Sabbath*

Social Action Shabbat and, if a particular issue is to be highlighted, to carry forth the theme that has been explored at the service. To spread awareness of the issue, information can be placed prominently on a table in the synagogue. The sub-committee or ad hoc group can decide how to further awareness and knowledge of the issue and to plan action involving the congregation.

While the Social Action Shabbat can be held anytime during the year, some congregations choose to hold it on *Shabbat HaGadol*, the Shabbat before Passover, when the CCAR has traditionally encouraged rabbis to explore a particular social issue chosen by the CCAR's Peace, Justice and Religious Liberty Committee each year. Letter-writing, signing up for pre-selected activities or similar action on the issue might follow the service. (See section on "Establishing a Message Center.")

- Create a series of sermons and/or Shabbat programs. Such a series, related to social issues, can be planned to take place over the course of the year, perhaps once a month for four months. The series should be publicized as a unit to the congregation so that the social action thrust is seen as part of a coherent piece. The presentations can be made by the rabbi, by a knowledgeable, articulate member of the congregation, or by visiting speakers.
- Celebrate the social justice work of congregants. The social justice work and vitality of a congregation should never be measured only by the work of the social action committee. The work of the affiliates and of synagogue members (which often dwarfs that of the committee) should be embraced and celebrated.

In most congregations, most members do their social justice work outside the structure of the synagogue and its social action committee. Many are professionals in serving professions (e.g., social workers, doctors, teachers, staff or directors of social

service agencies, etc.) Many are volunteers, lay leaders, or donors in many social justice, political, or public interest causes. These people provide a precious resource. They can be invited to speak at synagogue educational forums. They can help create social service programs in areas of their expertise. They can help guide advocacy efforts, since they are likely to know the political players who affect that issue.

The yearly Social Action Shabbat service should include a recognition of their efforts, accompanied

by a publication listing all the synagogue members who are involved in such work. This is a wonderful opportunity to dramatize the extraordinary contributions the synagogue committee makes to the general community and provide powerful education for other congregants on service opportunities.

Some synagogues have created new rituals around this work such as the *bar/bat tzedek* program in which activists are given the honor of lifting or dressing the



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Torah at the end of the reading. Before doing so, they are invited to speak for three to five minutes about their work and what it means to them as a Jew. This ritual underscores the centrality of social justice concerns and brings into the synagogue and its ritual those people who might not otherwise feel they have a place.

## Holiday Observances

Like Shabbat, the Jewish holidays and festivals offer meaningful opportunities to make the connection between the celebration and social issues. Each of the holidays contains important social justice themes. The meanings of the holidays can be enhanced by utilizing and developing liturgy, ritual, and action components highlighting these themes within the course of your synagogue’s celebration.

*Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* are the time of our largest congregational gatherings, as well as the period when people are particularly inclined to consider changes they wish to make in their lives. Social justice themes resonate throughout the High Holiday liturgy and rituals. *Yom Kippur* presents Isaiah’s powerful words condemning religious practice that is not accompanied by social action. Because social action offers a path for placing our religious principles in the service of society, the High Holidays become an especially poignant time to invite people to participate in the congregation’s social justice work. Further, because on *Yom Kippur* there are more people in synagogue focused on improving themselves and the world, the number of people you might involve in your programs is greatest.

The invitation to participate, with an accompanying response card, can be placed on sanctuary chairs or in people’s hands as they enter or leave the sanctuary; they can also be mailed during the Days of Awe. If the response can be filled out and collected while people are in the sanctuary, it will elicit the greatest response. (Alternatively, synagogues can use these cards as entry tickets, sending them in advance.) The invitation might offer a number of opportunities to participate, asking members to indicate which action or actions are of greatest interest to them, such as volunteering in a social service project, organizing a family social action effort, staffing the Message Center or similar letter-writing efforts, helping organize a program, working on the social action committee or a sub-committee, donating to a *tzedakah* collective or fund, etc.

In addition, most congregations now engage in the “Corners of our Fields High Holiday Hunger Project,” initiated by the Religious Action Center and now coordinated by MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger.

*Pesach* provides opportunities to work with African-American churches on joint freedom seders, celebrating our common commitment to liberation from slav-

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LITERACY <small>Teaching Adults</small>	LITERACY <small>Teaching Kids/Teaching Children</small>	HABITAT FOR HUMANITY	SERVING A MEAL	DISASTER RELIEF <small>Nature</small>	WOMEN'S SHELTER <small>Domestic Violence</small>
JUSTICE, JUSTICE YOU SHALL PURSUE					
Make a Mark – Do a Mitzvah					
Please fill in the box of the volunteer program in which you are interested and write your name below.					
Thank you for your support!					
NAME _____ PHONE _____ EMAIL _____					
YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE!					
BURN CONTROL	AFFORDABLE HOUSING	IMMIGRATION	VOLUNTEER COORDINATION <small>Twelve Chapters</small>	DESERV <small>Must Zion's Caring Community</small>	NEW MEMBER OUTREACH <small>Meet Your</small>

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ery. (See the “RAC Resources” section for information on *Common Road to Freedom*, our *haggadah* created specifically for this purpose.) In addition, the traditional *tzedakah* of *maot chittim* (literally, wheat coins) is intended to ensure that everyone has enough money to provide a seder. Today, this has been expanded to include giving to the needy in general, and to organizations like MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. In lieu of the traditional symbolic “selling” of the *hametz*, many congregations collect the *hametz* that people would otherwise discard or put away and give it to a local food pantry.

*Shavuot*, with its attention to Torah study, is an ideal time to focus on issues of literacy. As it coincides with the end of the school year, it is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the members of your synagogue who have engaged in literacy efforts over the course of the year. With its connection to the book of Ruth, you may also choose to focus on how the congregation reaches out to those who have been traditionally shut out in your congregation or in your community.

*Sukkot* has natural ties to a range of environmental issues and programming connecting us to our relationship with the earth and the seasons. It also reminds us of both the bounty in our lives and life’s fragility as we dwell in makeshift booths. There is a powerful connection to be made to those who live perilously degraded lives due to poverty, hunger and homelessness. Finally, it is an ideal time to participate in local gleanings efforts, where members of the congregation go out to local farms and collect the “leftover” food to donate to a food pantry. Similarly, *Sukkot* could focus on issues of peace, based on the notion of *sukkat shlomecha*, the *Sukkah of your peace*.

The traditionally “minor” Jewish holidays have equally important social justice components.

*Hanukkah*, with its focus on religious freedom, may suggest actions to be taken on behalf of contemporary threats to religious freedom locally, nationally or internationally, to struggles for national freedom, or to the need to resist assimilation of core values. In addition, members of congregations can be encouraged, for at least one of the nights, to give a donation to a worthy *tzedakah* cause in lieu of the traditional gifts.

*Yom Ha’atzmaut* is certainly a time to both celebrate Israel’s independence and to think about current social issues with which the state of Israel is grappling.

*Tu B’shevat* presents a natural time to consider environmental issues. Such connections can be made in the course of festival observances or in the form of special programs that accompany the festival.

On *Purim* we are commanded to give *matanot l’evyonim* (gifts to the poor), actively seeking to give money directly to those in need on this day. The story of



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Purim also raises issues dealing with women's rights, the imperative of advocacy, and resistance to oppression and evil.

For more information on integrating social justice into your holiday celebrations, see:

*Seasons of Our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays* by Arthur I. Waskow, (September 1991, Beacon Press); or

*The Jewish Holidays : A Guide & Commentary* by Michael Strassfeld and Arnold M. Eisen (April 1985, HarperCollins).

### Lifecycle Events

There is a special means by which the value of social responsibility can be conveyed in a significant manner on any occasion when Jews gather to celebrate. MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger (see "Resources" section) was formed with the thought that when Jews are celebrating our own good fortune – at weddings, *bar/bat mitzvah* parties, anniversaries, and other occasions – we ought to voluntarily allot 3 percent of what we spend on our celebrations to help address the scourge of hunger among those who are far less fortunate than we are. In this way, a commitment to MAZON gives added meaning to Jewish gatherings. The pooling of the Jewish community's resources allows MAZON to make grants to organizations fighting hunger primarily in America, but also in other places around the world, including Israel. Obviously, celebrants can designate other charities of special concern to them in addition to or instead of MAZON.

Whether it is volunteering in a local program, raising money for a worthwhile project, or some other inventive action, integrating Jewish responsibility with Jewish celebration is a powerful lesson in Jewish values.

### Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Increasing numbers of congregations are asking that *b'nai mitzvah* commit themselves to a social service project as part of their religious preparation, thus indicating the sense of the responsibility that is inherent in the concept of *bar/bat mitzvah*. Some congregations have the entire family of the *bar/bat mitzvah* participate.

There are also creative ways to emphasize the *mitzvah* component of *bar/bat mitzvah* celebration itself, even incorporating it as a part of the party. One such idea is to create unusual centerpieces for your *bar/bat mitzvah* celebration and donate them to charity. Bret Johnson (Temple Am Shalom, Glencoe, IL) included stuffed animals in his centerpieces and then donated them to the Ronald McDonald House. Many items, including sports equipment, make excellent centerpieces and valued gifts.

In addition, many synagogues now encourage their students to think about donating a portion of the money they receive in gifts to *tzedakah*. This can either

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וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי בְצֶדֶק  
וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד  
וּבְרַחֲמִים

I will betroth you to me in  
righteousness and  
justice, mercy and  
compassion  
*Hosea 2:21*

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be done through special funds set up for this purpose (contact the Religious Action Center for more information) or by having the student choose the *tzedakah* of his/her choice. Rabbis, educators and parents can assist the young person to approach this dimension thoughtfully, suggesting a variety of contributions he or she can make.

Confirmation/Graduation

Many congregations make *tikkun olam* a central component to the confirmation curriculum, using *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice* or similar books as a text book and/or bringing their students to the RAC to participate in the *L'Taken* social action teen seminars. In addition, more and more congregations are requiring a *tzedakah* component for confirmation or high school graduation. Again, these activities and studies can be directed at the students by themselves or at the students with their families.

Brit Mila/Baby Naming

Focussing attention on the role of Elijah in these ceremonies and the redemptive hope that is created with each new person helps us express our hope for the world in which this child will grow up. In addition, expanding on the traditional blessing of *Torah*, *chupah* and *ma'asim tovim* (learning, family and good deeds) can provide an opportunity for family and friends to share their dreams and blessings for the type of life that the newborn child will lead. Other ideas include special centerpieces with items that can be donated (e.g., baby food in a basket, children's books) and requesting *tzedakah* donations in lieu of baby gifts.

Weddings/Commitment Ceremonies

Weddings are a time when couples are making decision about how they are going to live their adult lives together. Working with your rabbi, this can be an opportunity to help couples consider the role that *tzedakah*, in all of its senses, will play in their new life together. In addition, the congregation may choose to give an artfully decorated *tzedakah* box to each couple who gets married in the synagogue or by one of its clergy. Many of the other ideas mentioned in the other lifecycle events also apply to weddings.

Prayer/Liturgy

An additional way to integrate religious life with social responsibility is to bless the actions that congregants undertake in pursuit of justice, mercy, and peace. In Judaism word and deed are joined in blessing. The Commission on Social Action in conjunction with the Commission on Religious Living created a blessing that would express the holy intention of those who address social problems. Whether one is feeding people in a soup kitchen or meeting with legislators to express Jewish values and positions, the moment can be augmented by beginning with a blessing:



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(This blessing is available on special Social Action Blessing Cards, and can be obtained by contacting the CSA office.)

In addition, it should be noted that many of the traditional blessings in

the *siddur* contain important social justice themes. In *Birkot HaShachar* (the morning blessings) we include *brachot* that praise God who opens the eyes of the blind (*pokeach ivrim*), who clothes the naked (*malbish arumim*), who frees the captive (*matir asurim*), and who lifts up the fallen (*zokef k'fufuim*). Many of the Psalms from the traditional *P'sukei D'zimra* section of the morning prayers emphasize similar themes. In addition, there is a notion in Judaism that we should conclude our *tefillah* with prayers for peace. Thus, the *amidah* ends with either *Sim Shalom* or *Shalom Rav* and the *Kaddish* ends with *Oseh Shalom*. Making ourselves aware of these and other social justice themes in the *siddur*, and reminding ourselves of their challenge is a powerful way to enhance your congregation's *tefillah* and to build the social consciousness of the members of your synagogue.

## VITAL ROLES OF SYNAGOGUE PROFESSIONALS

### The Rabbi

Most rabbis are deeply involved personally, as well as through interfaith and intergroup coalitions, in addressing local and national social justice concerns. Rabbinical leadership is also vital to the success of the synagogue's social action program. The rabbi's teaching role can bring people – adults and youth alike – to an understanding of the social justice underpinnings of Judaism. The rabbi is also in an invaluable position for conveying the emphasis that Judaism places on engagement with the world. In teachings from the pulpit, through writings in the synagogue bulletin, in the design and content of classes, and by personal example, the rabbi can set a tone for the pursuit of justice as an essential expression of Judaism.

At times, lay people express the wish that their rabbi would focus more on the work of social justice as part of his/her teaching and leadership roles. Congregants may find that they do, indeed, have an ability to influence their rabbi by initiating meetings and discussions on the subject and by helping to develop steps the rabbi might take in the social justice arena. For example, the rabbi might be willing to teach a course on the Hebrew Prophets or to design and teach a course on social justice and Judaism. Encouraging the rabbi to lead a delegation to the RAC's Consultation on Conscience (the Reform Movement's

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premier adult social justice seminar) may also provide a spark. In addition, inviting the rabbi to attend a community meeting at which people are wrestling with local problems can entice the rabbi to become involved with the community and, subsequently, to involve the entire congregation.

The Cantor

Like the rabbi, the cantor has vital educational and leadership roles in the congregation. That leadership extends to the social action arena. The cantor, in various ways, teaches Judaism, which includes the Jewish mission of repairing and transforming the world. Like the rabbi, the cantor models social justice commitment. Some cantors work directly with the social action committee and/or the caring community committee. Others teach social justice themes and values in the process of working with the synagogue choirs and with students preparing for *bar/bat* mizvah. Still others arrange for music that relates to observances with a social justice theme, e.g., the Shabbat that is close to the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King or a special Social Action Shabbat.

The Educator

Synagogue educators, working through the religious, Hebrew, and/or day school, are in a critically important position to bring both children and their parents (and even grandparents) to the understanding that Judaism requires engagement with the world. Ensuring that *tikkun olam* is integrated fully into the curriculum is a major responsibility of the educator. Here are a few of the many opportunities for educators to promote the social values of Judaism:

- Designing both classroom and informal education curricula that help students link *gemilut chasadim*, social justice and Judaism.
- Providing a regular *tzedakah* component in religious education.
- Offering family education that promotes the values of concern for others and working to make the world a better place.
- Creating visual messages that proclaim Jewish values (e.g., via bulletin boards and school walls).
- Arranging opportunities for students to engage in community service, perhaps as part of a study unit, or in conjunction with *bar* and *bat mitzvah* and/or confirmation. (See the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* section under “Lifecycle Events.”)

The Administrator

A synagogue administrator can play a key role in facilitating a successful social action program. He or she can:



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- Work with the building and personnel committees to insist on the kinds of ethical practices discussed previously. (See “A New Model: The Social Action Non-Committee” section of this guide.)
- Ensure that the building’s operations meet the highest environmental standards, including using energy efficient lighting, heating, cooling and office equipment. (Congregations that reach such levels can apply to the EPA to be designated an “Energy Star Congregation.” For more information, go to <http://www.epa.gov/smallbiz/congregations.html>.)
- Seek to identify ways in which the synagogue’s building can be used to house community social service programs.
- Assist lay leadership and the other synagogue professionals to be certain that appropriate arrangements are made for the social action programs, whether they are the relatively simple needs of a visiting speaker or the fairly complex preparations that go into a *Mitzvah* Day for the congregation.
- Help assure effective publicity for social action programs. The publicity may go beyond the congregation, extending to the larger community.
- Guide the social action committee if it is contemplating establishing a Message Center (see section on “Establishing a Message Center”) or participating in the High Holiday Hunger Project.

## Youth Workers

Many Jewish youth find social service opportunities to be an especially engaging part of their synagogue’s youth group programs. Whether the objective is to discuss moral issues and decisions confronting them in their personal lives, to raise funds for a cause that they feel is important, or to offer hands-on assistance to those in need, young people like to know that Judaism relates to real problems of the world around them. Social service projects can be accompanied by Jewish study relating to the program (e.g., Judaism and poverty, Judaism and environmental concerns) and can involve opportunities to link with other youth groups, Jewish or non-Jewish, to pursue common concerns. (For more information, see the section on “NFTY Groups”)

## AVENUES OF PARTICIPATION FOR SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS

There are many ways that members of a synagogue can become involved in the social justice work of the congregation. Drawing on the variety of skills and resources that members possess can enrich both the work of the social action committee itself and the social action program of the synagogue as a whole.

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וְבָלַב כָּל חָכָם לֵב  
נָתַתִּי חֲכָמָה וְעָשׂוּ  
אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר  
צִוִּיתִךְ

I have granted skill to all  
who are skillful, that  
they may make  
everything that I have  
commanded you  
*Exodus 31:6*

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In terms of the committee itself, consider, for example, the range of tasks that are necessary to put together a rally (although the same principles hold true for any type of event that you are planning). These include: designing, photocopying and distributing flyers; making phone calls; creating posters and signs; confirming well-known speakers and musicians; setting up the audio equipment, etc. Now think about which members of your congregation work in graphic design, own a print shop, have artistic skills, work for a publicist, or have technological skills. While not every congregation will have members who have all of these skills, most congregations will find that there are some members with such skills who would be willing to help out in at least some of these areas. Often, these people may never have participated in a program sponsored by the social action committee. However, by asking them to donate their time and energy in the area of their expertise, you can help make them understand the valuable role they can play, even if they never attend a meeting or event. However, many of these people are likely to participate in the event if they have been involved in the creation of it.

In addition to helping the committee itself, members of the congregations can use their professional skills in a wide variety of ways to serve the community. Below are just a few examples of the myriad ways that the synagogue can help connect people with social service opportunities:

- Lawyers can speak informally in a shelter or similar facility with people who have legal questions (this might be done under the auspices of a Legal Aid Foundation to assure malpractice coverage);
- Doctors, dentists and other medical professionals can offer free services or advice in a health fair sponsored by the synagogue. (See the "Significant Programs" section of this guide.);
- Accountants can assist poor people in developing household budgets and provide free income-tax preparation assistance;
- Artists and graphic designers can help beautify a neighborhood or a child-care center;
- Computer specialists can train people with the skills necessary to get a job in today's marketplace; and,
- Teachers, former teachers, and others can provide specialized tutoring for children or adults.

A social action program that aims to reach a large number of people in the congregation needs to make available numerous routes for involvement. What is possible for a person who is single may not be possible for a young parent; what is of interest to some in the congregation will not entice others; some people can give just a little time or a little money; others have more of both. Opportunities to be of service from one's home, for example, staffing a "hotline," placing regular calls to an elderly person living alone, or writing letters, will enable individuals for whom leaving

the house is difficult to participate. Other people are eager to have an opportunity to interact with those in need outside their homes. There are, undoubtedly, members of the congregation who are particularly interested in social policy issues and would be drawn to advocacy work on behalf of the congregation. (See section on "Identifying Key People in the Congregation.")

As a social action program evolves in the congregation, its diversity is likely to be a significant strength, allowing many members – adults and children – to give practical implementation to their religious and moral commitments.

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QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

Effective synagogue social action programs are constructed in many different ways, depending on the character of the congregation, its leaders, the community where it is located, issues that are current, and the interests of those committed to synagogue social action. As discussed in the previous section, “Building A Synagogue Social Action Structure,” some social action programs are driven by a committee while others are the product of the varied interests of a number of members of the congregation, which are simply coordinated by one or more congregants or staff members. Still others evolve in response to a particular social issue about which the congregation and its leadership become concerned.

With many variations, strong and successful synagogue social action program share some common underpinnings and characteristics:

- They are religiously rooted, offering participants opportunities to understand their actions as religious actions. This can be realized through Jewish study on the issues they address, by offering a blessing before embarking on the action, or by raising up the social action aspects of ritual and observance. (See “Resources” section for Social Action Blessing Cards developed by the CSA.)
- They affect the congregation by giving it a sense of Jewish purpose and by giving substance to the notion of a religious community.
- They have a beneficial effect on the people and social issues toward which they are directed, either through shorter term acts of *gemilut chasadim* or through longer term change-oriented acts of social justice.

TYPES OF SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY

Social action programs fall into the following three categories:

- Education: Programs focused on exploring social justice issues and on learning about the relationships between Judaism, social justice, and peace;
- *Gemilut Chasadim* (deeds of lovingkindness): Social service projects intended to render relief to those in need; and,
- Advocacy: Efforts to change things by influencing public policy or institutional practices.

While a congregation may choose to begin its social action program with education, a fully rounded program eventually involves all three of these components

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in one way or another. Some programs – a long-term liaison between a synagogue and an African-American church, for example – may pull from the several categories simultaneously.

For an example of an issue that can involve the congregation in all three aspects of a social action program, let us consider the problem of homelessness:

## Education

The congregation becomes concerned as people without homes are increasingly observable on the streets. To approach the issue, the synagogue engages in Jewish study that focuses on poverty and Jewish responsibility toward the impoverished. Rabbi Charles Kroloff (CCAR president, 1999 – 2001) wrote a very helpful book, *When Elijah Knocks: A Religious Response to Homelessness* (Behrman House), for congregations working on this issue. The next educational step involves inviting the director of a local social service agency, or a similarly knowledgeable person, to speak about the causes of homelessness, problems of people without shelter, and local responses to the problem. Where appropriate, try to put a human face on such problems by, for example, inviting a current or formerly homeless person to participate in the educational forums (local agencies can help identify appropriate speakers).

## Gemilut Chasadim

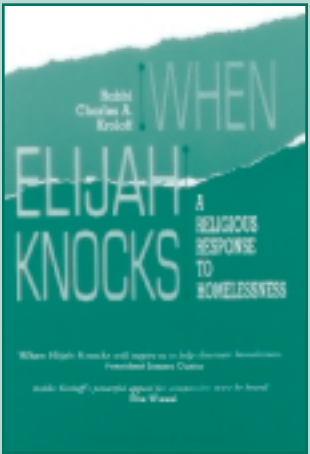
At this point the synagogue decides to become involved with a local shelter or resource agency for people who are currently or in danger of soon becoming homeless. Actual programs undertaken by Reform synagogues have ranged from recruiting volunteers to staff community shelters, to offering the congregation itself as a temporary shelter; from setting up a transitional housing support program and assisting with a day care center for homeless children (thereby allowing parents to work), to helping build low-income housing.

## Advocacy

As congregants become increasingly aware of the problem through volunteering in the program, the committee will want to consider responses that would change public policy, addressing the causes of homelessness, not just the symptoms. This could take the form of advocacy: pressing local, state/provincial, and federal government officials for greater availability of affordable housing or advocating for increased social services needed to assist people with employment, child care, or transition to independent housing. The advocacy can also involve addressing structural issues confronting the homeless, such as establishing an interest-free loan fund that would enable people living in shelters to make the hefty initial payment needed to move into an apartment.

The issue of homelessness used in the above example is focused primarily on the community outside the synagogue (although there may indeed be members of the congregation who are living in dire straits). Other issues will offer opportunities to focus inward. For example, the congregation's elderly population may

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have particular unmet needs toward which synagogue programs could be directed. These, too, can involve education of synagogue members, social services to the elderly (this is the *gemilut chasadim* category), and advocacy to be certain that the older person is receiving the government benefits to which she or he is entitled as well as addressing structural issues such as working to establish a Jewish geriatric care facility in your community.

A final example of a program that would involve education, congregational practices, and public policy is the arena of environmental action. There are fine resources for Jewish study of environmental concerns available from the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) (see “Resources” section). An audit of internal synagogue practices with regard to energy conservation and recycling would be in order. Finally, the congregation may want to speak to issues of public policy affecting the environment, locally and globally. UAHC resolutions offer excellent support from the Reform Movement for taking such positions.

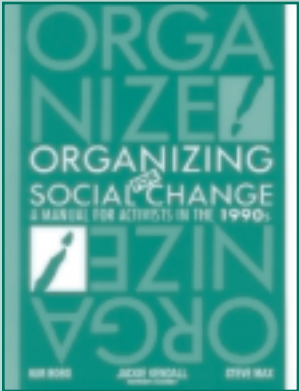
(For more information on types of social action program, see “Connecting to All Aspects of Synagogue Life/Education,” “Advocacy,” and “Significant Programs for You to Consider.”)

## TWENTY TECHNIQUES FOR ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

Activists who have spent considerable time working with congregations as they attempt to organize effective social action programs have formulated recommendations to facilitate those efforts. The following ideas are offered by Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Co-Director of the Commission on Social Action; by James Mitchell Brown, former chairperson of the social action committee at Anshe Chesed Fairmont Temple in Cleveland, Ohio and member of the Commission on Social Action; and by Kim Bobo, Executive Director of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, a former grassroots trainer specializing in religious organizations for the Midwest Academy (the premiere American institution for training community organizers) and co-author of the social action manual, *Organizing for Social Change*.

1. Pick programs that are integral to the congregation, including worship, study and action components.
2. Choose programs that are supported by and involve a significant segment of the congregation.
3. Pick initial programs that are limited in scope with an identifiable beginning and end, and which have measurable results.
4. Be respectful of people's limited time. Structure programs in a manner that assures volunteers they will not be pressured to give more time than they feel they are able to give.
5. Ask congregants who are already active in issues to be liaisons for the congregation on those issues and to contact organizations working on these issues, identifying points at which the congregation could become involved.
6. Plan programs that involve the entire family.
7. Don't recruit for meetings; recruit for an activity.
8. Put a human face on the problems you are addressing. Help congregants understand that there are real people affected by the problems you are addressing.
9. When engaged in social service programs, preserve the dignity of the people who are being served, involving them in discussion about the services that are contemplated.

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10. Involve the synagogue leadership, particularly the board, in projects. This will generate a greater understanding of and commitment to the power of social action in the life of the synagogue.
11. Through publicity, build the image of the committee in both the synagogue and the community.
12. Be open to projects people are interested in, as long as they are willing to do the work. Don't be an impediment to action. Share the authority for the work with motivated people who want to run with projects.
13. Remember that the number of people involved is not what's ultimately important; what is critical is doing something important.
14. When bringing a speaker to the congregation who can excite people about an issue, be ready to sign people up to work on the issue at that time. Don't use speakers simply as entertainment. The speakers should have topics that lead to action.
15. Try to offer some activities that people can do at home, such as answering a domestic violence hotline by volunteers who have been trained to do so.
16. Work with all of the affiliates (sisterhood, men's club, youth group, senior citizens) to engage them in this work.
17. Work especially with the synagogue educator to involve religious school students in social action projects.
18. The goal is to become a social action congregation. Acknowledge the good work being done by professionals, volunteers and donors in their lives outside the synagogue and ask these people to participate when they are needed for synagogue programs; bring a doctor and/or lawyer to the homeless shelter to answer questions for people who have nowhere to turn.
19. Urge congregants to attend the Reform Movement's biennial Consultation on Conscience in Washington. They will be powerfully inspired by it and are likely to become new committee members.
20. Attach social action programs to already existing synagogue events that draw people. For example, if there are periodic meetings of religious school parents, pre-school parents, *chavurah* members or young adults, when a social issue is of pressing concern, arrange with the organizer of the meetings to make a short presentation on the problem, accompanied by opportunities to participate in action to address the issue.



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### SELECTING PROGRAMS TO FURTHER YOUR OBJECTIVES

Once objectives – which can, of course, be considerably more specific than those listed above – have been identified, there are a number of resources available to assist in choosing an appropriate program – one that is likely to further those objectives. Members of the social action committee or planning group may be interested and quite knowledgeable about how to develop specific projects and programs. Beyond your synagogue, extensive resources are available.

Publications of the Commission on Social Action and the Religious Action Center offer many avenues for activism; in particular, you can obtain ideas from:

- the CSA's newsletter, *Tzedek v'Shalom*;
- the "Social Action Packets" that are distributed several times a year by the CSA and RAC;
- *Chai* IMPACT E-mail Action Alerts (of particular importance on national issues);
- the RAC web site (<http://www.rac.org>), particularly its program bank section;
- recent UAHC, CCAR and WRJ resolutions;
- Irving J. Fain Award-winning programs (the Movement's highest award for social action programs), a listing of which is available from the CSA or from the RAC's website; and,
- the "Significant Programs for You to Consider" section of this guide.

Apart from written and electronic resources, the staff of the RAC and CSA are available to help. A conversation with the Director of the CSA or the Director of Congregational Relations of the CSA/RAC would be a helpful way to link yourself with the resources of the Reform Movement. Either of them may, in turn, suggest that you speak with one of the Legislative Assistants at the RAC if your interest is in a particular issue. Or they may let you know of other congregations that have undertaken projects close to your interests. The staff of the RAC and the CSA can also direct you to national organizations with which they work that have expertise on specific issues.

For a voice closer to home, each UAHC region has a Regional Social Action Chairperson and some have social action staff. A conversation with the regional chair can put you in touch with the activities of congregations in your area and special resources that may exist near you. Contact the CSA office or your regional UAHC office to obtain the name and contact information for your region's chairperson.

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**UAHC/CCAR Resolutions as Resources for Advocacy**

At its Biennial conventions, the UAHC adopts positions reflecting agreement of a majority of the thousands of delegates, representing synagogues across North America, who attend. Many of the resolutions concern social issues about which the delegates believe the UAHC should speak and on which the congregations should take action. While some of the issues can be considered “political,” the Biennial Assembly is acknowledging, by its voting decisions, that Jewish values frequently must find expression in the political arena if we are to effectively pursue our calling to be God’s partners in the creation of a more just and peaceful world. The CCAR takes similar action on resolutions at its annual conventions.

Following their adoption, the Religious Action Center uses the resolutions to design its advocacy work. But the resolutions have important implications for congregations as well as the RAC. In many instances the resolutions call on congregations to take related actions. For example, when the UAHC passed a resolution concerning the serious problem of homelessness in the United States and Canada, in addition to calling for more adequate governmental responses, the resolution also asked that synagogues become involved with the issue. Synagogues across North America responded to the problem in exemplary ways. In educating and galvanizing their congregation, activists may find it helpful to refer to the UAHC resolution.

Although resolutions do not bind congregations to take particular actions, they do offer support. It can be encouraging to members of the congregation who may be hesitant to see the temple involved with one issue or another to know that the UAHC has taken a position on the matter. Once the congregation has been informed and invited to become involved with the issue, various kinds of action can be contemplated. Beyond the social services that the resolutions may suggest, synagogues use them as a guide when seeking opportunities to participate in advocacy efforts. They might join or initiate a local coalition, as in the case cited above, for example, to insist on the provision of an adequate supply of low-income housing.

**Compelling Local Needs and Issues**

Other sources of information may come from local social justice organizations and coalitions. If there’s a Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) in your area, it may already be involved in projects that would be of interest to the congregation. The JCRC director could be invited to speak to the committee regarding issues on which the JCRC is focused. Local interfaith groups may have programs and projects in place that would benefit from synagogue participation. If there are synagogue members who are involved with these and other social justice groups, they can be asked to offer insight into the projects and the needs that have prompted the projects.

## SMALL AND MID-SIZE CONGREGATIONS AND SOCIAL ACTION

Many small and mid-size congregations have vibrant social action programs. While they may not have access to some of the professional guidance and other resources available in larger synagogues and communities, they have found ways to make social justice a significant dimension of their communal life. Typically they find projects that rely on the human and financial resources available to them. In particular, they draw on the community spirit that often is a blessed advantage of smallness.

A review of a few Fain Award-winning programs may suggest the range of what is possible when people, even in small numbers, set out to repair the world.

### Port Jewish Center (Port Washington, NY)

A congregation of 150 members, Port Jewish Center was given a Fain Award in 1999 for an exemplary alliance it constructed with a community in the South Bronx. The program, called the South Bronx-Port Washington Community Partnership, created connections between schools, organizations, and congregations in the two disparate communities, the South Bronx being one of the poorest areas in the country and Port Washington among the most affluent.

As a product of monthly meetings between members of the synagogue and two churches in the South Bronx, relationships were formed and needs became known. Synagogue members were able to sweeten the lives of people in their partner community, starting by donating art supplies and books for children in an after-school program offered by the church, then continuing by providing used clothing to the homeless people served by the church, turkeys at Thanksgiving, and toys at Christmas for families too poor to buy them.

The relationship has grown as the congregations have shared dinner and services at the congregations, enjoyed a Kwanzaa/Chanukah/Christmas party, and participated in a seder and blood drive together. Many projects have stemmed from the partnership, including business people from the synagogue exploring the possibility of turning an abandoned theater into a cultural arts center, assistance in restoring an abandoned greenhouse, establishment of a scholarship fund for needy high school and college students, and creation of a job bank.

As the relationships deepen, new projects are contemplated. The understanding, joy, and possibilities for improving the lives among members of these two very different communities has been a blessing for all.

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Temple Emek Shalom (Ashland, OR)

A congregation of 150 members in the small city of Ashland, Oregon, Temple Emek Shalom won a Fain Award Honorable Mention for numerous social action efforts that characterize the life of the synagogue on a daily basis. According to its social action chairperson, community members know that the synagogue is always prepared to assist in community projects and the rabbi constantly inspires congregants and classes to perform *mitzvot*.

During the year that preceded its award, the congregation had successful food drives; raised money for local indigent migrant farm workers, for a synagogue in North Dakota that suffered flood damage, and the UAHF Disaster Relief Fund for Central America; and, invited speakers from a local social service agency to address the congregation, prompting a number of congregants to volunteer with the agency. On *Tu B'shevat* the synagogue also helped with reforestation in the area.

The list goes on: members of the congregation deliver Meals on Wheels for a two week period each year and also volunteer at the food bank for two weeks during the year. The synagogue serves as a shelter for a one-week period during the winter months as part of a revolving church/synagogue shelter program. Many congregants are involved in providing food, transportation, companionship as part of this program.

A highlight of the program has been the intergenerational *Mitzvah* Day in which 80 percent of the congregation participated. Activities in the past have included: planting flowers in a local park; cleaning and repairing Head Start facilities; going to the homes of seniors and to prune, haul and do general cleaning; working at the Humane Society and at the Salvation Army shelter; tending the Jewish section of the cemetery; and reorganizing the synagogue library.

Lest all of this seems daunting for a small congregation, the annual social action budget is just \$250. It is evident that for small congregations, just as for larger congregations, involvement in *tikkun olam* is a way to involve a large percentage of the community in practicing Judaism.

Central Reform Congregation (St. Louis, MO)

Central Reform Congregation, a 400-family congregation established in 1984, is the only Jewish congregation within the city of St. Louis. Its location is central to its mission, which focuses on “deepening our understanding of our Jewish values by incorporating *tikkun olam* into all aspects of our congregation’s life and in our own individual lives.” To that end, it is involved in a wide variety of partnerships and activities that emphasize the connection between, and the importance of, dismantling racism and economic injustice. Among them: Central Reform partnered with Cote Brillante Presbyterian Church, a primarily African-American congregation, in mentoring students from kindergarten through middle school and in sponsoring a summer camp, book drives, an annual winter

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coat and clothing drive, and the construction of a much-needed school/community park and educational garden. (The mentoring program has been replicated in eight city public schools, with 1000 students 2000 mentors.)

The congregation is an active advocate for accessible health care, higher wages, an end to the death penalty, it has expanded its own involvement (with Cote Brillante) in Habitat for Humanity to include the 12 area congregations that are part of the regional Jewish Social Action Network; in partnership with Grace Hill Community Center, it seeks to rebuild an economically depressed community and provide needed support, including transitional housing, for abused and addicted women. A twice-yearly winterization program targets elderly residents of the community, and has so far improved some 500 homes; weekly meals are provided at the women's shelter; in the Time Dollar Store, residents "buy" donated clothing and household items with "time dollars" they have earned from their participation in various neighborhood programs.

The congregation has also initiated an "internal outreach" program designed to identify and better support the needs of its members who are people of color or who have people of color in their families, and seeks to ensure that its own employment practices conform to its ideals.

## SMALL AND MID-SIZE CONGREGATIONS AND SOCIAL ACTION

דִּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט  
אֲשֶׁר לְחֹמֶץ  
שִׁפְטוֹ יָתוֹם  
רִיבוּ אֶלְמָנָה

Seek justice, undo  
oppression, defend  
the fatherless, plead  
for the widow.  
Isaiah 1:17

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THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY IN JUDAISM

In many congregations the *mitzvah* to pursue justice gets implemented only in the important efforts to provide some relief from suffering (hunger, illness, homelessness), and such efforts are often consuming. Still, in the Jewish tradition, such expressions of mercy are just one component of religious obligation. Justice is a critical ethical underpinning of Judaism. Without it, the need for merciful responses will be never-ending, since the disparities that yield degraded lives tend to grow ever more egregious.

At the congregational level, there is a need to enter more fully into the work of advocacy intended to beget social justice. This surely does not mean congregations should move away from *gemilut chasadim*, the acts of lovingkindness that mean so much to both the recipients and to those rendering the services. Instead, building on the *gemilut chasadim* activities, the social action committee can help connect people to the wider social problems that make such activities necessary. This awareness and sensitivity should lead our congregations to become advocates for a more Godly world. And that should include changing policies, institutions, and structures in ways that prevent the needs from arising.

Feeding malnourished children treats the symptom; advocating policies that will eliminate malnutrition addresses the cause. Sheltering homeless people treats the symptom; advocating for low-income housing and treatment of the mentally ill who lack health insurance address some of the causes of homelessness. Adopting political refugees addresses symptoms; advocating for universal human rights and against political and religious persecution help respond to the causes. Our social action work must do both.

Once congregations decide to embark on change-oriented work, they may, at times, be called to defend their advocacy efforts, sometimes because the work is challenged by members of the congregation. (See section on “Speaking on Behalf of the Synagogue”) If it is the advocacy itself that is called into question, as opposed to involvement in a particular issue (although critics may not distinguish between questions of substance and those of process), study of Jewish sources, particularly the outspoken Hebrew Prophets, will offer substantiation for advocacy as an integral aspect of traditional Judaism.

The prophet Isaiah enjoined the Hebrew people to become advocates when he said: “*Seek justice, undo oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow*” (Isaiah 1:17, emphasis added). These action verbs: seeking, undoing, defending, pleading – are among the vital components of effective advocacy.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel saw the role of the prophet as follows:

The calling of the Prophet may be described as that of an advocate or champion, speaking for those who are too weak to plead their own cause. The

major activity of the Prophets was *interference*, remonstrating about wrongs inflicted on other people, meddling in affairs which were seemingly neither their concern nor their responsibility... The Prophet even calls on others to be champions of the poor. (Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 204, emphasis added.)

## AFFECTING PUBLIC POLICY: REGISTERING JEWISH VALUES

Once a congregation has developed a position on a matter of public policy – whether, for example, it pertains to religious liberty, the need for more adequate low-income housing, or a foreign policy matter – there are a number of means for putting forth that position effectively.

### Developing Relationships with Elected Officials

Even in the absence of immediate critical issues, there are very good reasons for a delegation from the congregation to establish a relationship with elected officials on the local, state/provincial, and federal levels. Sometimes the relationship building might be effectively pursued in conjunction with other Jewish groups in the area who share the same perspective on social issues.

At an introductory meeting, while the main focus of the meeting may be to establish a relationship and to express the sorts of issues that are of concern, it is important to pick one issue to discuss with the official, and on which you want to get an answer concerning the official's position. By doing so, you begin the relationship with the understanding that the group takes the meeting and the official's time seriously, is prepared on the issues, and expects to get answers to its concerns. The group should agree in advance on which areas to highlight. Once the relationship has been established, it will be easier to approach the official on other specific public policy matters.

Meetings can be held in the official's district or federal office or, in the case of state or provincial legislators, the local, state or provincial office. Following the meeting, a letter should be sent thanking the official for the meeting and reminding him or her of the most important issues to the group and any commitments the elected official has made.

### Helpful Tips for Meetings with Elected Officials

*The following suggestions come from a document developed for the RAC's advocacy seminars titled "How to be a Chai-Powered Lobbyist":*

- Choose two or three issues to discuss during the visit. You will want to leave time for discussion after you present your views.
- Know the official's view on the issue before going into the meeting. For example, do not ask a Member of Congress to support a piece of legislation that he/she introduced.

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- Arrive a few minutes early for the visit.
- Be polite, even if the person with whom you are meeting does not respond in kind.
- Introduce your delegation quickly, but politely, including your city and congregation and any important expertise participants bring to the meeting. Very briefly outline the issues you plan to address.
- Speaking to a legislative aide is as important as speaking to the legislator. The aide will convey your opinions and may very well be better informed about the specific issue you wish to discuss.
- Be as specific as possible, both in terms of what you want why you want it. Phrase your statements in terms of specific requests for action, such as, “I urge the Representative to support the Patients’ Bill of Rights (H.R. 358)”;
- not, “I think health care is important.”
- Get specific answers whenever possible: will the legislator support the bill or bills? Does the legislator have any particular issues with the bill as it now stands? Note: the legislator may not always want to be specific; you may need to ask your questions in several different ways.
- If your legislator agrees with you, it still makes sense to discuss the issue briefly. Let him/her know why the issue is important to you, thank him/her for supporting the measure, and ask advice on how you can best assist the official in moving the legislation forward (or stopping bad legislation).
- Do not be hesitant to assert your views, even if they contradict the legislator’s. Always, however, avoid adversarial rhetorical tactics.
- Be personal: give your own reasons for your position, not just reasons you have been told. If you have personal experience with the matter discussed (for example, there are guns in your schools, a toxic waste site near your neighborhood) be certain to include that in your remarks. Elected officials often cite such anecdotes in their own talks.
- Be passionate: let the person know you really care about the issue.
- Be concise.
- Be prepared: if more than one person is speaking, know who is speaking next; assign at least one person to write down possible follow-up questions; have your position as a group clearly defined; and, know the substance of the issue.
- Whenever possible, list allies who support your position.



- Try to anticipate questions and have answers thought through. One way to accomplish this is to “role-play” prior to the meeting.
- Don’t hesitate to acknowledge when you do not know the answer to a question. Tell the person with whom you are meeting that you will get back to him or her later. If you would like to be sent more information about the legislator’s viewpoint, leave a business card.
- Thank the person with whom you have met and send a thank you note after the meeting, making reference again to the issues you have discussed and any commitments made.

### Inviting Elected Officials to Speak at the Synagogue

This allows for greater understanding of your concerns and closer relations with your representatives. Elected officials can be invited to speak from the pulpit, to address an annual meeting or a social justice educational forum, or simply to be present at a major social justice event, such as a *Mitzvah* Day or when food for the High Holiday Hunger Drive is donated. They will be interested because it is a wonderful photo opportunity for them. You should be interested because it may increase press interest in the event and, most of all, it will expose the officials to your synagogue community and its serious commitment to these issues. (During an electoral campaign season in which the official is running for re-election, extra care must be taken to avoid appearances of improper electioneering. See the section on “What the Congregation Can and Can’t Do” for more information.)

Take advantage of all visits by elected officials. Pick a couple of issues to discuss – formally or informally – at a pre-event dinner, in the introduction to the talk, or in the question and answer period. Use the opportunity to educate the official about the concerns of the community as well as to be educated by him/her.

### Cultivating Relations with Legislative Staff

Social activists and social action committees should recognize the importance of the staff who work for their elected officials. It is most often the legislative assistants who do the research, draft the legislation and speeches, and advise the elected officials on positions to take. Learn to cultivate these relations. Call them, ask advice, and invite them to speak at your synagogue. They will appreciate your recognition of their importance. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of them will go on to higher public service.

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Writing Elected Officials

Letter-writing campaigns, conducted conventionally or electronically, are potent ways to register public opinion. Let the words of President John F. Kennedy motivate you:

“I think letters have an effect on Members of Congress. Everybody’s vote counts in America, but those who sit down and write letters make their votes count more times.”

Even today, with the popularity of email, the best way to get a legislator’s attention (short of a personal visit) is to write a personal, handwritten letter. E-mail, while more effective than form letters or petitions, at least at this point, is still not as effective as letters precisely because it is so easy.

The Religious Right has been quite effective in rallying its constituents to write letters and make phone calls. This is one reason it has been, and continues to be, a potent political force. Our opinions often differ from theirs but we, too, must convince those who share our values to voice those opinions. Many synagogue venues offer opportunities for supplying people with the information they need to register their opinions as well as offering them the simple physical tools they need to write a letter. Certainly any social action meeting or program is an appropriate time to take an action. In addition, other synagogue gatherings, be they for youth, the Women of Reform Judaism, or seniors, can be accompanied by letter writing on an issue of concern.

To choose an appropriate topic for letter-writing or phoning one’s elected official, you may want to check the RAC’s online Legislative Action Center, which offers sample letters on current issues of critical importance to the values of the Reform Movement.

Letter Writing Tips

In writing letters, remember that on many issues, your elected officials may be hearing from very few people. Ten to twenty good letters can feel like a landslide. Many of these suggestions parallel those made in the section on “Helpful Tips for Meeting With an Elected Official.”

9 DO’S

1. Review the specific points you intend to make.
2. Get accurate information on the issues. The Religious Action Center can help you in this regard.
3. Display an awareness of the legislator’s past votes on the issue so that he/she will know you are a well-informed voter.
4. Tell the legislator exactly what course of action you would like him/her to

take, such as sponsoring or opposing a particular bill, or supporting or opposing a particular action proposed through Administrative regulations.

5. When citing specific legislation, refer to the bill by number and name, such as the “The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2001” (H.R. 74).
6. Tell the legislator why he/she should take the course of action you propose.
7. Put a human face on the problem you are addressing. Use personal illustrations to make the issue come alive. These letters are more likely to be read by the officials and cited by them in explaining the position they take.
8. Use a friendly tone. Threatening the legislator with your vote or influence is apt to alienate him/her.
9. Include your address on the letter itself, not only on the envelope, as these may become separated.

## 9 DON'TS

1. Don't indicate you are writing because a group asked you to and don't use sample language that a group sent as a model verbatim. “Form letters” are often discounted and may not be answered.
2. Don't cover more than one subject in your letter. If you want to write about more than one issue, do so in separate letters. Single letters dealing with more than one subject are apt to be set aside or delayed within the receiving office.
3. Don't indicate blanket disapproval of the legislator because he/she disagrees with you on one issue. Your correspondence should have a thoughtful tone.
4. Don't include every argument you know in support of your position. Use those that are most compelling or that you know will appeal to the legislator's political philosophy.
5. Don't belabor your point.
6. Don't send duplicates of the same letter to different legislators to save time. Your letters should be as personalized as possible.
7. Don't make offensive comments about the legislator or his/her staff (“I hope this letter makes it past your secretary.”).
8. Don't apologize for writing (“I'm sorry to take up your valuable time.”).
9. Don't forget to write a follow-up letter when you receive your legislator's response, even if it sounds like a form letter. Follow-up letters get even more attention.

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TIPS FOR FOLLOW-UP LETTERS

- Writing a follow-up letter from you or from friends can be even more important than your original correspondence. This shows your level of commitment.
- Circulate the legislator’s response and your follow-up letter among your family and friends. Your follow-up letter should mention that you did this.
- Follow-up letters should be written promptly.
- If your legislator agrees with you, write back expressing your appreciation. Sometimes it is better to have one of your friends write and explain that you shared the letter and how appreciative your friend is. Positive reinforcement is very important and can be instrumental in getting the legislator to take an active role on the issue.
- If your legislator expressed concerns about your position, but you think he/she can be persuaded, offer thoughtful refutations of arguments he/she may have used.
- If possible, enclose a pertinent editorial or fact sheet that supports your views.

Establishing a Message Center

A visible and effective way to bring advocacy right into the synagogue is to establish a Message Center as a place to write letters on issues of social concern. The Message Center may consist of no more than a table or two with an identifying banner proclaiming “Message Center,” or whatever name will signify to congregants that this is a place to take action. This simple equipment, along with a supply of pens, plain writing paper, envelopes, stamps, and a list of elected representatives along with their addresses, allows the Center to be folded up when not in use and easily brought out when needed.

The Message Center encourages a rapid response to legislative situations or social crises requiring immediate attention. The Center can be opened at a number of different synagogue functions, for example, synagogue or affiliate meetings or just before religious school ends while parents are waiting for their children. The most common time to invite people to express their opinions is during the *Oneg Shabbat* following Shabbat services. Whenever you use the Center, collect the letters to mail yourself (even if it means springing for the stamps). Most of those who take material home to write or mail a letter never get to it.

Process for Opening a Message Center during an  
*Oneg Shabbat*

Since *Oneg Shabbat* and *Shabbat Kiddush* are the times the greatest number of people gather regularly, in those synagogues that feel writing on Shabbat is appropriate, the following applies. In other synagogues, the same techniques can

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be applied to non-Shabbat gatherings (including Sunday morning bagel brunches, adult education nights, etc.). The following is an easy 10-step guide to establishing a Message Center:

1. Determine in advance on which issue the Social Action Committee or social action leadership would like members of the congregation to express themselves. This determination can be guided by *Chai* IMPACT E-mail Action Alerts, UAHC resolutions, or other issues of concern to the congregation. Prior consultation on the issue to be addressed should take place with either the synagogue president, the rabbi, or whomever has been designated to be involved in these decisions.
2. Materials that discuss the subject at hand, for example *Chai* IMPACT E-mail Action Alerts and relevant UAHC resolutions, should be gathered and duplicated for people who visit the Message Center. You need to set your own standards for circumstances in which you feel it is important to have material advocating both sides of an issue and when that is not necessary. Try to include a Jewish perspective in the information you provide. You may choose to guide the letter-writing with sample letters or with a list of suggested points to be covered.
3. Some people may not want to write on Shabbat. The Message Center gives them an opportunity to take background information with them and do their writing after Shabbat.
4. Make it clear that people should advocate for the position they believe in, whether or not it coincides with a recommended position.
5. Volunteers are needed set up the Message Center, staff the table, welcome participants, and provide guidance and should be sought ahead of time. Usually one or two people can manage all the functions.
6. An announcement should be made during services that the Message Center will be open after services and should mention very briefly the subject on which action is sought.
7. To be certain that the letters written will be mailed promptly, the Message Center volunteer can mail all letters that have been placed in a box on the table. A coin jar to cover the cost of postage and supplies may be provided, or the social action committee can decide to allocate money for stamps (especially if the custom of the synagogue is not to use money on Shabbat).
8. Remind people to include their return address on the letter itself as well as the envelope.
9. The question of how frequently the Message Center should be opened is answered differently by different congregations. If it is present every Friday night it may attract less attention than if it appears once a month. Sometimes a series of fast-moving critical issues necessitates more frequent usage.

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10. Vary the types of issues on which congregants are asked to take action. A balance between those of particular interest to the Jewish community and those of more general interest is one consideration. Another sort of balance may be between issues that affect people close to home versus those that are more remote in impact. All of these issues are important and likely to express Jewish values, but some will interest some congregants more than others.

Know that the Message Center may have secondary benefits that are significant. For one thing, the Center may serve as a place for people new to the congregation or just visiting to gather and interact. Newcomers often find *Onegs* a bit uncomfortable, not knowing to whom to talk. The Message Center is immediately involving. Another benefit is that the Center is a visible reminder to people in the congregation that the synagogue has a commitment to putting its values into action.

Identifying Key People in the Congregation

Many synagogues have members who are elected or appointed officials, legislative assistants, party officials, or significant advisors or contributors to elected officials. Seek their advice and involvement. Thus, for example, if someone is active in local politics, when an issue about which the congregation cares is coming before the legislature, that person might be in a strong position to make a call or pay a visit to the pertinent elected representative. Please remember to contact the RAC with information about such politically-involved members.

Perhaps a congregant has a strong interest in a particular issue of social justice and has worked in the community to advance that cause. That congregant can be asked to track the issue and keep the congregation advised when there is action to be taken.

By identifying such key people ahead of time, the congregation or social action committee will be prepared to respond to issues in a timely way. In addition, the congregation now has a means to be kept informed about matters by congregants who are particularly knowledgeable. This process has the added advantage of affording socially-concerned members of the congregation a new way to link their passion for justice with their synagogue life.

Your “Who’s Who of Concerned Members” can even be an actual physical directory, updated from time to time, that will be passed from one social action chair to the next, forming an ongoing record of which members can be helpful on which issues. The members’ areas of interest or influence should be noted so that, for example, when a critical environmental or housing or health issue confronts the community, there will be a resource pool available to the congregation.

To adequately tap the congregation for advocacy or other sorts of social action, be certain that new members as well as older members are given an opportunity to inform the synagogue of their interests. As indicated above, you might decide

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to design a brief questionnaire aimed at social action concerns that will be distributed at a strategic time, perhaps during the High Holidays, or will be mailed to the congregation with a persuasive cover letter.

For the new members in particular, if they ordinarily are given an interest form, be certain that social justice interests are included and that those interests are forwarded to someone on the social action committee who is working on congregational involvement. If this is not routinely done for new members by the congregation, ask that they be given a social action questionnaire (which you have designed) when they join.

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Effective Advocacy—A Real Story

The following strategy was developed by a small group in a Midwestern community during a legislative battle over food stamps. It could easily apply to many issues and offers a fine strategy for augmenting the voice of a group.

The Midwestern group realized that their Representative, as well as many people in the legislative district, had a position different than their own on a food stamp issue. They felt that some education was in order.

They held a meeting to plan a response, bringing to the meeting all the study material they could find. Sections of the background material which addressed the objections of their Representative to the position they favored had been underlined. The group's goal was twofold: to create a climate for discussion within the community and to impress the Representative that some of his constituents did not share his position.

Six members of the group committed themselves to deal with separate objections in letters to the editor of the local paper. They used the statistics and arguments of an IMPACT Action Alert (the present equivalent would be a *Chai* IMPACT E-mail Action Alert; see "Resources of the RAC" section) and added points that applied to their own city. The group agreed to a one-week period for sending these letters to the newspaper that catered principally to local issues.

The group further agreed on three follow-up actions, and each participant accepted a specific assignment:

Each member watched the newspaper for the letter to the editor. The day it was published, each asked at least two friends to clip the letter and send it to the Representative. Many people who do not feel equipped to write a personal letter on the subject respond to this kind of simple request. Included were messages such as: "I found this to be very interesting and would like your opinion."

One person volunteered to call the local radio station the day after the letter appeared. That station ran a talk show for listeners to voice their opinions on any subject. Before calling the station, she alerted the other members of the group through a phone chain established at the initial meeting. She told the station that she had seen the letter in the paper, read it over the phone, and wondered if others would care to comment on the issue. The same people who had written other letters were prepared to call in and add their views to the discussion or to wait until others had called with objections.

The group had alerted others in the community of the plan, thereby expanding the original number involved in the project. The calling resulted in a three-day debate on the talk show. This was unusual and, because the media



needs to cater to the interests of the public, the leader of the original group was invited to appear as a guest on the morning show of the affiliated television station.

Later, three members of the group called the Representative to make an appointment to talk about the issue. They cited the letter to the editor and the subsequent discussion on radio and TV. The office was aware of the widespread interest in the legislation and the Representative agreed to meet with the group the next time he was in the district.

The entire action took only a few weeks to execute. It quickly involved many members of the community who had no previous interest in the issue. Once the debate was established as being a matter of public concern, the local newspaper did a feature on the legislation. Thus, the members of the group were successful not only in getting the attention of their legislator, but in raising the level of awareness about the issue for the entire community.

### Using the Media

Perhaps the greatest single factor in the external impact of your social action events is the media exposure you receive. While a great speaker might electrify those who are there, even a short newspaper story or a 10-second evening news clip will alert many of those who were not there. Attention also begets attention: people who miss an event but see media coverage often call afterward, providing you with an opportunity to recruit new volunteers and reach a larger base.

The fact that the media is so crucial is, of course, both good news and bad news. The good news is that working with the media is not a difficult or rarefied process; with a little patience and plenty of persistence, anyone can make even a small event into a newsworthy story. The bad news is that the news cycle is often out of your control; even the best planning sometimes gets derailed by a major breaking story elsewhere in the area or the world. Here, however, we will focus on the good news.

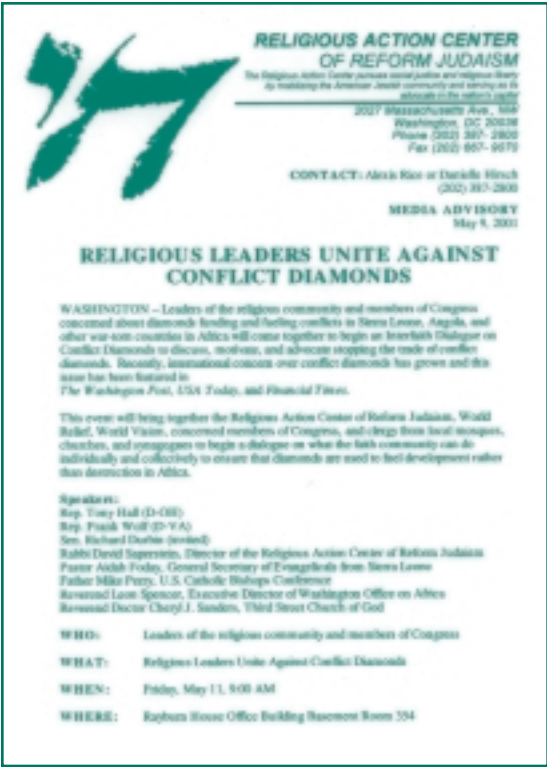
There are five basic steps to producing good media coverage for your event.

1. Have clear answers to the basic journalistic questions (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How many? Whom do I call for more information?) about your event. These are the most fundamental pieces of information that any media outlet will want. If you are unclear or do not have these answers, you are likely to get a frosty reception. It is important to include these details very clearly in your media advisory. Keep in mind that you do not need to hold an earth-shattering event for it to be newsworthy: the activities of local religious organizations are, by definition, news to the local paper and local broadcast media; in addition, even a small group is newsworthy if someone with local notoriety or an issue of local interest is to be discussed. Don't be shy about pressing for news coverage of your events.

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2. Tell them what’s going on. Make sure that the local news media know what you’re going to do and have all of the information that they need to decide whether or not to cover your event. This is usually done through a press advisory (see below). A media advisory should go out as soon as you have all of the answers to the questions above, and it should go out again a week before the event, and then again the day before the event. It is appropriate to follow your advisory with a phone call (Did you receive our advisory? Do you have any questions? Are there any special arrangements you need? I hope we’ll see you there.), but not with an endless stream of calls.



3. Be prepared to help members of the media if they come. Have a press packet with an agenda for the event, a list of speakers or participants, some background information on the event and its organizers, a copy of any relevant newspaper articles, etc. In addition, be prepared to spend a few minutes with the media: know what message you want to spread and have a few participants in mind for brief interviews or comments. If you anticipate television or radio coverage, work out in advance where the camera might go and know where there are electrical outlets for lights or other equipment. Always introduce yourself to journalists who come to your event and make sure that you offer to help them. Before they leave, thank them, exchange phone numbers, and ask them to send you a copy of their finished story.
4. Be prepared to help them after the event. It is always a good idea to do a follow-up press release touting the successes of your event and containing some brief comments by organizers and participants. This is especially helpful for

those journalists who were unable to attend; this way they can still write a story. In addition, be prepared to field calls from journalists who did attend but need more information after the fact.

5. Maintain good relations with the journalists you meet. Not only are people who already know you more likely to respond to your next media advisory, but it is also the case that you will receive unanticipated calls on other topics once you have a relationship with a reporter. Anytime the reporter needs a comment from a leader in the Jewish community, it will be easier for him/her to call someone he/she already knows. Return all such calls promptly, even if just to explain that you don't have any comment on the subject. If you can, however, give the reporter the name and contact information for someone who might be able to speak on that subject.

There are a few additional factors to consider when working with the media:

- Deadlines shape the calendars and lives of reporters and not all reporters work on the same deadlines. If you want local TV news coverage, for example, you should not plan a 5:45 p.m. event. The station needs time to package and edit the story before broadcast. Analogously, most Jewish newspapers have Tuesday afternoon deadlines. If you want coverage, a Tuesday afternoon event will complicate matters. (In general, late afternoon events and very early morning events are inconvenient for reporters, who have afternoon deadlines and morning meetings.) Deadlines should govern more than your event planning: try to be considerate and not call reporters when they are finishing up stories or are under heavy deadline pressure. Ideal calls to follow-up a media advisory include a two- or three-minute conversation during which the reporter looks at your advisory and you briefly describe the event. A call when the reporter is too rushed to speak with you or just shunts you into voicemail is not a successful one.
- Remember that even though you will quickly find working with the media to be straightforward and mostly pleasant, not everyone has had your experiences. If you want participants at your event to talk to the media or pose for a photo, some might be hesitant. It's never a bad idea to have planted the idea in a couple of people's minds beforehand.
- Reporters are under great pressure and sometimes make mistakes. If you are upset that your event was not covered or that a story was incorrect or incomplete, do not hesitate to express that complaint. But always do so politely. Often, reporters are displeased with how much space or time they were allotted by their editor, and not all decisions about headlines and about what gets cut are theirs to make. The long-term benefits of good working relationships with the press are many. Rather than burning bridges over a story that you didn't like, be constructive in your criticism. Often, you'll find that a reporter who feels bad about having made a mistake will compensate by calling you for inclusion in a different story or will do a better job covering your next event.

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WHAT THE CONGREGATION AND RABBI CAN AND CAN'T DO

(Adapted from *Religion Today*, used with permission.)

Although some regulations handed down by the Internal Revenue Service seem to escape the bounds of ordinary logic, rabbis and their congregations have little to fear. A synagogue is tax-exempt so long as it does not act as a unit in crusading for a particular candidate.

In terms of lobbying in a non-election setting: A synagogue may not engage in “substantial” legislative (as opposed to electoral) activities. The substantiality of legislative activities usually is measured by reference to synagogue expenditures. Expenditures of less than 5 percent of an organization’s total budget generally are not considered substantial. This would include the portion of a rabbi’s or other staff’s time devoted to such activity or the cost of a mailing to congregants asking them to write their elected officials.

In terms of electoral activities: The following are electoral do’s and don’ts applicable to synagogues and their rabbis. As the law on these issues is subject to change, please check with a local lawyer and the Religious Action Center staff if you have any questions about the appropriateness of any given activity:

- A synagogue may not endorse or oppose candidates for political office, and a rabbi may not endorse or oppose candidates on behalf of his/her synagogue. A rabbi, however, may personally endorse candidates for political office.
- It is unclear whether a rabbi’s personal endorsement may be made from the pulpit, even if it is clear that it is his/her personal view and not that of the synagogue. The IRS has indicated it is concerned about this but has taken no formal position.
- A rabbi may allow his/her name, in a personal capacity, to be used as a supporter of a candidate in the candidate’s own political advertisements. While, technically, the rabbi may be identified as the rabbi of a particular synagogue “for identification purposes only,” we recommend that rabbis not permit this when it comes to partisan political activity.
- A synagogue may engage in non-partisan voter registration and voter education activities, so long as such activities are not intended to benefit any political candidate or party. (In fact, the RAC regularly distributes a guide to congregations to encourage them to engage in such activities.)
- While circumstances and the problem of appearances may dictate not doing so, the synagogue may allow political candidates to rent or use synagogue premises for their own purposes, on the same basis that civic groups and other organizations are allowed to do so. If civic groups and other organizations are required to pay rent for using the synagogue property, the political candidate should be charged the same amount. If the premises are

made available to one candidate, it must be made available to others who want it, on the same terms.

- The Internal Revenue Service has held that a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization may invite candidates to a public forum for the purpose of public education without jeopardizing its tax-exempt status, so long as the organization takes appropriate steps to ensure fair and impartial treatment of candidates. The IRS, in assessing a forum, will look at the total picture. No one factor is determinative, but the following circumstances may serve as guidelines:

1. Choose a location for the forum that does not reflect political considerations;
2. Assemble a non-partisan and independent panel of knowledgeable persons to prepare and present unbiased questions for forum participants;
3. Design procedures for raising questions that would show no bias or preference for or against a particular candidate;
4. Allow each candidate an equal opportunity to present his or her views;
5. Select a moderator who does not function as a spokesperson for the sponsoring organization's views, but serves solely to ensure that the rules of the event are observed;
6. State clearly that the views expressed are those of the candidates and not those of the organization, that the organization's sponsorship of the event is not intended as an endorsement of any candidate, and that all of the candidates who met objective, reasonable criteria were invited to participate, and
7. Prepare a forum agenda that covers a broad range of issues.

In a 1986 ruling that “all legally-qualified candidates” must be invited to participate in candidate forums and debates. However, such all-inclusive participation is not an absolute requirement. Under certain circumstances, a 501(c)(3) may exclude particular candidates from a forum if they fail to meet reasonable, objective criteria established by the 501(c)(3) organization for participation in the event.

- Candidates should not be allowed to appeal to the congregation for support of funds to be used in his/her political campaign to a congregation at a synagogue service or a synagogue sponsored event.
- While we generally recommend that synagogues not give their membership lists to any other organizations, synagogues may not sell or offer their membership lists to electoral candidates.

### ADVOCACY: FINDING A JEWISH VOICE FOR CHANGE

- A synagogue may, on the other hand, give its mailing list to a legislative organization on the same basis that the list is made available to other organizations. If a legislative organization is given more favorable terms for receiving a mailing list than other organizations, the cost of the list would be considered a legislative expenditure. Again, we recommend that you do not give your synagogue mailing list to any outside organizations.
- A synagogue may not establish or aid in establishing a political action committee (PAC).
- The rabbi and other like-minded individuals may establish a political action committee, as individuals, but care should be taken that the committee is completely separate from the synagogue.

SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE SYNAGOGUE

Congregations have different ways of responding to the question of whether a social action committee can speak in the name of the synagogue. Some congregations have decided that only the synagogue board can speak for the synagogue. Other congregations allow the committee to speak only for itself, but not for the congregation. Still others will permit the committee to speak for the synagogue if the board has approved the matter at hand. In some synagogues, when the committee is speaking locally on a matter on which the UAHC has passed a resolution nationally, they can act without prior approval from the synagogue board. Some synagogues have a policy of not speaking on public policy issues at all.

The advantages of doing or saying something in the name of the congregation include:

- The ability to speak out allows the synagogue to address concerns affecting the life of the community and to participate in important community intergroup and interfaith events, or interfaith coalitions that need a Jewish presence;
- The ability to invoke the congregation's name on a social issue gives more weight to the position than would be conferred if only the committee's name were used; and
- The process of congregational education needed in order to speak in its name means that more people are invested in the issue.

The principal disadvantage of having to seek approval for every action undertaken by the committee is the slowness of the process. Some issues require rapid response if the response is to be effective. The congregation may put in place a process to permit rapid response in such cases, perhaps a phone conference involving the rabbi and president or the executive board.

### CONNECTING TO THE WORLD: WORKING IN COALITIONS

Groups committed to social justice face the frustrating reality that in addressing social problems, no single group alone can undertake all of the urgent tasks needed to produce significant change. By working with other groups with shared concerns, many issues can be addressed more effectively. In the process, a valuable sense of trust, understanding, and community is created among the participants.

In a pluralistic society, it is inevitable that legitimate group interests will sometimes clash. Yet constructive relationships play a vital role in the effectiveness of the coalition. It may be necessary to set limits as to the groups you want involved to avoid tearing a coalition apart or differing on core issues. As a step toward creating good relationships among coalitional partners, the American Jewish Committee's Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity has developed a guide to coalition building. Some of their suggestions (with our recommendations) follow:

#### MAJOR PREMISES OF COALITION BUILDING

- A coalition need not be a permanent organization. Often it is a temporary alliance of groups, which may well disband once its stated goals have been accomplished.
- It is important for individual groups to maintain their autonomy and identity at the same time they participate in a coalition to pursue larger common objectives.
- Each participating group must be able to perceive that its own interest is served by pursuing goals collectively that it would be unable to achieve on its own.
- A process to identify common goals should be established.
- Extreme ideological stances limit coalitional effectiveness and participation.
- A successful coalition does not require total consensus in every area before it can take action.
- Organizations joining a coalition do so on a basis of equality. There should be a concerted effort to strike a balance in types of groups to encourage an atmosphere of openness and avoid domination by any one particular type of group.
- Except on issues of basic principle, participants must be willing to accept and deal with differences in values, attitudes, and communication styles among the coalitional members.

- Internal group conflict is inevitable, should be anticipated, and should be treated constructively as part of the process of coalition building.
- Negotiating and bargaining are basic to the successful functioning of any coalition.
- Reasonable short-term and long-term goals and priorities should be clearly defined in such a way that participants are likely to achieve at least some of them.

**COALITION TRAINING: THE KEYS TO SUCCESS**

- Establish an understanding of the differences between a coalition composed of extremely diverse groups and the more homogeneous types of organizations in which people are accustomed to participate.
- Raise consciousness around the meaning of pluralism by creating an environment supportive of differences in attitudes and appearances.
- Appreciate verbal and non-verbal forms of expression based on ethnic, religious, socio-economic and other differences.
- Be aware of subtle signs of disaffection or lack of participation that may be directly related to group differences.
- Encourage the participants to engage in open dialogue and free expression of feelings about themselves in relationship to society at large and to the group to which they belong.
- Help others discuss negative stereotypes in a non-threatening atmosphere that provides constructive feedback.
- Support individual participants in maintaining their own sense of group identity, while developing group cohesion and helping to avoid fragmentation or divisiveness.
- Be alert to potential internal conflicts, and work to minimize their destructive impact by encouraging a sharing of feelings and a discussion of group differences on values and strategies.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR MAINTAINING A COALITION**

- Be sensitive to existing power structures and organizational relationships in the community.
- Establish a core group or steering committee that will be able to reach out to the broadest possible spectrum of groups.



- Constantly clarify the coalition's purpose.
- Provide technical resources for: (1) developing a working structure; (2) research on the issues of concern to the group; (3) developing effective strategies to accomplish goals; and (4) developing appropriate media and financial development campaigns.
- Organize of periodic training workshops around issues, strategies, creative problem-solving techniques, and group dynamics.
- Create a mechanism for ongoing self-evaluation of the coalition's efforts and for feedback from all coalition participants regarding the leadership, strategies, and issues.
- Chart future options once the coalition's goals have been achieved; does it disband, become an ongoing "permanent" organization, or develop a new set of goals?

### CONNECTING TO THE WORLD: WORKING IN COALITIONS

#### WORKING WITH OTHER SYNAGOGUES AND JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

One of the remarkable aspects of Jewish social justice is its ability to help people transcend traditional institutional boundaries to work together toward the common good. Social action, like no other dimension of Jewish life, has the ability to unite many facets of our community, from the most secular to the most traditional. The ability to involve Jews from diverse backgrounds can be instrumental in furthering social action goals. As more people become involved, the probability of greater media and community attention increases. In planning your congregation's social action program, it will behoove you to look for opportunities to work with other congregations from across the spectrum of Jewish life.

In addition to the other congregations in your area, in the nation's largest cities there are regional offices of many of the major North American Jewish organizations, such as American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League. In addition, there likely is a Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and a Jewish Federation in your area. Seek opportunities to partner with each of these agencies to draw more people, to build your relationship with the wider Jewish community, and, possibly, to attract additional funding sources. Depending on the type of action you are contemplating, a broader cross-section of the community may enhance your ability to respond to an issue. (For more information on this, see the "Community Cooperative/Funded Events" and "Social Justice" sections of the *Synagogue-Federation Handbook* available from the United Jewish Communities.)

WORKING WITH THE REFORM MOVEMENT

THE COMMISSION ON SOCIAL ACTION OF REFORM JUDAISM

Purpose and Function

The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism (CSA) is the policy making and social action programming office of the Reform Movement. Its membership includes members of Reform congregations from across North America, representatives from the UAHC Board, CCAR members, regional social action chairs and representatives from the other constituent groups of the Reform Movement, including Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), the American Conference of Cantors (ACC), the Association of Reform Zionists of America World Union for Progressive Judaism, North America (ARZA/World Union), the National Association of Temple Administrators (NATA), the National Association of Temple Educators (NATE), the North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods (NFTB), and the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). Working together with the Religious Action Center, the CSA performs three main functions:

- 1. **Assisting congregations in establishing effective Social Action Committees and programs.** The Commission provides technical assistance to congregations looking to start or revamp their social action programs. By connecting the congregation with successful models of social action programming and available resources, the Commission serves as a national clearing-house for synagogue social action programming.
- 2. **Helping synagogue members become aware of social issues and stimulates them to appropriate action.** Congregational Social Action Packets (mailed several times a year to rabbis and social action chairs), SOCIAL-ACTION (an e-mail discussion group), and the newsletter *Tzedek v'Shalom* are just a few of the resources the Commission offers. The Commission also produces books, pamphlets, audio-and videotapes, and other relevant programmatic materials.
- 3. **Proposing policy positions to both the UAHC and the CCAR and overseeing the work of the Religious Action Center (RAC) in Washington, DC.** Meeting semi-annually, the Commission studies and debates critical issues of our time, develops policy positions, and clarifies and interprets existing policy to ensure its continuing relevance to current issues. The resolutions passed by the Commission are then brought before the UAHC and CCAR for their consideration. Once these resolutions are passed, the Commission and the RAC are charged with implementing programs and advocacy that adhere to the adopted positions.

How It Can Facilitate Your Work

The director and staff of the Commission are available to consult with you and your social action committee to help you develop an effective social action pro-

gram for your congregation. This includes assisting you on content and program-related issues, as well as process-oriented questions, such as developing innovative models to integrate social justice into the fabric of your synagogue. Together with the RAC, the CSA also sponsors regional and national social action skills training workshops. (See section on the “Religious Action Center” for more information.)

In addition, the Commission provides the following resources for your congregation:

**The Newsletter: *Tzedek v'Shalom***

*Tzedek v'Shalom* is the Commission’s newsletter. Each issue contains exemplary program models from congregations across the country, thought-provoking articles on current issues, a legislative analysis, information concerning the work of the Religious Action Center and the Commission, and profiles of social justice activists.

**Making use of it**

Many congregations have found it helpful to use *Tzedek v'Shalom* as a study guide for social justice issues. When a new issue comes out, the social action chair should convene the rabbi, the educating leaders of the congregation and its affiliates to discuss the topics raised in it. At that same meeting, they should decide what issues the congregation wants to address and through which means they will do so. This will help keep the work of social justice as a central component to the work of the synagogue.

**Contributing ideas to it**

*Tzedek v'Shalom* welcomes your ideas and program suggestions. Simply provide a brief program description or contact the director of the Commission on Social Action to contribute an article on a issue of concern in your community.

**Programs at the UAHC Biennial and UAHC Regional Biennials**

The UAHC holds its biennial convention in the late fall of odd-numbered years. These conventions, which attract close to 5,000 people, always include a major social action track of workshops and plenary speakers. The workshops are ideal for social action chairs looking to learn more about the issues facing our community, to share ideas with other social action chairs from across the continent, and to learn the skills to better integrate social justice into the life of the synagogue. In addition, each UAHC region holds its own regional biennial in the non-UAHC biennial programming years. These are opportunities to do the same type of work and to meet with leaders of the Reform Movement and other members of social action committees in a more intimate atmosphere.

**Awards**

Irving J. Fain was a passionate proponent of social justice and of the Reform Movement’s active commitment to the work of *tikkun olam*. He served for a decade as the chair of the CSA. The Fain Awards, established in 1983 in his honor and memory, are awarded every two years to congregations whose work

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in the area of social justice is exemplary. Specifically, awards are presented to congregations that have successfully involved large numbers of congregants in their social action programs or that have developed genuinely innovative and/or particularly effective projects. The awards are presented at the Religious Action Center’s Consultation on Conscience, which is held in the spring of odd-numbered years, just after a new Congress convenes. For more information, contact the CSA office in New York.

**THE RELIGIOUS ACTION CENTER OF REFORM JUDAISM**

**Purpose and Function**

The Religious Action Center is the Washington social action office of the Reform Jewish Movement. The RAC represents the Reform Movement to Congress and to the Administration; develops extensive legislative and programmatic social action materials for the Movement; and trains thousands of Jewish professionals, youth, and lay leaders each year in social justice work.

The RAC works to ensure that policy-makers hear a progressive Jewish voice on the more than 60 social justice issues in which it plays an active role. The RAC also “represents” Washington to the Jewish community, explaining the political system, training social activists, and producing resource materials to effectively motivate and inform grassroots activists.

During the past four decades, the RAC has been an integral part of some of the most important legislative and social developments of our time, including:

- the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965;
- the preservation of Church-State separation;
- the abolition of South African apartheid;
- the rescue of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews;
- the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and
- the preservation and continuing defense of woman’s reproductive freedom and right to choose.

The RAC works under the auspices of the CSA, the social justice policy-making body of the Reform Movement, and is charged with implementing the social justice resolutions of the UAHC, CCAR, CSA, and serving the other Reform Movement affiliates. The RAC works with the CSA to apply Jewish ethics to contemporary issues of social justice, religious liberty, and world peace.

**How It Can Facilitate Your Work**

The Religious Action Center can provide you with the resources necessary to plan your social action programs. Whether through its weekly legislative updates, website, social action packets or individualized information packets, the staff of the Religious Action Center can keep you up-to-date on the social justice issues it covers and help you get the materials you need to plan a successful

event. Through its conferences, the RAC also trains thousands of social activists each year.

### Eisendrath Legislative Assistants

The RAC is able to do the work it does largely because of seven recent college graduates who serve as Eisendrath Legislative Assistants (LAs) for a one-year fellowship. These LAs are involved and play a pivotal role in every aspect of the Center's work – legislative advocacy, conferences, communications and supporting the CSA. Over 250 young people have been profoundly transformed through their experience as legislative assistants and it is no exaggeration to say that the RAC and the Reform Movement's social action programs and policies have been transformed by the LAs. Former LAs have gone on to become rabbis, staffers on the Hill, public policy advocates, and lawyers, as well as a myriad of other professions.

### RAC Programs

#### Consultation on Conscience

The Consultation on Conscience is the premier adult social action conference of the Reform Movement, held every two years in Washington, D.C. Hundreds of Reform Jews from across the country, including lay people, rabbis, cantors, educators, HUC-JIR students, as well as participants from other streams of Judaism, converge on Capitol Hill to gain a deeper understanding of current social and political issues in order to consider their implications for the Jewish pursuit of justice and peace. Insights, analyses, and opinions are offered by prominent legislators, Administration officials, world and religious leaders, and shapers of social policy.

Two days of presentations in the Senate and House caucus rooms are accompanied by smaller workshops intended to help participants translate the policy issues highlighted by the Consultation into synagogue social action programming at home. Meetings between participants and their legislators are scheduled in order to give voice to concerns about issues that have been raised at the Consultation.

The Commission on Social Action meets both prior to and immediately following the Consultation. These open meetings allow Consultation attendees to get a glimpse of the CSA at work. It is at these meetings, as well as at its meetings prior to the UAHC Biennial, that the CSA develops resolutions on policy issues, with the hope that these positions will be embraced by the UAHC at its Biennial General Assembly and by the CCAR at its annual convention.

#### *L'Taken* Teen Seminars

The *L'Taken* Seminars (formerly known as the Political Action Seminar Program) are an intensive four-day *kallah*, in Washington, DC, focused on Jewish values and social justice.

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High school students from across the country participate in:

- **Prayer** – connecting holiness and justice through creative worship services;
- **Education** – learning Jewish social justice values, the legislative process, and the political and social reality we need to transform; and
- **Action** – going to Capitol Hill and lobbying their Senators’ and Representatives’ offices on the issues they have just studied.

Every *L’Taken* seminar covers a broad spectrum of issue areas in a variety of interactive formats. These issues, ranging from HIV/AIDS to women’s rights, from Israel to environmental and economic justice, are selected based on the current legislative agenda, in conjunction with the interests of the groups attending. Experts from both inside and outside of the Jewish community (lobbyists, national leaders and special interest group leaders) speak to, and with, *L’Taken* participants.

**Social Action Training Seminars**

The Religious Action Center, together with the Commission on Social Action, also run a series of specialized social action training seminars, both in Washington and in cities across the country. These seminars focus on the how-to’s of social action, including planning a successful program, recruitment, working with the media, working with elected officials and much more. For more information or to schedule a seminar in your region, contact the Director of Congregational Relations at the RAC.

***Machon Kaplan***

*Machon Kaplan* is a unique summer work/study internship program for undergraduate students interested in Judaism and social justice based at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. It provides students with a meaningful internship dealing with social justice issues; the opportunity to engage in academic study that relates to their internships; and, a community of like-minded students to share the experience together in a group living atmosphere. Students learn through study and action the interrelationship of Judaism and American democratic ideals, as well as the political interaction of the organized American Jewish community and the U.S. government, while gaining a foundation of Jewish knowledge to help ground the political issues on which the Center works.

**RAC Resources**

**RAC on the Web**

The RAC’s website is the hub of Reform Jewish social justice on the internet. It contains the RAC’s legislative priorities, press releases and *Chai* IMPACT alerts, as well as updates on the sixty legislative and policy issues monitored by the RAC staff. The website also contains a social action program bank, which provides information and ideas for congregations seeking to engage in congregational projects on a particular social justice issue. New material is being added every week. Set a bookmark to the RAC’s homepage at: <http://www.rac.org>.

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### **RACNEWS and *Chai* IMPACT E-mail Action Alerts**

RACNEWS is an automated mailing list delivering action alerts, press statements, program announcements, and other timely information to anyone with an e-mail address. Subscribers will receive a weekly legislative update whenever Congress is in session. To subscribe to this free service, send a blank message to [listproc@shamash.org](mailto:listproc@shamash.org) with the words SUBSCRIBE RACNEWS <YOUR-NAME> in the message.

### **RAC Advocacy Network**

The Advocacy Network is designed to provide an immediate and coordinated grassroots response just at the point when vital legislation reaches a crucial stage in the legislative process. Network members select the particular issues that they are interested in following and when their representatives and senators are “undecided” on such legislation, network members are phoned by a Washington-based liaison or a phone tree member to discuss the importance of a call to their elected officials. Sign up on the RAC’s website at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org).

### ***Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time***

The updated version of *Tough Choices* by Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, this book is used widely in confirmation, high school, youth groups, and adult education classes to present students with the most pressing social dilemmas of our time.

### **RAC’s Legislative Agenda**

At the outset of each session of Congress, the RAC publishes an outline of the Reform Movement’s legislative priorities for the session.

### ***Sing Out For Justice***

A unique compilation of social action music, recorded and performed at the 1997 UAHC Biennial in Dallas, this CD and tape has proven to be one of the RAC’s most popular resources. Available with a study guide that includes lyrics of all of the music and education resources for your congregation.

### ***A Common Road to Freedom***

Designed with Black/Jewish seders in mind, the newest edition of the heralded Black/Jewish Passover hagaddah is rich in new songs, ancient and contemporary writings, and reflections by Jewish and African American leaders. Scores of synagogues, communities and college campuses have held Black/Jewish seders during the Passover season using *A Common Road to Freedom*.

### ***A Common Road to Justice***

Published by the Marjorie Kovler Institute for Black/Jewish Relations, co-sponsored by the UAHC and the NAACP, *A Common Road to Justice* is a programming manual for Black/Jewish relations. The manual includes extensive background information on the history of Black/Jewish relations, several creative and helpful programming suggestions, sample liturgies and model sermons, as well as a list of additional resources.

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**Mitzvah Day Manual**

*Mitzvah* Day is a program that sets aside a day during the year when all congregants – adults and children, social action mavens and novices – take part in one of several social action projects in their city or town. This manual, compiled from congregations of all sizes that have conducted successful *Mitzvah* Days, will take you step-by-step through the planning of your synagogue’s very own *Mitzvah* Day.

**Ani V’Atah: How To Do Social Action Programming (Videotape)**

This informative, entertaining social action video features clips from successful social action programs around the country, advice from Reform Judaism’s leading social justice activists, and highlights of the extraordinary 1992 Social Action Training Retreat. This 40-minute video is an exciting guide to social justice activity and a useful tool for every social action committee, social action chairperson, educator, and rabbi.

**Kupat Tzedakah: A Guide to Synagogue Tzedakah Collectives**

Following UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie’s call in June, 2001 for congregations to take the opportunity of the tax rebates that all taxpayers received that summer to create a synagogue tzedakah collective, the Commission on Social Action created *Kupat Tzedakah: A Guide to Synagogue Tzedakah Collectives*. The booklet is designed as a how-to guide for establishing a Collective and also contains rabbinic source material for sermons and classes, as well as other educational material for adult study groups and religious schools.

**YOUR UAHC REGION**

**The Regional Social Action Chair**

The UAHC is organized by regions. Nearly every UAHC region has a regional social action chair to whom congregations can turn with social action questions and ideas, especially when those questions and ideas pertain to local or regional issues. Each regional chair is automatically a member of the Commission on Social Action, thus able to bring both a national and local perspective to the needs of the region.

Regions and regional chairs function differently, depending on the interests of the chair and needs of the region. Among the functions in which some of the chairs engage are these:

- Bringing together synagogue social action chairs and interested activists in order to share ideas, to serve as resources to one another, and to learn what is current in the social justice work of the Reform Movement. This is accomplished through periodic meetings, orientations for new social action chairs, and regional conferences;



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- Stimulating action on critical issues – local, state/provincial, or national – such as letter writing on school prayer or advocacy for adequate provisions for the poor;
- Keeping in touch with social action chairs by newsletter, phone, or e-mail to provide them with information and encourage them to take action;
- Helping to build social action committees where they are dormant or in need of assistance to function effectively;
- Producing resources for the region, tailored to local needs and interests;
- Interacting with other groups in the community and serving as a liaison between them and the UAHC;
- Planning social action programs for regional biennials and other regional conferences. For example, if the region is holding a small congregations conference, a workshop on social action for small congregations would offer a fine way to stimulate social justice work in those congregations;
- Encouraging the use of CSA and RAC materials by the congregations, as well as suggesting to the congregations the benefits of attending the Consultation on Conscience and other national social action programs;
- Working with regional UAHC affiliates (e.g., NFTY, Women of Reform Judaism, Brotherhood) to coordinate efforts; and,
- Working with the leadership of the region, both lay and professional, to be certain that social action plays a significant part in the work of the region.

### Regional Directors

The UAHC regional director is also a person to whom you can turn for assistance with your social action program. He/she is quite familiar with the resources of the Movement and the programs taking place in synagogues in the region. If you would like your region to become involved with a particular issue, especially if it is one on which the UAHC has a position, or if you would simply like to suggest a way for the region to further the work of social justice, the regional director should be consulted.

### Regional Programs and Training

A number of regions have offered conferences in cooperation with the CSA that focus on social justice. Frequently they combine Jewish study, training in organizing effective social action in the synagogue, and current issues with which synagogues may want to become involved. Bringing people together from around the region has the substantial benefit of connecting activists to one another so that they can learn from each other's experience and even develop some joint projects. Often the regional conferences draw teachers and activists associated

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with social action nationally, either lay people or professionals, as well as from around the region. For information about the possibility of a conference in your region, contact either your regional social action chair (who can be reached through your regional UAHC office or through the CSA in New York), your regional director, or the director of congregational relations at the RAC/CSA.

“Holy Way” Seminars

Several regions have combined Jewish study with education for social justice by offering a series of seminars called “The Holy Way: The Religious Quest for Social Justice.” While the precise pattern has varied from region to region, generally participants from synagogues in a metropolitan area have been invited to commit themselves to attend four to six evenings of study and discussion. Planners ask teachers who are both knowledgeable Jews and committed activists (frequently, but not always, the teachers are rabbis) to divide the evening into Jewish text study related to social justice and then to exploration of a social justice project or issue. Participants are engaged by the study and their activism is enhanced by the group exploration. People are exposed to excellent teachers and to other group members who share their interest. One of the great benefits of this program is that participants come to understand their social action as religious action, grounded in Judaism.

To find out more about the possibility of a “Holy Way” series for your region, contact the CSA.

NFTY GROUPS

NFTY, the North American Federation of Temple Youth, has been one of the leading Reform Jewish voices in the pursuit of justice and *tikkun olam* throughout its history. NFTYites have historically engaged in local and national political action through lobbying and marching, local inter-religious affairs, and community service. Whether feeding the homeless, joining with Black church youth groups, or writing letters to Members of Congress, NFTYites are involved in the work of *tikkun olam*. Perhaps this is why one of the most oft-sung tunes in NFTY is “*Ani V’Atah N’Shaneh et ha’Olam* – You and I will change the world.”

NFTY is comprised of approximately 450 local temple youth groups. While there are many models of youth group structures, in terms of its officers and programming, social action is an integral element of any well-rounded TYG program. Many NFTY youth groups participate in and are awarded the *NFTY Tikkun Olam B’Shem Adonai* Programming Award in which social action programming is a key component.

Most NFTY youth groups have a Social Action Vice President (SAVP). The SAVP may coordinate social action programming and projects just for the youth group, or may work with the greater synagogue community as well. Local SAVPs are networked with the other SAVPs in the NFTY region, and regional SAVPs are, in turn, networked with the North American NFTY Social Action Vice President.

NFTY uses this system of communication to network and provide resources for local youth groups.

If your youth group is not involved in your greater synagogue social action program, we urge you to contact your SAVP and to begin to coordinate activities together. Your youth group will bring a wealth of both programmatic and human social action resources. Working together will not only produce more successful and larger social action projects, but also foster intergenerational relationships within your synagogue.

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THOUGHTS FOR SUSTAINING YOURSELF AS YOU PURSUE  
SOCIAL JUSTICE

With this guide in hand, you have at your fingertips techniques for effective religious action as well as resources to assist you. Yet there is more to the sustained quest to repair the world than techniques and resources. In some senses, it's hard to be an activist, hard to go forth from the place where we are to a new place. But the choice is to remain in "Egypt," narrowly bound, with shortness of spirit—*kotzer ruach*—when, in fact, we know there is a better place, and that redemption will not come unless we set out for that place.

As the journey is sure to be long, often arduous, it is important that we learn to sustain ourselves. The following are some thoughts for sustaining oneself in the religious pursuit of social justice:

A. Create a sense of enspiriment: This refers to a fullness of spirit that connects us to our sacred sources and leads us to the streets—and to the shelters and hospitals and tents of meeting and halls of Congress. Jewish study is a wellspring for generating understanding, compassion, righteous indignation at injustices and cruelties that swirl around us, and, ultimately, action.

As an example of an enspiriting lesson, consider this one based on a teaching by Rabbi Eric Yoffie:

In studying the Exodus story, Rabbi Yoffie indicates that the first act of civil disobedience in recorded history was committed by women (Exodus 1:17), the midwives to the Hebrews, who defied Pharaoh's directive to kill all male Hebrew infants. Their defiance was based on their relationship to God, clearly a religious position, as have been so many subsequent acts of civil disobedience. The midwives determined that the will of the political authority, the Pharaoh, was in conflict with the Divine will, and opted to obey the latter, an exceedingly courageous choice. As good activists, they realized that they would need to be creative in their own defense and, in fact, were quite inventive (they alleged that because the Hebrew women were so "vigorous" they would have their babies before the midwives could arrive).

Rabbi Yoffie takes this additional lesson from the story of the midwives: Modern history is filled with claims that resistance to tyranny is impossible. There are attendant dangers, but it is not impossible now, nor was it in Biblical times.

Another lesson: Abraham Joshua Heschel interprets the Prophetic message as a warning that, "The sounds of religious hymns must not drown out the cries of the oppressed." (*The Prophets*) From this we learn that what passes for "religious living" or "spirituality" can become an exercise in narcissism if we address God but not the human condition. While it is lovely to be exhilarated by religious hymns, we must not allow ourselves to be deafened by them.

# A Guide to Synagogue Social Action

## THOUGHTS FOR SUSTAINING YOURSELF AS YOU PURSUE SOCIAL JUSTICE

B. Find colleagues and teachers: Choosing to whom we will look for instruction and camaraderie is always a quite individual matter; yet none of us is well equipped to go it alone. Because each of us responds differently to teaching styles as well as personal qualities, finding those individuals who will touch our hearts, souls and minds may require some purposefulness. Friends and teachers (and they are sometimes one in the same) alike challenge us to think in new ways, offer us counsel and consolation, allow us to be irreverent and reverent, help us to discover water beneath barren rocks.

C. Find what is engaging: Sustained activism requires a sense of personal engagement. Many people are apt to tell us what we “ought to be” concerned with, yet unless the issues have meaning for us, we are unlikely to stay with them or to have much creative energy for them. This is not to say that we can’t learn to care about issues of which we previously have had little knowledge. On the contrary, many times people have become involved with problems because they have seen or heard or read something that was compelling.

But we don’t respond similarly to all otherwise compelling issues, and the point is to find those that, for whatever, mysterious reasons, “get under our skin.” The issues that engage us most deeply often present, practically simultaneously, three levels for involvement: religious, political and personal.

An example: many of the activists who were involved with the Sanctuary Movement, the religious effort to protect and advocate for the needs of refugees fleeing persecution in Central America during the 1980s, reported that their involvement was experienced on all three levels: 1) as a religious calling or mandate; 2) as an issue that moved them to become advocates to change U.S. refugee policy as well as U.S. foreign policy which they felt was implicated in the creation of so many refugees in the first place; and, 3) as an opportunity to enter into important personal relationships with refugees and co-workers.

D. Sanctify the work: The integration of the social justice work we do with our religious orientation is another sustaining path. Text study is one path toward such integration. There are other means as well, many that are ours to create.

A *b’racha* is our traditional way of pausing and contemplating what we are about to do, our way of allowing holiness to enter. The Commission on Social Action, in conjunction with the Commission on Religious Living developed blessings to accompany our social action work (See “Prayer/Liturgy” section). They are means for integrating the work of our hands and our voices with our religious aspirations.

A less specific, but no less significant means for sanctifying our work is to proceed with religious intentionality, with *kavanah*. For example, on seeing people living degraded lives, one needs sometimes to remind oneself that these people, too, are created in God’s image. Another example: when adverse conditions seem intractable, invoke the image of a redeemed world: that place of justice and peace

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we are taught to imagine on Shabbat—that place we are instructed to create.

E. Maintain hope: It’s unlikely that we would set out to change the world without the hope that change is possible and without the knowledge that we can be agents of transformation. Judaism is essentially a hopeful religion, offering a vision of a world that is just, peaceful, and compassionate, while urging us to become instruments to realize that vision.

Because the issues in which religious activists involve themselves can be daunting, techniques for maintaining a hopeful spirit are both useful and sustaining. It may be helpful to keep a “hope list,” reminding you of the enormously hopeful changes we’ve seen in our lifetime. Entries may include:

1. The dismantlement of apartheid in South Africa;
2. The Women’s Movement and the Gay/Lesbian Movement, with all their attendant personal and political possibilities;
3. The Sanctuary Movement and, more recently, the Jubilee 2000 campaign demonstrating the power of religious activists to influence foreign policy and refugee policy, to give comfort and protection to those fleeing persecution and war, to relieve international debt burdens, and to provide the public with information different from what they might have received from the mainstream media and the government of the United States;
4. The anti-sweatshop movement, especially the role of University students across the continent in using the power of determined consumers to combat the egregious working conditions of those who produce goods for our comfort and pleasure; and,
5. The advent of environmental activism, especially religious environmental activism, through organizations such as the Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) and the National Religious Partnership for Environment (NRPE).

In each of these cases one can say, correctly, that much remains to be done. Yet each also demonstrates the power of individuals and groups to move the world along a Godly path.

## APPENDIX A: CONGREGATIONAL SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMS

Over the last half-century, Reform synagogues have proven remarkably creative and effective in developing and implementing social action programs. In fact, most of the initiatives that the Commission on Social Action and the Religious Action Center have pressed on a national level were first developed at local congregations. Here is a small sampling from the impressive array of social action programs that have been implemented in Reform synagogues.

### MITZVAH DAY

*Mitzvah* Day is a day on which congregants of all ages express their Judaism by serving others in their community. Congregants choose from a variety of hands-on social action projects that will challenge them on a personal level, and encourage them to incorporate social action into their lives throughout the year. While many of your congregants – either through the synagogue or outside of it – may already volunteer in areas soup kitchens, visit the elderly or tutor students, *Mitzvah* Day is a concentrated effort, on a single day, to bring the entire congregation together to spend one day volunteering in the community, as a community.

Successful projects have included programs as varied as tending to the environment (by cleaning up a local park); cataloging books at a public library; making toys for children with cancer; gleaning at a local farm and donating the crops to a food bank; fixing up apartments for low-income families; cooking and delivering meals to patients suffering from HIV/AIDS; and, taping books for the blind. In addition, *Mitzvah* Day provides another opportunity for your congregation to collect large donations of canned goods, clothing and other items for distribution at area shelters. Many congregations also incorporate advocacy into their program, by setting up a “Message Center.” (See the “Establishing a Message Center” section of this guide.)

A successful *Mitzvah* Day will strengthen your congregation’s commitment to social action. The most effective means of recruiting new congregants for social action projects and for your social action committee is by having them take the first step – getting them out there doing social action. A *Mitzvah* Day will also increase involvement in both pilot projects and existing social action projects. And some congregants will want to continue volunteering for one of the *Mitzvah* Day projects on an ongoing basis.

Finally, *Mitzvah* Day is also a time to deepen your congregation’s identity as a caring community. On the one hand, participants experience the power and value of their personal contributions; at the same time, it is an object lesson in the multiplier effect of numbers, a demonstration of how much more a community can accomplish than an individual action alone. (To learn more about ordering a *Mitzvah* Day Manual, see the “RAC Resources” section.)

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**SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTING: A PROGRAM THAT CHALLENGES THE CONGREGATION TO PUT ITS VALUES INTO ACTION**

Investing in economically distressed communities provides the best opportunity in recent years to move those communities from dependence to self-sufficiency, thereby bringing the repair of the world one step closer. Recognizing this at its 1997 General Assembly, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) committed itself to establishing CHIP, the Chai Investment Program. Under CHIP, the UAHC agreed to put 1.8% of its invested funds in community development investments; so, too, the Reform Pension Board, a joint instrumentality of the UAHC and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, agreed to invest 1.8% of its assets in such funds. The resolution also encourages all UAHC member congregations to participate in CHIP.

The preamble to the UAHC resolution points out:

In recent years, exciting opportunities for what has come to be known as ‘community investing’ have proliferated across the country. These investments provide urgently needed resources to benefit depressed communities and their people, communities that lack adequate access to the credit that is required if they are to be lifted out of their disabling poverty. Indeed, lack of credit creates a cycle of disinvestment that perpetuates poverty. Community investment programs range from support for micro-enterprises to the development of affordable housing to the establishment of credit unions.

There are by now thousands of such efforts. The National Association of Community Development Loan Funds estimates that twenty percent of the capital of their member funds comes from religious sources. That is not an accident: Loans to those who work to build decent communities are an especially appealing and effective method for mending the world. Even modest funds devoted to community investing can have significant impact, since they often help leverage substantial additional funds. Rates of return on such investments may vary, depending on market circumstances; in general, if they are carefully chosen, they need not deviate from conventional investments. And when, as here proposed, such funds are part of a balanced investment program and represent a small fraction of that portfolio, even a lower rate of return on funds invested in community development institutions will have a negligible impact on the total income earned from all investments.

The Commission on Social Action has published a guide to congregational participation in CHIP. It is designed to set out help congregations understand why and how they can prudently and effectively invest in community development vehicles.

One significant resource discussed in the guide that is available to congregations is The Shefa Fund (See the “Resource” section of this guide.) The Shefa Fund is



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unique in that it is the only national Jewish organization dedicated to community investing. Since 1995, its Tzedek/Justice Economic Development Campaign (TZEDEC) has catalyzed more than \$3.5 million from synagogues, federations, and other Jewish institutions nationwide for investment in CDFIs (community development financial institutions). The TZEDEC staff can provide congregations with assistance in deciding whether to invest in CDFIs, how to choose CDFIs, and how best to work with these institutions. It also provides matching funds in certain cities. The Shefa Fund also encourages congregations that utilize its services to provide a modest contribution to the Fund and thereby become “stakeholders.” The Shefa Fund seeks to use its stakeholder list to leverage broad-based investment in CDFIs from Jewish communities nationwide.

The CSA’s CHIP guide details many other investment vehicles. It presents the varying investment paths that have been chosen by a number of Reform congregations around North America as they seek to pursue the values of Judaism with through socially responsible investing. To obtain a copy of CHIP: The Chai Investment Program, contact the Commission on Social Action office.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS TO INVOLVE THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION

The following are just a few examples of ways a social action committee can reach beyond its members to have an impact on the entire congregation. On one level, they may be viewed as simply good recruitment techniques. However, effective recruitment for a synagogue’s overall social action program is a key to bringing about a truly integrated social action congregation. While some of these programs have been referred to elsewhere in this guide, they are included here for easy reference.

Social Action Pledge Cards

Many congregations distribute High Holiday Appeal cards for the congregation’s building fund, Israel bonds, or other *tzedakah* projects. Social Action pledge cards operate on the same basis, except that instead of asking people to donate money, these cards solicit members’ time. By distributing pledge cards with a wide variety of social action volunteer activities, either through the mail with tickets or by hand during services, you can encourage every member of your congregation to commit to participate in a synagogue-related social justice activity, at least once during the year. This is a particularly effective time of year to make such a solicitation, both in terms of the number of people you can reach and in its relationship to the themes of the holidays (with the notion that *tzedakah* is one of the primary ways we achieve forgiveness). Members of the social action committee are then able to follow up on programs throughout the year, reminding people of the commitment they made the previous Rosh Hashana.

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**Tikkun Olam Calendar**

Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation (Indianapolis, IN) sought to underscore its commitment to social action by creating a *Tikkun Olam* calendar, designed to encompass all of the congregation’s social justice projects. Prior to the creation of the calendar, social action projects at IHC seemed disconnected. The *Tikkun Olam* calendar offers congregants numerous opportunities to access information regarding all IHC’s social action programming has to offer the congregation, as well as the greater Indianapolis community. Congregants are able to review the calendar, and choose activities in their area of interest that fit into their family schedules.

**To Bring About**

Temple Beth Ami’s (Rockville, MD) “To Bring About” social action recruitment program has attracted over 400 families to sign up to participate in one or more community service projects. A brochure sent to congregants explains how people can get involved and explains the many programs, covering a broad range of social issues for which congregants can volunteer. Each project has a component explaining to the volunteer why, according to our values, the issue merits the time and concern of the Jew. Because of the time-limited nature of the program, many people who do not customarily volunteer their time became involved in the program.

**PROGRAMS THAT USE UNUSUALLY EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES**

The following programs are each simple ideas that have provided tremendously effective results. It is, in fact, the simplicity of the idea (or, as Ziv Tzedakah Collective founder Danny Siegel calls it “Ah-ha” ideas) that make them work. They serve as an important reminder that it is often the little things that mean so much.

**Ask A Little, Get A Lot**

This idea was developed by Rabbi Sheldon Marder who initiated a \$2.50 fund in his congregation. By asking congregants to donate just \$2.50 each, the synagogue felt it could pool the small contributions in order to help address the plight of homeless families in the community for whom the initial payment of first and last month rent for an apartment is a major obstacle to securing housing. By asking so little of each congregant, a large proportion of the congregation donated money, and did so repeatedly, so that Temple Israel of Long Beach was able to make a difference in the lives of many poor families.

**High Holiday Hunger Drive and MAZON**

For well over a decade, the Reform Movement has encouraged its congregations to use the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to engage in a massive food drive. By simply putting out empty grocery bags at Rosh Hashanah and asking members to return them full at Yom Kippur, we have created what many report to be the largest national food drive in the country. With the suc-

cess of the program other Movements began to do likewise, and in the late 1990s MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger took on the project, coordinating with the Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative Movements. This program now raises over \$1 million and two million pounds of food per year.

**5K Walk/Run**

Walk or run for a good cause! For example, the Sisterhood and social action committee of Temple Beth El (Bloomfield Hills, MI) sponsored a charity 5K walk/run. Money raised from the event was used to support people living with AIDS by providing food, medical services, medicine, shelter, and clothing. By assessing each runner a \$15 entrance fee (which includes a T-shirt listing sponsors) and through a synagogue contribution of \$5 per runner, the congregation was able to raise a significant amount of money. The synagogue can also rotate where the donations go each year.

**PROGRAMS ORGANIZED BY SUBJECT**

This section includes a broad range, both in type and in scope, of actual programs that synagogues have implemented. In many cases, there are numerous congregations who have run such programs and the synagogue listed is just one example of a successful program. They are included here both for emulation and inspiration.

(Additional programs, as well as more full descriptions of many of the programs listed below, can be found on the Religious Action Center’s website at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org))

**AIDS Support Work**

**Host Project**

The Host Project, sponsored by Congregation Rodeph Shalom (New York, NY), was designed to provide relief and support services to families who have come to the city to care for loved ones with AIDS. Services provided include: assisting with logistical information, such as providing directions; finding affordable housing; participating in hospital visits with the patient and family; and, bringing food and arranging for observance of Jewish holidays while away from home.

**The SHOFAR Project—Synagogues Helping Others Foster AIDS Resources**

The Temple Emanuel (Worcester, MA) initiated its SHOFAR Project as a multi-faceted AIDS awareness/action project that provides assistance, support, advocacy and education for central Massachusetts individuals who are infected with, affected by, at risk for, or concerned about HIV/AIDS.

**Anti-Semitism**

**Not In Our Town**

“Not In Our Town” is a lecture-film program about the people of Billings, Montana, who joined together when their Jewish neighbors were attacked by white supremacists. The program includes a guest speaker and an accompanying documentary film.

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Black/Jewish Relations

Black/Jewish Dialogue

Sinai Temple (Springfield, MA) has created a series of study circles with a neighboring Black Baptist church in an effort to facilitate dialogue between the Black Christian community and the Jewish community. Members of the dialogue circle learn about each other’s history, culture, liturgy, and social concerns.

Martin Luther King Shabbat

Each year, the Black/Jewish Dialogue of Temple Beth El (Great Neck, NY) and Mt. Olive Baptist Church sponsor a Martin Luther King Shabbat Service. This annual service is an expression of the important relationship between Blacks and Jews in American society today. During the service, an interfaith choir performs a program of inspirational music that includes selections representative of both cultures and religions. Students participate by submitting essays about Dr. King and the winners have the privilege of reading their essays from the pulpit and receiving awards.

Children’s Issues

InterFaith Works!–Respite Care to Foster care Parents

InterFaith Works! is a program of Congregation B’nai Israel (Elmira, NY) that, every other month, provides a day of educational, entertaining and nurturing activities for 30-60 foster care children, allowing parents time off to catch up, rest, and renew themselves. The programs have benefited the children – a second *mitzvah*! The program also serves to increase awareness of the foster care program, its needs and role. Each of the three participating congregations takes turns in “hosting” a day.

Big Brother/Big Sister

Big Brothers/Big Sisters is a nationwide program that links male adults with young boys and female adults with young girls to provide fatherless or motherless children with the love and attention they might be missing. Jewish Family Service (JFS) in San Diego, CA has identified a population of Jewish boys who are growing up without a father because of death or separation. Having a Jewish Big Brother willing to make at least a year’s commitment can exert a positive influence on a boy’s Jewish identity and give a child fatherly love that is lacking. Many cities have similar programs that involve the at-risk population in general. In either case, variables such as personality, temperament, intellectual/personal interests, and the proximity of the respective homes are taken into consideration during the matching process.

Church-State Issues

Citizens Interfaith Council for Democracy

This community-based group spearheaded by Anshe Hesed Congregation (Erie, PA) and the Unitarian Society was set up with a mission to challenge the Religious Right through networking, supporting and educating its members and the public, and providing a unified voice to inform the community about the perils of the political agenda and tactics of the Religious Right lobbying.

### The Interfaith Alliance of Central California

Temple Beth Israel (Fresno, CA) is located in an area with few Jews, an area that is claimed by the Christian Right as one of its strongholds. In response to a flood of missionaries in the public schools, the synagogue decided to work with the Interfaith Alliance of Central California, an organization that includes Reform and Conservative Jews, Unitarian-Universalists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Latter-Day Saints, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Orthodox Christians, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Science, and Bahai. The Alliance has successfully pressed the Fresno Unified School District to adopt a new policy on religion in the schools, organized an alternative to the Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast (an exclusively Christian event) and sponsors several interfaith programs, including a “get out the vote” campaign and a program in celebration of human rights.

### Criminal Justice

#### Jury Diversity

Based on a 1994 report that documented the statewide problem of under-representation of the poor and of minorities in New York jury pools, Temple Sinai (Rochester, NY) and Baber A.M.E., an African-American church in Rochester, collaborated with the Monroe County Bar Association to create The Monroe County Jury Project. The purpose of the project was to educate people on the importance of jury service and to enroll young people, poor people, and people of color who are not currently on the jury source-list for jury service. Members of both institutions sat at recruiting tables in shopping malls, at the local community college, and in other places where there is a high volume of traffic, distributing information and encouraging people to let their names be added to the jury pool.

#### Prison Services

Temple Beth Am (Buffalo, NY) started a program to conduct Shabbat services (led by volunteer congregants) once each month at two area prisons. The synagogue has also conducted Seders at both prisons. In addition to the services, your synagogue might be able to formulate a support group or dialogue group between the inmates and congregants.

#### Legal Aid

Attorneys in your congregation can set up a legal aid program on a pro-bono basis. The attorneys can also conduct workshops at the synagogue, teaching people some of their basic rights and how to take care of many of those legal needs that do not actually require an attorney – such as how to read and understand simple contracts, tenant rights, consumer rights, temporary restraining orders against abusive partners, and handling small claims court cases.

### Disabled

#### Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped

The U.S. Library of Congress, together with the Council for the Jewish Elderly, the Jewish Braille Society, and the Midwest Federation of Temple Sisterhoods,

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sponsored a program that provides the necessary equipment and audiocassettes of books, magazines, lectures, and newspapers, as well as free instruction on using the equipment so that the visually impaired can enjoy “books on tape” in English, Hebrew, Yiddish or Russian.

**Feeding the Disabled**

Members of Anshe Heseid Fairmount Temple (Beachwood, OH) provided dinner once a month for residents of Rainbow II, a local apartment complex for citizens with physical disabilities. The program was coordinated to provide dinner at the end of the month when many of the residents will likely have used up their food stamp allotments.

**Serving the Hearing Impaired**

Congregation Emanuel (Denver, CO) was one of the first of the growing number of congregations that have opened their services to people with hearing difficulties. At the services, the synagogue provided headsets for the hearing impaired and sign language interpretation for the deaf.

**Economic Justice/Employment**

**Jacob’s Ladder**

Temple Emanu-El (Dallas, TX) has gone beyond helping people in trouble with their immediate needs by creating a program that provides economically and/or educationally disadvantaged adults (the working poor and non-working poor) with the basic academic and interpersonal skills necessary to move toward economic self-sufficiency. Following the enactment of the 1996 federal “welfare reform” legislation, Temple Emanu-El created Jacob’s Ladder to provide a non-sectarian, tuition-free adult learning center that exemplifies quality, excellence, and mutual respect by offering participants opportunities for personal and social growth, as well as programs for improving academic competence. Jacob’s Ladder is a free-standing institution with its own board, its own budget and a cadre of eager volunteers. It is truly helping members of its community climb out of homelessness to a new life of productivity and self-reliance.

**Temple Community Service Corps.**

The Temple Community Service Corps (TCSC) of Congregation Gates of Heaven (Schenectady, NY) offered qualified high school and college youth summer employment in selected community agencies. The program was financed by contributions from synagogue members and other fundraising projects. Students have been placed with day care centers, food distribution programs, with Boys Clubs as counselors, and as nursing home aides, among other positions. In mid-July, participants are requested to meet with the TCSC committee and the synagogue board members for a progress report. A report is also given to the congregation at the annual TCSC Shabbat.

## Educational Assistance/Tutoring/Literacy Programs

### The People of the Book Literacy Project

In response to national literacy efforts, Temple Sinai (Oakland, CA) connected with the Longfellow Elementary School, an impoverished school located about a mile from the synagogue. Temple Sinai members, both adults and students provide reading tutors. The congregation also raised \$8000 and donated 1600 books to address the condition of the library. Arrangements were developed to enable *B’nai Mitzvah* and Confirmation students to volunteer as reading buddies in an after-school program, and consideration is now being given regarding ways to help the children’s parents.

### After-School Tutoring

Rodef Sholom (Youngstown, OH) created a two-day per week after school tutorial program for students from neighboring inner city elementary schools. Adults and youth participate as tutors. The subjects taught vary depending on the needs of the students participating. Non-academic events – such as a softball game or a talent show – supplement the tutoring program as a means of getting the students and tutors acquainted.

### HEART–Help Educate And Renew Trust

Temple Sinai (Worcester, MA) and the Emmanuel Baptist Church, an African-American congregation in the most economically depressed area of the city, united to create an after-school academic enrichment program for minority children that brought together volunteers from widely different backgrounds to provide individual tutoring and homework assistance; activities in language and literature, the arts, mathematics, and science; computer training (using six complete systems pieced together from donations); and, field trips for the enjoyment of nature, art, science, and just plain fun.

## Gay and Lesbian Rights

### And Justice for All

In August of 1993, the Cobb County (Marietta, GA) Commission passed a resolution on “Family Values,” which was a thinly-veiled threat against gay Americans. In part, the resolution stressed that lesbians and gays were antithetical to the values of Cobb County and that gays were a danger to the “health, safety, and welfare of the community.” In 1994, Rabbi Steven Lebow of Temple Kol Emeth (Marietta, GA) met with other local clergy groups and founded an interreligious coalition to fight the gay-bashing brought on by the actions of the Commission. On the anniversary of the anti-gay resolution, Kol Emeth organized a rally attended by over 3,000 people where local clergy demanded an end to the anti-gay resolution.

### Homosexuals Under Nazi Tyranny: Cleveland’s Interfaith Lecture Series and Visits to U.S. Holocaust Museum

In May 1994, Chevrei Tikvah (Cleveland, OH) sponsored a lecture by Dr. Klaus Muller a renowned scholar on anti-gay Nazi policies and persecution and pre-

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sented, for the first time outside the Holocaust Museum, the remarkable documentary film of gay Holocaust survivors entitled, *We Were Marked With a Big ‘A’*, (a German pejorative applied to homosexuals). The program helped introduce, or expand awareness, of the Holocaust, the Jewish community, and the lesbian and gay community. It placed the often forgotten story of lesbians and gays in the context of the Nazis’ vicious persecution.

Health Care

Organ Donor Shabbat

Temple Hesed (Scranton, PA) dedicated a Shabbat service to the cause of organ and tissue donation. The congregation invited members who had been personally affected by the lack of sufficient donors to participate in the program. At the service, donor family members were honored with gold ribbons, while recipients wore red ribbons. Materials were passed out as people entered the sanctuary and the rabbi’s sermon dealt with the Jewish view toward organ donation.

Bloodmobile

Work with your local Red Cross chapter to organize one or two blood drives at your synagogue each year. Many members who would not otherwise go to a Red Cross center will come to the synagogue to donate blood. Be sure to advertise the blood drive in the local community to maximize donations.

Bone Marrow Matching Program

This program can be two-fold. Your congregation can raise money to cover the cost of a bone marrow matching process. The project may also include a drive to test and register potential bone marrow donors. Consider working with other area congregations and Jewish institutions and organizations. You may also want to consult with a local hospital.

Free Medical Equipment and Medical Services

The project *Yad Sarah* lends medical equipment free of charge to people throughout Israel and saves Israel’s economy nearly a quarter of a billion dollars a year. The project can be replicated in the United States in coordination with a local hospital. In accordance with the principle of *Yad Sarah*, a group of physicians in Boston have developed the Boston Jewish Medically Uninsured Project to provide services free of charge to uninsured citizens.

Health Fair Extraordinaire

Congregation Beth Emeth (Albany, NY) has hosted an annual community-wide Health Fair. Free medical screenings, medical educational lectures and health-related information have been provided to the residents of the Albany Capital District, especially to those who otherwise would not have such opportunities. It had grown to be the largest health fair in the region, with more than 3,000 people attending throughout the day.



## Homeless Support and Housing

### Beit Tikvah

After many years of involvement with the Bridgeport chapter of Habitat for Humanity, members of B'nai Israel (Bridgeport, CT) sponsored and built a house on their own. The project required a commitment of at least \$50,000, and, of course, many hours of labor. Funds for the house were raised over a six-month period, with every element of the synagogue family participating. In the end, over 750 congregants contributed more than \$60,000. Nursery school children and seniors made lunches for the workers, and members of the other Reform synagogue in the area joined in the work. More than 300 people participated in the construction.

### Out of the Cold

Holy Blossom (Toronto, ONT) was the first synagogue in Toronto to provide meals and overnight accommodation as part of the city's Out of the Cold coalition. The program has provided forty people with overnight accommodations, and an additional fifty people with a full-course dinner. (Those sleeping over also received a hot breakfast and, on their departure in the evening or the morning, each guest was given a bag lunch.)

### The Traveling *Mitzvah*

As they travel, members of Congregation Emanuel (Denver, CO) picked up the complimentary bottles of shampoo and other toiletries provided by their hotels. They set up a collection box at the synagogue and donated the items collected to a homeless shelter. Shelters welcome unopened trial-sized toiletries, as residents of overnight shelters must carry all of their possessions with them every day. Women of Reform Judaism have adopted a similar program for battered women's shelters.

### Winter Warm-Up Clothing Drive

A clothing drive during the cold winter months is a simple yet very important *mitzvah*. Bring new and slightly-used (but still wearable) coats, gloves, hats, mittens, wool socks, etc. to your synagogue anytime during the last half of October through December. Adult, child, and toddler sizes are all useful. By doing your share, you can make the winter months warmer for someone in need. Contact a local shelter or organization to make your donation.

### Shelter for Homeless Men

In March 1983, Congregation Rodeph Shalom (New York, NY) opened its Shelter for Homeless Men in response to an appeal from former Mayor Edward Koch. The shelter has served eight homeless men during New York's most bitter months, from October through May. The program has also created an interest in longer-term solutions to homelessness. The synagogue helped create Beyond Shelter, a group of synagogues and other religious institutions working to promote permanent, affordable housing for the homeless.

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Hunger

**MAZON Partners**

Become a MAZON partner by asking congregants to donate 3% of the costs of their celebrations to MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. MAZON, in turn, will grant the money to organizations that focus on addressing the causes of hunger, as well as those that are involved in ameliorating its immediate effects.

**Mitzvah Baskets**

*Mitzvah* Baskets are an alternative to flower arrangements for decorating the sanctuary or to be used as table centerpieces at special ceremonies such as a *b'nai mitzvah* or confirmation. At Temple Solel (Bowie, MD), congregants place orders with the social action committee. Volunteers filled baskets with non-perishable food items and decorated them appropriately for use on the *bimah*. After the *simcha*, the social action committee delivered the food to a facility of the congregant's choice, chosen from a list compiled by the committee.

**Community Soup Kitchen**

Many congregations volunteer weekly or monthly to cook and serve a meal in a local soup kitchen. Contact a soup kitchen or shelter in your area and see how you can be of service. Congregants can volunteer on a regular basis, or you can set up a rotating schedule. The most successful programs are the most regular – for instance, congregants can work the third Tuesday of every month or every Wednesday. The work is varied – volunteers can purchase, cook, deliver, or serve food. Have simple, healthy recipes available for your volunteer cooks. Different groups from the synagogue (i.e., the Youth Group, the Sisterhood, etc.) can take responsibility for finding the volunteers on a rotating basis.

**Alphabetical Food Drive**

Congregation Beth Tikvah (Worthington, OH) organized its annual High Holy Day food drive alphabetically. According to the first letter of their last name, congregants were encouraged to contribute pasta, rice, canned vegetables and fruit, tuna, fruit juice, soup, baby food, and a host of other non-perishables matching a food with their last name. By adding this interesting twist to an old idea, the synagogue helped generate interest and increase participation.

Immigrants

**Russian Émigré Program**

Temple Beth Hillel (Valley Village, CA) helped more than 100 Jewish families from the former Soviet Union adjust to life in a new country and reconnect with their Jewish heritage by providing an array of spiritual, cultural and educational activities. These have included: regular Russian/English Shabbat services or weekday *minyanim*; an annual Shabbat dinner to teach how to celebrate Shabbat at home at which members distribute baskets prepared by the eighth grade social action students; a Russian *Seder* held before Passover; special efforts to include the families in religious and social events; and, once or twice a month, mailings translated into Russian with information about synagogue activities, schools, job

training, employment, health care, free concerts, and other free or low-cost services or activities that members thought were interesting or beneficial.

## Interfaith

### South Bronx-Port Washington Community Partnership

The Port Jewish Center (Port Washington, NY), in an affluent New York suburb, partnered with community leaders of the South Bronx, one of New York's poorest neighborhoods, to establish an alliance that would enable the two communities to stand in solidarity with each other. This partnership has created connections between schools, organizations, congregations, and individuals in the two communities, including after-school programs, tutoring programs, food drives, pulpit-swaps, neighborhood beautification and holiday programs.

### Multicultural Group of Greater Hartford

Farmington Valley Jewish Congregation's (Simsbury, CT) participation in a one-time volunteer program at a soup kitchen run by Faith Seven Day Adventist Church led to expanded programs with this African-American church. Together, they formed the Multicultural Group of Greater Hartford with other churches, mosques and members of the Bahai Community. The Multicultural Group planned and executed an array of joint religious, cultural and social action programs.

SEE ALSO: Children's Issues (InterFaith Works) and Church and State Issues (The Interfaith Alliance of Central California)

## Senior Citizens

### Shared Care

Shared Care is an interfaith program of activities for the frail and elderly, co-sponsored by Temple Beth El (Boca Raton, FL), the First Presbyterian Church, and St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church. The program is open to the community; based at Temple Beth El, volunteers from all three sponsoring congregations meet weekly. Activities include discussions, music, arts and crafts, and chair exercises. Once a month, the program becomes intergenerational, with the children of the Temple Beth El nursery school joining the elderly participants for arts and crafts or chair exercise games.

### Kever Avot

On the Sunday between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, escort volunteers from Temple Israel (W. Bloomfield, MI) accompany residents of area old-age homes who wish to visit the graves of their loved ones. Prior to the day of the program, volunteers are recruited, information from prospective participants regarding the site(s) to be visited is secured, the cemeteries are informed so that the appropriate graves will be specially marked and golf-carts made available in those cases where the gravesites are otherwise difficult to access, air-conditioned tour buses (with bathrooms) are hired, and stones, tissues, snacks, hand-wipes, and booklets of appropriate prayers are prepared.

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**Phone Companions for Seniors**

On weekday mornings, senior volunteers meet at Temple Shalom (Succasunna, NJ) and make reassurance phone calls to homebound elderly people. The calls help the elderly maintain their independence while giving them contact with the outside world. Calls take about two hours of the volunteer’s time. The project is sponsored nationally by the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, an office of the National Senior Service Corporation.

**Project Ezra**

Temple Shalom (New York, NY) is part of *the Ma Tov* Collective, an ally of Project Ezra, a non-profit organization serving the Jewish elderly of the Lower East Side of New York. On any given Sunday in the spring, the elderly people served by Project Ezra are “Honored Guests for a Day.” Congregants provide “honored guests” with lunch, entertainment, a take-home bag of food, and other assorted goodies.

**Madeline and Julian Wallerstein Keshet Program**

The *Keshet* program of Temple Shaaray Tefila’s (New York, NY) is an outreach effort to Jewish seniors as well as a means for outreach to interested volunteers. The program reaches over 120 seniors, referred to the congregation by social service agencies and the rabbis of the congregation. Before Shabbat services, volunteers set up long tables on which goods are set out. After services end, the entire congregation enters the auditorium and each person takes a shopping bag and moves down the rows of tables, packing the bags in assembly-line fashion. Holiday cards made by students from the religious school are tied onto the bags with a ribbon. Volunteers give out names of seniors to those who wish to drop off bags. The *Keshet* program also runs a Caregivers Support Group, which meets twice monthly, for people caring for an aging or ill spouse or parent. In addition, there is a bereavement group that meets monthly.

APPENDIX B: RESOURCES

REACHING THE REFORM MOVEMENT

*Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism*

[www.uahc.org/csa](http://www.uahc.org/csa)  
633 Third Avenue, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 650-4160

*Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism*

[www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)  
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 387-2800

*Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Its Affiliates  
(including ARZA/WUNA, NFTY, WRJ, NFTB, NATA and NATE)*

[www.uahc.org](http://www.uahc.org)  
633 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 650-4000

*Central Conference of American Rabbis*

[www.ccarnet.org](http://www.ccarnet.org)  
355 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 972-3636

NATIONAL JEWISH SOCIAL ACTION ORGANIZATIONS

*American Jewish World Service*

[www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)  
45 West 36th Street  
New York, NY 10018  
(800) 889-7146

*Amos: The National Jewish Partnership for Social Justice*

[www.amospartnership.org](http://www.amospartnership.org)  
443 Park Avenue South, 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10016-7322  
(646) 424-9010

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*Jewish Fund for Justice*

[www.jfjustice.org](http://www.jfjustice.org)  
260 Fifth Avenue, 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
(212) 213-2113

*Jewish Service.org*

[www.jewishservice.org](http://www.jewishservice.org)

*MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger*

[www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)  
1990 S. Bundy Dr, Suite 260  
Los Angeles, CA 90025-5232  
(310) 442-0020

*The Shefa Fund*

[www.shefafund.org](http://www.shefafund.org)  
8459 Ridge Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19128  
(215) 483-4004

*Social Action.com*

[www.socialaction.com](http://www.socialaction.com)

OTHER MULTI-ISSUE JEWISH AGENCIES

*American Jewish Committee*

[www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org)  
165 East 56 Street  
New York, NY 10022  
(212) 751-4000

*American Jewish Congress*

[www.ajcongress.org](http://www.ajcongress.org)  
15 East 84th Street  
New York, NY 10028  
(212) 879-4500

*Anti-Defamation League*

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)  
823 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 490-2525

***Hadassah***

[www.hadassah.org](http://www.hadassah.org)  
50 West 58 Street  
New York, NY 10019  
(212) 355-7900

***Jewish Council on Public Affairs***

[www.jewishpublicaffairs.org](http://www.jewishpublicaffairs.org)  
443 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 684-6950

***National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)***

[www.ncjw.org](http://www.ncjw.org)  
53 West 23rd Street, 6th Floor  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 645-4048

***United Jewish Communities***

[www.ujc.org](http://www.ujc.org)  
111 Eighth Avenue - Suite 11E  
New York, NY 10011-5201  
(212) 284-6500

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OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

The following organizations, listed by subject area, include non-profit and governmental agencies that the staff of the Religious Action Center work with most. It is not meant as a comprehensive list of all organizations that work on that issue, nor is it an endorsement of any particular organization or its positions. While many of these organizations work on multiple issues, each is listed only once, based on the issue that we primarily work on with them.

Africa

*The Advocacy Network for Africa (ADNA)*

ADNA is a progressive non-partisan network of 200 U.S.-based organizations. Their initiatives address issues of peace and security; human, civil, political, and women’s rights; environmentally and economically sustainable development for poverty eradication; social justice, popular participation, and good governance; and humanitarian and crisis relief.  
[www.africapolicy.org/adna](http://www.africapolicy.org/adna)  
110 Maryland Ave. NE #509  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-7961

*The Washington Office on Africa (WOA)*

The Washington Office on Africa is a church-sponsored not-for-profit advocacy organization seeking to articulate and promote a just American policy toward Africa. They monitor Congressional legislation and executive policies and actions and issue action alerts to advance progressive legislation and policy. They also work in partnership with colleagues in Africa, the Africa advocacy community in the United States, and grassroots organizations concerned with various aspects of African affairs.  
[www.woaafrika.org](http://www.woaafrika.org)  
212 East Capitol Street  
Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 547-7503

Arms Control

*U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines*

The U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines (USCBL) is a coalition of more than 400 U.S.-based human rights, humanitarian, faith-based, children’s, peace, disability, veterans, medical, development, academic, and environmental organizations dedicated to a total ban on antipersonnel landmines. They have resources for community activists, religious groups, and other interested people.  
[www.banminesusa.org](http://www.banminesusa.org)  
Email: [banmines@phrusa.org](mailto:banmines@phrusa.org)  
100 Boylston Street  
Boston, MA 02116  
(617) 695-0041



### *Disarmament Clearinghouse*

Coordinated by several arms control organizations, the Disarmament Clearinghouse draws together resources from many different areas of the arms control movement. It is very easy to find information and action suggestions on their website.

[www.disarmament.org](http://www.disarmament.org)  
1101 14<sup>th</sup> St NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 898-0150 x232

### *Peace Action*

Peace Action, “the nation’s largest grassroots peace organization,” works through national and grassroots citizens’ action to promote global nuclear disarmament, cut military spending, and end the international arms trade. They are committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, redirection of Pentagon spending to domestic investment, an end to global weapon sales, and non-military resolutions to international conflicts.

[www.peace-action.org](http://www.peace-action.org)  
1819 H St, NW #420  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 862-9740

### *Council for a Livable World*

The Council for a Livable World, the Council for a Livable World Education Fund and PeacePAC are arms control groups committed to ridding the world of weapons of mass destruction and eliminating wasteful military spending. They report on arms control issues and the performance of elected officials. The Council and PeacePAC are also political lobbies that endorse political candidates.

[www.clw.org](http://www.clw.org)  
110 Maryland Ave., NE Suite 201  
Washington, DC 20002-5626  
(202) 546-0795 x126

### **Bio-Ethics**

#### *National Partnership of Women and Families*

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that uses public education and advocacy to promote fairness in the workplace, quality health care, and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family.

[www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org)  
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 710  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 986-2600

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*UAHC Bio-Ethics Committee*

The Department of Jewish Family Concerns provides congregations and clergy with a Reform Jewish perspective on these issues, so that they can more effectively counsel, guide and support their congregants. They produce numerous publications and resources about Bio-Ethics.

[www.uahc.org/jfc](http://www.uahc.org/jfc)

633 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 650-4294

**Campaign Finance Reform/Election Reform**

*Common Cause*

Common Cause is the flagship campaign finance reform advocacy group. While they support public financing of political campaigns in theory, they focus on banning soft money and monitoring contributions of PACs and advocacy groups. Their website has studies and voting records for Members of Congress.

[www.commoncause.org](http://www.commoncause.org)

1250 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 833-1200

*Public Campaign*

Founded in the mid-1990s, Public Campaign works for voluntary public financing of political campaigns. They work extensively in the states and have compelling studies on the need for comprehensive campaign finance reform.

[www.publiccampaign.org](http://www.publiccampaign.org)

1320 19th Street, NW, Suite M-1  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 293-0222

*The Center for Responsive Politics*

The Center for Responsive Politics tracks money in politics and its influence on elections. Their web site has extensive studies and statistics on who is giving, including individuals, corporations, and special interest groups.

[www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)

1101 14th St., NW, Suite 1030  
Washington, DC 20005-5635  
(202) 857-0044

*Center for Voting and Democracy*

CVD is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that studies how voting systems affect participation, representation and governance. Their website has an extensive amount of information about election reform proposals and links to recent newspaper articles.

[www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)

6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 901  
Takoma Park, MD 20912  
(301) 270-4616

## Children's Issues

### *Children's Defense Fund (CDF)*

CDF is one of the chief organizations working for children in the United States. They are a private, non-profit organization supported by foundations, corporation grants and individual donations. They are an excellent source of information on issues ranging from child-care to children's health care to education.

[www.childrendefense.org](http://www.childrendefense.org)

25 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 628-8787

### *Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)*

CWLA is an association of more than 1,100 public and private non-profit agencies that assist over 3.5 million abused and neglected children and their families each year with a wide range of services. They are an excellent source of information on virtually every children's issue.

[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

50 F Street NW, 6th Floor  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 638-2952

### *Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC)*

The CCAC works to communicate ideas for improving child care to inspire parents, community leaders and the public to take action, with special emphasis on literacy and universal pre-kindergarten; stimulate investment in child care by employers, state and local governments, schools and community organizations; encourage partnerships among communities, schools and business leaders to improve child care and early education and to make it affordable to all working families; and advocate public policies that support families.

[www.childcareaction.org](http://www.childcareaction.org)

330 Seventh Avenue, 14th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
(212) 239-0138

## Church-State

### *Americans United for the Separation of Church and State*

Americans United works to protect the constitutional principle of church-state separation, a vital cornerstone of religious liberty. They are an excellent source for information on any issue that affects religion and public policy and have excellent fact sheets and updates on legislation affecting religious liberty.

[www.au.org](http://www.au.org)

518 C Street, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
(202) 466-3234

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*People for the American Way (PFAW)*

People For the American Way organizes and mobilizes Americans to fight for fairness, justice, civil rights, and the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. They are one of the most respected progressive lobbying organizations in the country in monitoring and combating the Religious Right.

[www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org)

2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 467-4999

*Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs*

The Baptist Joint Committee works exclusively on religious liberty issues. Their mission is to “defend and extend God-given religious liberty for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principle that religion must be freely exercised, neither advanced nor inhibited by government.”

[www.bjcpa.org](http://www.bjcpa.org)

200 Maryland Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 544-4226

*Institute for First Amendment Studies*

IFAS monitors and counters the activities of the radical Religious Right. They have daily news clippings on their website and publish a bi-monthly journal discussing major issues involving the Religious Right.

[www.ifas.org](http://www.ifas.org)

PO Box 589  
Great Barrington, MA 01230  
(413) 274-0012

**Civil Liberties/Privacy**

*American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*

Originally founded in 1920, the ACLU conducts extensive litigation on Constitutional issues including privacy, free speech, and criminal justice. ACLU has affiliate groups that can be contact to initiate projects at the state and local level.

[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)

125 Broad Street  
New York, NY 10004-2400  
(212) 549-2500

### *Electronic Privacy and Information Center (EPIC)*

EPIC was established in 1994 to focus public attention on emerging privacy issues. EPIC conducts litigation, sponsors conferences, produces reports, publishes the EPIC Alert, and leads campaigns on privacy issues

[www.epic.org](http://www.epic.org)

1718 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 483-1140

### **Civil Rights**

#### *Leadership Conference on Civil Rights*

The LCCR is a coalition of more than 185 civil rights agencies representing persons of color, women, children, labor unions, individuals with disabilities, older Americans, major religious groups, gays and lesbians and civil liberties and human rights groups. Broadly speaking, the Leadership Conference's agenda includes fighting discrimination in all its forms, improving intergroup relations, and promoting the full participation of every American in every facet of our nation's life.

[www.civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org)

1629 K Street NW, Suite 1010  
Washington DC 20006  
(202) 466-3311

#### *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*

The NAACP is the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the United States. The principal objective of the NAACP is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of the United States. The NAACP Washington Bureau represents one of the primary forces lobbying for civil rights in the nation's capital. The Bureau's activities are directed primarily at the Congress, the Executive Branch and governmental agencies.

[www.naacp.org](http://www.naacp.org)

NAACP Washington Bureau  
1025 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 1120  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 638-2269

#### *Southern Poverty Law Center*

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a non-profit organization that combats hate, intolerance, and discrimination through both education and litigation efforts. Some of its programs include *Teaching Tolerance* and the *Intelligence Project*. In addition, the Center takes on pioneering lawsuits, many of which have led to the creation of groundbreaking legal precedent.

[www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org)

400 Washington Avenue  
Montgomery, Alabama 36104  
(334) 264-0286

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Crime and Criminal Justice

*The American Bar Association*

The ABA's Criminal Justice Section initiates studies and research; publishes reports, articles, and other widely-disseminated materials; reviews and makes recommendations concerning legislative, administrative, and judicial proposals relating to the criminal law and the administration of criminal justice; and, authors *amici curiae* briefs, filed with the United States Supreme Court, on behalf of the the ABA in matters concerning the criminal law. Its Juvenile Justice Center emphasizes the right to effective assistance of counsel and the representation of delinquent youth, issues surrounding juveniles tried as adults, and conditions of confinement.

[www.abanet.org/crimjust/home.html](http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/home.html)

ABA Criminal Justice Section  
740 15th Street, NW, 10th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005-1009  
(202) 662-1500

Death Penalty

*The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty*

The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to the abolition of capital punishment, provides information, advocates for public policy and mobilizes and supports people and institutions that share its unconditional rejection of the state's use of homicide as an instrument of social policy.

[www.ncadp.org](http://www.ncadp.org)

1436 U Street, NW, Suite 104  
Washington DC 20009  
(202) 387-3890

*The Death Penalty Information Center*

The Death Penalty Information Center is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. The Center prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for journalists, and serves as a resource to those working on the issue.

[www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)

1320 18th St. NW, 5th Floor  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 293-6970

## Disability Rights

### *The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities*

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of approximately 100 national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

[www.c-c-d.org](http://www.c-c-d.org)  
1730 K Street, NW, Suite 1212  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 785-3388

### *National Organization on Disability*

The National Organization on Disability works on policy issues and national programs, as well as serving as a resource for people with disabilities around the country. In addition, NOD has a special Religion and Disability Program devoted to helping congregations become more accessible and welcoming to people with disabilities.

[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)  
E-mail: [ability@nod.org](mailto:ability@nod.org)  
910 Sixteenth St., NW, Suite 600  
Washington D.C. 20006  
(202) 293-5960

### *Americans with Disabilities Act Home Page*

A good source for official government information, this website also includes ADA success stories, legal documents, and a state-by-state guide to resources for people with disabilities.

[www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm)

## Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco

### *National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids*

The Center's Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids is made up of over 130 partners including health, education, medical, civic, corporate, youth, and religious organizations that are dedicated to reducing tobacco use among children and adults. The Campaign aims to alter the public's acceptance of tobacco by de-glamorizing tobacco use and countering tobacco industry marketing to youth and other practices. It also works to change public policies at federal, state and local levels to protect children from tobacco.

[www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org)  
1707 L Street, NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 296-5469

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*Office of National Drug Control Policy*

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), a component of the Executive Office of the President, was established by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. The principal purpose of ONDCP is to establish policies, priorities, and objectives for the Nation’s drug control program.

[www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov)

*Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse*

The Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse (DPIC) supports the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). A component of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, the Clearinghouse is staffed by subject matter specialists and serves as a resource for statistics, research data, and referrals useful for developing and implementing drug policy.

[www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org)

P.O. Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20849

(800) 666-3332

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

The CDC website contains a wealth of information on all health topics, including smoking hazards, drugs, cancer, and drunk driving.

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

1600 Clifton Rd.

Atlanta, GA 30333

(800) 311-3435

**Economic Justice, Hunger and Homelessness**

*Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is a non-partisan research organization and policy institute that conducts research and analysis on a range of government policies and programs, with an emphasis on those affecting low- and moderate-income people. They are a great source for research materials and factual information on all economic justice issues.

[www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)

820 First Street, NE, Suite 510

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 408-1080



### ***Coalition on Human Needs (CHN)***

CHN is an alliance of national organizations, including the Reform movement, working together to promote public policies which address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. The Coalition's members include civil rights, religious, labor and professional organizations and those concerned with the well being of children, women, the elderly and people with disabilities. They are a great source of information for current legislative activity.

[www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org)  
1120 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 910  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 223-2532

### ***MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger***

MAZON is a national, non-profit agency which allocates donations from the Jewish community to non-profit organizations providing food, help and hope to hungry people of all faiths and backgrounds. Partner synagogues encourage congregants to help hungry people by donating three percent of the cost of their life-cycle celebrations to MAZON, by donating to MAZON at the High Holy Days and Passover, and by giving to MAZON in honor or memory of friends and family members.

[www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)  
12401 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 303  
Los Angeles, CA 90025-1015  
(310) 442-0020

### ***Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)***

FRAC is a national organization working to improve public policies to eradicate hunger and under-nutrition in the United States. Founded in 1970 as a public interest law firm, FRAC is a non-profit and non-partisan research and public policy center that serves as the hub of an anti-hunger network of thousands of individuals and agencies across the country. They are a great source for legislative information, hunger statistics, and ideas about how to get involved.

[www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)  
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 540  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 986-2200

### ***America's Second Harvest***

America's Second Harvest is the nation's largest domestic hunger relief organization. Through a network of over 200 food banks and food-rescue programs, they distribute food to 26 million hungry Americans each year. This is a great source for finding out how to get involved on a local level.

[www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org)  
35 E. Wacker Dr., #2000  
Chicago, IL 60601  
(800) 771-2303

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*National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC)*

The National Low Income Housing Coalition is the only national organization dedicated solely to ending America's affordable housing crisis. The NLIHC is committed to educating, organizing, and advocating to ensure decent, affordable housing within healthy neighborhoods for everyone. NLIHC provides up-to-date information, formulates policy, and educates the public on housing needs and the strategies for solutions.

[www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org)  
1012 Fourteenth Street NW, Suite 610  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 662-1530

*Center for Community and Interfaith Partnerships of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*

The Center for Community and Interfaith Partnerships links community and faith-based organizations to HUD. The Center's mission is to focus, integrate, and intensify HUD's relationship with these groups. Though the Center is not a funding source, it fulfills its mission by seeking input, sharing resources, and building a network of organizations to maximize the impact of local and national community development projects.

[www.hud.gov/cdc.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/cdc.cfm)  
451 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20410  
(202) 708-1112

*National Coalition for the Homeless*

The National Coalition for the Homeless is a national advocacy network of homeless persons, activists, service providers, and others committed to ending homelessness through public education, policy advocacy, grassroots organizing, and technical assistance. They provide a great deal of legislative and statistical information and articles, and also connect people with local organizations.

[nch.ari.net](http://nch.ari.net)  
1012 Fourteenth Street, NW, #600  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 737-6444

*National Alliance to End Homelessness*

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a non-profit membership organization whose mission is to mobilize individuals and the non-profit, profit and public sectors of society to end homelessness. They are a good source of statistical information and policy/legislative information, and have a great series of fact sheets directed especially at students.

[www.naeh.org](http://www.naeh.org)  
1518 K Street NW, Suite 206  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 638-1526

## Education

### *National Education Association*

NEA is the union and advocacy group for public school employees across the country. They are involved in grassroots educational activity and in legislative advocacy in DC and the states. They have tremendous resources on the benefits of public schools and are effective at tracking legislation affecting public education.

[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)  
1201 16<sup>th</sup> St., NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 833-4000

### *Parent-Teacher Association*

PTA is a volunteer association that works in communities and in Washington, DC, on behalf of families and children. They are strongly committed to public education and have good resources on vouchers and education funding.

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)  
1090 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1200  
Washington, DC 20005-4905  
(202) 289-6790

### *Department of Education*

An excellent source for studies, research, educational guidelines, and education news. [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
(800) USA-LEARN

## The Environment

### *The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)*

COEJL was founded in 1993 to promote environmental education, scholarship, advocacy, and action in the American Jewish community. COEJL is sponsored by a broad coalition of national Jewish organizations and has organized regional affiliates in communities across North America.

[www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)  
443 Park Avenue South, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10016-7322  
(212) 684-6950

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*The National Environmental Trust*

National Environmental Trust is a non-profit, non-partisan membership group established in 1994 to inform citizens about environmental problems and how they affect our health and quality of life. Through public education, NET helps people understand an issue and express their concerns to public officials.

[www.hotearth.net](http://www.hotearth.net)

1200 18th St. NW, Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 887-8800

*Environmental Defense Fund*

The Environmental Defense Fund is a not-for-profit environmental advocacy group with four main goals: (1) stabilizing the Earth's climate; (2) safeguarding the world's oceans; (3) protecting human health; and, (4) defending and restoring biodiversity.

[www.edf.org](http://www.edf.org)

257 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 505-2100

*Natural Resources Defense Council*

NRDC uses law, science, and the support of more than 400,000 members nationwide to protect the planet's wildlife and wild places and to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all living things.

[www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)

40 West 20th Street  
New York, NY 10011  
(212) 727-2700

*Sierra Club*

True to their motto: "Protecting the environment . . . for our families, for our future," the Sierra Club has been devoted to preserving nature's miracles for over 100 years.

[www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

85 Second Street, Second Floor  
San Francisco CA, 94105-3441  
(415) 977-5500

*Union of Concerned Scientists*

UCS is an independent non-profit alliance of 50,000 concerned citizens and scientists across the country. We augment rigorous scientific analysis with innovative thinking and committed citizen advocacy to build a cleaner, healthier environment and a safer world.

[www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org)

2 Brattle Square  
Cambridge, MA 02238  
(617) 547-5552

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### *U.S. Public Interest Research Group*

The State PIRGs created the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) in 1983 to act as watchdog for the public interest in our nation's capital, as much as PIRGs have worked to safeguard the public interest in state capitals since 1971.

[www.uspirg.org](http://www.uspirg.org)

218 D Street, SE

Washington, DC 20003

(202) 546-9707

### *World Resources Institute*

WRI provides information, ideas, and solutions to global environmental problems. Their mission is to move human society to live in ways that protect Earth's environment for current and future generations. The Institute's program meets global challenges by using knowledge to catalyze public and private action.

[www.wri.org](http://www.wri.org)

10 G Street, NE, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 729-7600

### *World Wildlife Fund*

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is dedicated to protecting the world's wildlife and wildlands. WWF directs its conservation efforts toward three global goals: protecting endangered spaces, saving endangered species, and addressing global threats.

[www.worldwildlife.org](http://www.worldwildlife.org)

1250 24<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

P.O. Box 97180

Washington, DC 20037

(800) CALL-WWF

### *Gay and Lesbian Issues*

#### *Human Rights Campaign*

Human Rights Campaign is the nation's largest national lesbian and gay political organization. Founded in 1980, HRC maintains the largest full-time lobbying team in the nation devoted to issues of fairness for lesbian and gay Americans. In addition, HRC educates the public; participates in election campaigns through education and through funding by the political action committee; organizes volunteers; and, provides expertise and training at the state and local level.

[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

919 18<sup>th</sup> St. NW

Washington, DC 20006

(202) 628-4160

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*Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund*

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund is the oldest and largest American legal organization working for the civil rights of gay men, lesbians, and people with HIV. It is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, and people with HIV/AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.

[www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)  
120 Wall Street, Suite 1500  
New York, NY 10005-3904  
(212) 809-8585

*National Lesbian and Gay Task Force*

NGLTF is a national progressive organization working for the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. NGLTF serves tens of thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people who are in need of resources, training, and technical assistance to pass pro-GLBT legislation.

[www.nglhf.org](http://www.nglhf.org)  
1700 Kalorama Road NW  
Washington, DC 20009-2624  
(202) 332-6483

*Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays*

PFLAG is a national non-profit organization with a membership of over 80,000 households and more than 440 affiliates worldwide. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and, advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights.

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)  
1726 M Street, NW Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 467-8180

**Gun Control**

*Handgun Control, Inc./Center to Prevent Handgun Violence*

HCI is the largest and most well funded gun control organization in Washington. It engages in litigation, lobbying, and election advocacy. The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence is a think tank and policy research arm of the organization.

[www.handguncontrol.org](http://www.handguncontrol.org)  
1225 Eye Street, NW, Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 898-0792

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### *Coalition to Stop Gun Violence*

CSGV is composed of 44 civic, professional and religious organizations and 100,000 individual members that advocate for a ban on the sale and possession of handguns and assault weapons. It sponsors an Annual Citizens Conference to Stop Gun Violence each year in late February. Features a thorough website with news, statistics, and ratings of elected representatives on gun control issues.

[www.csgv.org](http://www.csgv.org)  
1023 15th Street, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 408-0061

### *Violence Policy Center*

VPC is the leading think-tank on guns, gun manufacturing, gun control legislation, gun litigation, and related issues. It publishes frequent reports on gun violence issues and engages in lobbying. VPC views gun violence as a widespread public health problem, of which crime is merely the most recognized aspect.

[www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org)  
1140 19th Street, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 882-8200

### **Health Care**

#### *National Coalition on Health Care (NCHC)*

The National Coalition on Health Care is the nation's largest and most broadly representative alliance working to improve America's health care. The Coalition, which was founded in 1990 and is non-profit and rigorously non-partisan, is comprised of almost 96 groups, employing or representing approximately 100 million Americans. The NCHC is a good source for policy information.

[www.americashealth.org](http://www.americashealth.org)  
1200 G Street, NW, Suite 750  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 638-7151

#### *The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation*

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is an independent philanthropy focusing on the major health care issues facing the nation. The Foundation is an independent voice and source of facts and analysis for policymakers, the media, the health care community, and the general public.

[www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)  
2400 Sand Hill Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 854-9400

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*Families USA*

Families USA is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to the achievement of high-quality, affordable health and long-term care for all Americans. This organization manages a grassroots advocates' network of organizations and individuals working for the consumer perspective in the national and state health policy debates, acts as a governmental watchdog, produces policy reports, provides advocacy training, and conducts public information campaigns.

[www.familiesusa.org](http://www.familiesusa.org)

1334 G St. NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 628-3030

**HIV/AIDS**

*AIDS Action*

[www.aidsaction.org/](http://www.aidsaction.org/)

1906 Sunderland Place NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 530-8030

AIDS Action is dedicated to responsible federal policy for improved HIV/AIDS care and services, vigorous medical research and effective prevention. AIDS Action is a network of 3200 national AIDS service organizations and the one million HIV-positive Americans they serve.

*Elisabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation*

[www.pedaids.org](http://www.pedaids.org)

2950 31st Street, #125  
Santa Monica, CA 90405  
(310) 314-1459

The Foundation takes a leadership role in establishing a national pediatric research agenda, as well as promoting global education, awareness and compassion about HIV/AIDS in children. They also identify, fund and conduct critical pediatric research that will 1) lead to better treatments and prevention of HIV infection in infants and children; 2) reduce and prevent HIV transmission from mother to child; and, 3) accelerate the discovery of new treatments for other serious life-threatening pediatric diseases.

*Global Health Council*

[www.globalhealth.org](http://www.globalhealth.org)

1701 K Street NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20006-1503  
(202) 833-5900

The Global Health Council is the world's largest membership alliance dedicated to improving health worldwide. They advocate for needed policies and resources, build networks and alliances among those working to improve health, and communicate innovative ideas, knowledge and best practices in the health field.



## Human Rights

### *Amnesty International*

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement that works to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards. In particular, Amnesty International campaigns to free all prisoners of conscience; ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel treatment of prisoners; end political killings and “disappearances”; and, oppose human rights abuses by opposition groups.

[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

322 8th Avenue

New York, NY 10001

(212) 807-8400

### *The American Anti-Slavery Group, Inc. (AASG)*

AASG is the only American organization solely dedicated to abolishing slavery worldwide. They monitor, document, and publicize the plight of slaves around the globe, focusing especially on the issues of black chattel slavery in North Africa and involuntary servitude in the United States.

[www.anti-slavery.org](http://www.anti-slavery.org)

198 Tremont Street #491

Boston, MA 02116

(800) 884-0719

### *Freedom House*

Freedom House works to monitor and evaluate the state of freedom around the world through annual surveys of political rights and civil liberties, press freedom, and freedom of religion and conscience.

[www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

1319 18th Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 296-5101

### *Human Rights Watch*

Human Rights Watch investigates and exposes human rights violations in detailed reports and pushes governments to hold abusers accountable.

[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor

New York, NY 10118-3299

(212) 290-4700

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Immigration

*National Immigration Forum*

A resource for legislation on immigration-related issues and analyses of general immigration issues.

[www.immigrationforum.org](http://www.immigrationforum.org)

220 I Street NE, Suite 220

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 544-0004

*Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society*

HIAS helps resettle and advocate for refugees and immigrants across the world.

They also provide information and services, including legal counseling, for immigrants of all religions and ethnicities.

[www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)

1640 Rhode Island Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20036

(202) 828-5115

*National Council of La Raza*

NCLR works in communities and in Washington for the interests of Hispanic Americans. They are well-organized and have good resources for both immigrants and policymakers.

[www.nclr.org](http://www.nclr.org)

1111 19<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

Washington, DC 20036

(202) 785-1670

*American Immigration Lawyers Association*

AILA helps immigrants and lawyers on procedural and legal issues affecting immigrants. Their web site is an excellent resource for current information.

[www.aila.org](http://www.aila.org)

918 F Street, NW

Washington, DC 20004-1400

(202) 216-2400

Israel and the Peace Process

*AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee)*

AIPAC lobbies policy makers to advance a strong U.S.-Israel relationship through economic, military and political support.

[www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org)

400 First Street, NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20001

(202) 639-5327

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### *Americans for Peace Now*

Americans for Peace Now was founded to pursue a lasting and equitable peace in the Middle East and to build an informed and empowered pro-peace

American public. [www.peacenow.org](http://www.peacenow.org)

1815 H Street, NW Suite 920

Washington, DC 20006

(202) 728-1895

### *Israel Embassy*

The Israel Embassy is the official voice of the Israeli government in the United States. Their website includes links to local consulates, as well as their speaker's bureau and information on current events in Israel.

[www.israelemb.org](http://www.israelemb.org)

3514 International Dr. NW

Washington DC 20008

(202) 364-5542

### *Israel Policy Forum*

IPF is a non-profit organization established in 1993 to create greater awareness of the Middle East peace process, and to encourage and support an active U.S. role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

1030 15th Street NW, Suite 850

Washington, DC 20005

(202) 842-1700

### *New Israel Fund*

New Israel Fund is an organization working and supporting organizations that work on religious pluralism and tolerance, civil and human rights, Jewish-Arab equality and coexistence, improving the status of women, bridging social and economic gaps, and environmental justice.

[www.nif.org](http://www.nif.org)

1101 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

Washington, DC 20005

(202) 842-0900

## **Labor**

### *National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice*

The NICWJ is a network of people of faith that calls upon its member's religious values in order to educate, organize and mobilize the religious community in the United States on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers.

[www.nicwj.org](http://www.nicwj.org)

1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., 4th Fl.

Chicago, IL 60660

(773) 728-8400

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*Jewish Labor Committee*

JLC works closely with local and national trade unions to combat racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of discrimination in the workplace and in society. JLC conducts programs to promote respect for diversity in the work force and works with African American, Latino, Asian Pacific, and other ethnically based labor organizations to promote harmonious intergroup relations.  
25 E. 21st Street, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 477-0707

*American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations*

The AFL-CIO is a voluntary federation of America's unions, representing more than 13 million working women and men nationwide. Their mission is to bring social and economic justice to our nation by enabling working people to have a voice on the job, in government, in a changing global economy, and in their communities.  
[www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)  
815 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 637-5000

*Sweatshop Watch*

Sweatshop Watch is a coalition of labor, community, civil rights, immigrant rights, religious, student, and women's organizations, as well as individuals committed to eliminating sweatshop conditions in the global garment industry. They believe that workers should be earning a living wage in a safe and decent working environment, and that those who benefit the most from the exploitation of sweatshop workers must be held accountable. This organization has great links to different local campaigns and has informative papers on different regional sweatshop conditions.  
[www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)  
310 Eighth Street, Suite 309  
Oakland, CA 94607  
(510) 834-8990

*Reproductive Rights*

*National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League*

NARAL works to educate Americans and officeholders about reproductive rights and health issues and elect pro-choice candidates at all levels of government. It is an excellent source for any information related to reproductive rights, especially voting records and fact sheets.  
[www.naral.org](http://www.naral.org)  
1156 15th Street, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 973-3000

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### *National Abortion Federation*

The NAF is the professional association of abortion providers in the United States and Canada. It ensures the safety and high quality of abortion practice with standards of care, protocols, clinical policy guidelines, quality improvement programs, and accredited continuing medical education. They are a good source for medical information, fact sheets, and stories of women who have been affected by abortion.

[www.prochoice.org](http://www.prochoice.org)

1755 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Suite 600

Washington DC 20036

(202) 667-5881

### *The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)*

The RCRC is comprised of national Christian, Jewish and other religious organizations. The RCRC provides opportunities for religious people to examine and articulate their own pro-choice positions, and assists clergy in educating their congregations, communities, and elected officials about the theological and ethical dimensions of reproductive choice.

[www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org)

1025 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1130

Washington, DC 20005

(202) 628-7700

### *Planned Parenthood*

Planned Parenthood is the world's largest and oldest voluntary family planning organization. They are involved in direct service, political mobilizing, teaching, and much more. They are an excellent source of information for anything relating to reproductive rights, contraceptives, and reproductive health.

[www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

810 Seventh Ave.

New York, NY 10019

(212) 541-7800

### *Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)*

SIECUS is a national, non-profit organization which affirms that sexuality is a natural and healthy part of living. Incorporated in 1964, SIECUS develops, collects, and disseminates information, promotes comprehensive education about sexuality, and advocates the right of individuals to make responsible sexual choices. They are an excellent source of information, policy papers, and statistics for both adults and teenagers.

[www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350

New York, NY 10036

(212) 819-9770

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Socially Responsible Investment

*Jewish Fund for Justice*

The Jewish Fund for Justice is a national, publicly-supported foundation that acts on the historic commitment of the Jewish people to *tzedakah* (righteous giving) and *tikkun olam* (repair of the world). It is committed to combating poverty in the U.S., and the injustices underlying it, as an essential part of the Jewish core identity and values.

[www.jfjustice.org](http://www.jfjustice.org)

260 Fifth Avenue, Suite 701

New York, NY 10001

(212) 213-2113

*Shefa Fund*

Shefa Fund helps congregations invest in community development and makes grants to Jewish groups working on progressive programs.

[www.shefafund.org](http://www.shefafund.org)

8459 Ridge Avenue

Philadelphia, PA 19128

(215) 483-4004

*Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility*

ICCR is comprised of religious institutions committed to pressing the corporations in which they invest to be socially and environmentally responsible. Their web site has current news on what companies are doing and how faith groups can become more socially responsible in their investments.

[www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)

475 Riverside Drive, Room 550

New York, NY 10115

(212) 870-2295

Women's Issues

*Women of Reform Judaism*

WRJ: The Federation of Temple Sisterhoods is the women's agency of the Reform Movement, representing 100,000 women in 600 local Sisterhoods throughout the United States, Canada and thirteen other countries. They work on a range of women's, children's and human rights issues.

[www.rj.org/wrj](http://www.rj.org/wrj)

633 Third Avenue

New York, NY 10017

(212) 650-4050

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### *National Organization for Women*

NOW is the largest feminist organization in the United States. The organization and its over 500,000 members organize mass marches, rallies, pickets, non-violent civil disobedience and immediate, responsive “zap” actions. They also do extensive lobbying, legal, and electoral work, and are a great source of information.

[www.now.org](http://www.now.org)

733 15th Street, NW—Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 628-8669

### *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*

NCADV’s work includes coalition building at the local, state, regional and national levels; support for the provision of community-based, non-violent alternatives – such as safe home and shelter programs – for battered women and their children; public education and technical assistance; policy development and innovative legislation; and, efforts to eradicate social conditions which contribute to violence against women and children.

[www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org)

P.O. Box 18749  
Denver, CO 80218  
(303) 839-1852  
National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233

### *Feminist Majority Foundation*

The Foundation’s mission is to create innovative, cutting-edge research, educational programs, and strategies to further women’s equality and empowerment; to reduce violence toward women; to increase the health and economic well-being of women; to eliminate discrimination of all kinds; and, to enhance feminist participation in public policy.

[www.feminist.org](http://www.feminist.org)

1600 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 801  
Arlington, VA 22209  
(703) 522-2214

### *National Partnership for Women & Families*

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that uses public education and advocacy to promote fairness in the workplace, quality health care, and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family.

[www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org)

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 710  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 986-2600

