

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 11, 2011

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United Synagogue Partners With Alban Institute
Consultancy will help United Synagogue develop leadership program

NEW YORK – Rabbi Steven Wernick, chief executive officer and executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, announced an innovative partnership with the Alban Institute of Herndon, Va., that will bring the expertise of Robert Leventhal, an Alban Institute senior consultant, to a United Synagogue team working to create a new continent-wide leadership development program.

The program will launch in June with web-based training materials and resources for current leaders. Later this year, the new leadership program will be expanded with a pilot group of 20 synagogues; it will be open to emerging leaders, people who are not yet serving on committees or synagogue boards. United Synagogue's new leadership program will expand Sulam, the organization's current program for synagogue presidents. Like all components of United Synagogue's strategic plan approved earlier this year, the leadership program seeks to strengthen and transform kehillot – sacred communities – that make up its membership across North America. Ultimately, the program's goal over the next three years is to train and develop a corps of 5,000 leaders, deeply committed Jews who know how to respond to today's challenges to the Jewish community as they invigorate and revitalize Conservative kehillot continent-wide. Together, Leventhal and the United Synagogue team will work on developing partnerships between United Synagogue and Alban's research, publishing, and consulting staff. The Rabbinical Assembly, the International Association of Conservative/Masorti Rabbis, will also participate in development and implementation of the initiative.

“Our strategic plan challenges us to help kehillot reinvent themselves for the 21st century,” Wernick said. “It calls on us to develop capacities internally, and to draw on the expertise developed by congregational transformation organizations like the Alban Institute. The research and publications that Alban produces are high-quality, and Bob Leventhal is a familiar and respected expert in congregational leadership development.”

The Alban Institute is one of the country's premiere congregational consulting and research institutions. It publishes the quarterly magazine *Congregations* as well as books on congregational leadership, and its Congregational Resource Guide is a searchable and interactive database of congregational resources. Alban consultants work on issues such as strategic planning, teamwork, governance and conflict management. Since 1974, the Alban Institute has worked primarily with mainline Protestant churches. Since hiring Leventhal in 2001, however, the institute has developed significant resources for Jewish congregations and its leaders, and it published *Sacred Strategies*, which won the 2011 National Jewish Book Award.

“I have had the benefit of hearing hundreds of cases of congregational leadership, and I am excited about bringing this learning to help strengthen Conservative kehillot,” Leventhal said. “My work at Alban has helped me learn to identify when congregations are ready to respond to change. I look forward to working with United Synagogue on developing a range of new resources.”

Leventhal has worked with synagogues, Jewish federations, and Jewish religious movements, and he has written extensively about synagogues. He will join Rabbi Charles Savenor, United Synagogue’s district director for metropolitan New York, and Mid-Atlantic district director Kathy Elias to create the core of the leadership development team. This new partnership calls for Leventhal to work with United Synagogue in 2011 as an Alban Institute consultant and to become a full-time member of United Synagogue’s professional staff in January 2012.

“We are very excited that Bob will be on board to help us build our leadership development resources,” Wernick said. “Our new partnership with the Alban Institute will allow United Synagogue to benefit from Alban’s track record of achievements in congregational development and at the same time it helps us take an important first step in implementing our strategic plan.”

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism was founded in 1913 as the association of Conservative synagogues in North America. Today it serves as a resource to its 650 affiliated congregations across North America, helping them to enrich the Jewish lives of their members and fulfilling religious, educational and communal responsibilities.

More information on the strategic planning process is available at www.uscj.org/4tomorrow.html.

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