

METNY Leadership newsletter

Nov. 2008 • CHESHVAN 5769 • VOLUME XXX • NUMBER 3



Metropolitan New York Region United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
330 West 38th Street, Suite 205 New York, NY 10018 212.533.0800 fax 212.533.0400 email: METNY@uscj.org www.uscj.org/metny

METNY Biennial Convention November 16

METNY's Biennial Convention, being held Sunday, November 16, at Temple Hillel in Valley Stream, features the installation of a new regional president, Sharon P. Steinberg, a series of congregational workshops, the presentation of awards to member congregations and a keynote address by United Synagogue Executive Vice President Rabbi Jerome Epstein.

The workshops include discussions on fundraising, outreach to intermarried families, enhancement of the arms of

congregations, and youth and life-long learning. A special workshop, titled "The 60 Minute Synagogue Fundraising Course," will offer strategic and tactical suggestions for establishing or strengthening the culture of synagogue fundraising. A study session on the "Midrash in the Medieval Mediterranean" will be presented by Dr. Burton Visotzky, The Nathan and Janet Appleman Professor of Midrash and Inter-religious Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Rabbi Charles E. Savenor, METNY's

new executive director, will address the convention during a luncheon following the workshops. During a plenary session at the start of the convention, new METNY officers will be installed. They include Sharon Steinberg, president; Norman Korowitz, first vice president; Abe Eisenberg, Jeffrey Horowitz, Al Krull, Maxine Peresechensky, Alan Reid and Joel Cutler, vice presidents; Michael Cohen, recording secretary; Marc Katz, communications secretary; Margaret Cella, financial secretary; and Naomi Snider, treasurer.

New METNY Executive Director Bringing New Visions to Region

Rabbi Charles E. Savenor, METNY's new executive director—who brings a lifetime of experience to his new position—is brimming with enthusiasm, goals, energy and ideas to involve members of the region in a new era of Conservative Judaism.

Reflecting on the state of New York area Judaism from METNY's new office suite, at 330 West 38th Street, Manhattan, Rabbi Savenor seemed to mirror a fresh brand of enthusiasm about the future of Conservative Judaism.

"I'm very optimistic about the future," he said. "There are just too many people committed to Conservative Judaism who want it to work. There are many reasons to be positive about our future. My prime goal is to help the region head in the right direction—not to just survive, but to thrive."

Rabbi Savenor was appointed to head the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's largest region last July, following an extensive nationwide search. "We interviewed many qualified candidates," said METNY President Irwin Scharf. "But, Rabbi Savenor exuberated an optimism that the METNY leadership shares. We are thrilled that he has agreed to become our executive director."

Rabbi Savenor, who grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, said he was inspired by his parent's commitment to Judaism. "They gave me an interesting perspective on congregational leadership," he said. "People who go to meetings inspire me."

He said he was 12-years old when he realized he wanted to become a rabbi. Involvement with United Synagogue Youth reinforced that feeling. He followed his brother as president of the USY New England Region and, in 1987, was elected the USY international president.

Rabbi Savenor graduated summa cum laude from Brandeis University. His senior thesis was "Portrait of an Immigrant Rabbi: The Life of Tobias Geffen." He was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1996 and earned his masters of education from Columbia University in 2008.

For four years he served as the associate rabbi of a 1,000-plus-member congregation, Anshe Emet Synagogue, Chicago, Illinois. In 2001, Rabbi Savenor became associate dean and director of admissions for the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was responsible for school recruitment and admissions. In his position, he

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New Executive Director

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traveled extensively to college campuses and conventions throughout North America and Israel.

"My experience at the Rabbinical School opened doors in different ways for me," he said. "I was directly involved in the organizational aspect of Judaism, as well as the academic side. It put the Jewish community in a different light.

"And," he added, "it is a great honor to be able to work with people who want to be rabbis. Inspiring people are inspiring in their own right. I was the beneficiary of some amazing experiences."

President Scharf chaired an 11-member search committee, equally divided among officers, Board members and past presidents. "As the region with the largest office staff, we were looking for someone with administrative experience," he said. "Rabbi Savenor's youth background was an additional major factor. And, we felt being a rabbi would enable him to work well with our member congregations.

"Of more than 30 applicants, we felt he had the best vision of what METNY could be and where it should go in the future."

Rabbi Savenor is nothing but upbeat about the future of Conservative Judaism in the region. "There are Conservative Jews out there who want to have a future in the Movement," he said. "We need to connect the dots in a way that makes sense. We need to energize our base and engage rabbis in effective ways. My strategic plan for the region is to find ways to enhance and strengthen Conservative synagogues in the New York metropolitan area.

"I want people to embrace Judaism as a responsibility," Rabbi Savenor said. "When you live Jewishly, there can be nothing more meaningful. I believe this with every ounce of my being." Rabbi Savenor and his wife, Julie Walpert, are the parents of two boys. Their youngest son, Benjamin, was

2008/2009 Regional Calendar

Sunday, November 16, 2008	METNY Biennial Convention
Wednesday, December 3 (10)	Institute of Continuing Studies
Wed Dec. 3, 2008	Youth Commission meeting
Monday, December 8, 2008	Executive Board Meeting
Monday, December 15, 2008	Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, December 17, 2008	UN Mission
Sunday, December 21, 2009	
through Monday, December 22, 2009	National Board Meetings, Washington DC
Sunday, Dec 21, 2008	
through Sunday, Dec 28, 2008	USY International Convention, Washington, DC
Monday, January 5, 2009	Executive Committee meeting
Monday, January 12, 2009	Education Commission meeting
Monday, January 26, 2009	Board of Directors Meeting

From the Incoming METNY President

By Sharon Steinberg

In Parshat Vayera, which was read just before convention, Avraham is circumcised—thus beginning God's covenant with the Jewish people.

November 16 begins, with God's blessings, METNY's new covenant with our member congregations. It is our new beginning, our new horizons—ones that we will share for good times, as well as challenging times.

Our new home, new administration and new executive director, give us new opportunities to create more ideas and programs that will help us to make our movement relevant and meaningful, to our members and to increasing numbers of Jews.

We are the largest region in United Synagogue and now we will strive to be the most creative, the most approachable, and the most eager to develop new leaders within our congregations.

We will always keep in mind that we are a family of synagogues, dedicated to the worship of God, study of Torah and doing good deeds. We must be creative in ways to encourage our synagogues to make their own covenant with each and every member. By doing so, we will strengthen our shuls, and ensure our future.

I look forward to working with all the arms of the Conservative movement. We all need to recognize our common mission. My vision is to have one large tent where we all can share our knowledge, our hopes and be proactive with our congregations.

I want you to feel comfortable offering METNY your ideas as well, which we can share with other congregations. We have a lot of room in our tent.

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born the day METNY moved to its new office location.

Rabbi Savenor said he plans to go on "a listening tour of the region's 108 synagogues, to hear first-hand from our members. I want to visit all of the synagogues to hear about their successes and their problems."

And what has been his experience

after four months on the job? "I am really impressed by the compassion lay people have for their synagogue and the Conservative Movement. It's exciting to re-imagine an organization to see its potential. I see the opportunity for us to do what we do—but do it even better. I am really happy I made the move to METNY," he said. "I honestly and truly couldn't be happier.

"METNY's Ofek Hadash - A New Horizon"

Executive Director's Message

Hevre,

The past three months serving as the METNY executive director has truly been an adventure. During my first month on the job, our office moved and my second son was born. These two significant events transpired fortuitously on the same day!

These two experiences —creating a new home for METNY and raising children — have not just framed my first few months in this position, but they also constitute the fundamental goals for our region and its affiliated synagogues. This goal, of course, is the essential enterprise of building dynamic spiritual homes for ourselves and the next generation.

The essential role that the Conservative movement and United Synagogue have always played in my life attracted me to this position. Working at METNY USCJ has also been a homecoming for me. Synagogue affiliation and community building were pillars of my parent's home. Raised in Boston, I fondly remember my parent's commitment to our local synagogue through committee service, minyan attendance and financial support. My parents were my first Jewish role models and their example continues to inspire me and my family, Julie and our sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

In high school I had the opportunity to further my commitment to the Conservative Movement through USY. One of the greatest experiences of my life was serving as the International President of USY in 1987. Through USY, I learned from inspiring youth professionals about the fundamentals and responsibilities of Jewish leadership. In USY I studied and experienced Judaism in a way that felt relevant to my life. USY also showed me that Judaism and Torah are vital tools for building community and addressing the challenges facing our world. Most importantly, USY—as well as my Jewish camping experiences—showed me what it meant to live Judaism.

I am excited about serving at METNY because I strongly believe that our synagogues can provide their members with daily, dynamic, Jewish experiences that can have a lasting positive impact. Moreover, our future as a movement seems bright because METNY has the resources necessary to enable our synagogues to

By

Rabbi Charles E. Savenor

Executive Director

Metropolitan New York Region,
The United Synagogue
of Conservative Judaism

enhance what they can provide to their members and reach new spiritual heights.

During my years serving in the pulpit and as a dean at the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, I discovered that successful synagogues have one eye on today and the other

on tomorrow. It is my goal that all of our METNY synagogues develop strategic plans so that we are continually providing our children and grandchildren with Jewish educational experiences that bolster their Jewish identities, as well as training passionate and compassionate new leadership. By working towards this objective, we position the next generation to surpass our success and achievements.

The path ahead will require proactive initiatives from METNY's lay and professional leadership, as well as true partnership with our synagogues. Together we will reach out to new members and enhance the experience of our current ones. Together, we will create innovative programs and "best practices" that can be replicated successfully within our synagogues. Together, we will assure that we offer dynamic and memorable programs to our USY and Hazak members.

I want to congratulate Irwin Scharf on his service to the region. His guidance and wisdom have been extremely helpful during this transition. I also wish a mazel tov to our incoming president, Sharon Steinberg. Sharon's leadership skills, commitment to Jewish life and passion will truly be an asset as we work together towards the future.

METNY's recent move and the birth of my son, Benjamin, remind me of another transition in Jewish history. When the Israelites prepared to cross the Jordan River, Moses and Joshua made sure that the education and welfare of the children were as important and well planned as any of their other goals. Like our ancestors, we in METNY are crossing into a new era. We have a new headquarters with new leadership, and a new horizon beckons us.

While times have changed, the goal remains the same, namely creating welcoming and engaging Jewish spiritual homes for ourselves and the next generation. Together we can actualize this vision and embrace the promise of ofek hadash, a new horizon!

President's Message

You will always remember your term as president of METNY," said one of the past presidents to me some months ago. That turns out to be the understatement of the century!

After having filled in as a caretaker/-executive director of the region from early March until Rabbi Savenor took office in mid-July, I was only too happy to go back to executing the traditional duties of regional president.

However, the 19 weeks I spent in a dual capacity gave me a unique opportunity to observe METNY from a day-to-day viewpoint, as opposed to the traditional view of my predecessors. I dealt with some of the daily minutiae as well as the big issues. I was extremely fortunate to be aided and abetted by the professionals and support staff in the METNY office, as well as those from the USCJ staff. All of them were always ready to help me in any way they could. I am especially appreciative of those past presidents and officers who were motivated during this time to call me on many occasions and offer their help and advice. I have tried to use the experience gained during this time in working with Rabbi Savenor to give him background, history and suggestions for many of the regional functions, operations and procedures.

My two years have gone very quickly and, as I look back upon the accomplishments of my term, I see as did all who preceded me and those who will follow that there were many things I wanted to do that happened and things which happened that I did not plan on.

A major accomplishment was the organization and heading of the Search Committee which selected Rabbi Savenor as our executive director. There were many applicants for the position and I feel more confident each day that the right choice was

made. He is an "out of the box thinker" and a day does not pass in which an innovative suggestion for how we can improve the Region is not presented. His background in youth and his rabbinic training will serve us well in the future and I look forward to the implementation, with future administrations, of what he envisions for the Region.

In addition, we survived the relocation of our quarters from 155, from which we moved in late August. Before the move, the staff was scattered around the building in temporary quarters, shared offices, and endured inconveniences. The packing and move was finally accomplished and our new offices are well on their way to completion. This is the result of much hard work by Al Krull and Rabbi Savenor, who joined me in many days of visiting various facilities around New York until the present location was found.

Two annual METNY dinners took place during my tenure. We honored Marsha Shlefstein and Robert Shapiro in 2007 and Stanley Hochhauser and Claire Salant in 2008. Our journals were highly successful on both occasions and made the support of many METNY programs possible.

The METNY Education program, headed by Rabbi Paulette Posner and chaired by Alan Roth and his co-chair Abe Eisenberg, continued their tradition of achievement. Nights of Learning and Institutes for Education took place. Our Board retreat was also a weekend of study. Regional students were involved and engaged in Hidon HaTorah and were recognized by Keter Torah ceremonies.

Our Youth program headed by "W" (my code name for Wendy Pusateri) and chaired by Jeff Shlefstein and his co-chair, Steve Topal, continued and enhanced our USY and Kadima programs. The ruach at the two regional

conventions was something I will always remember, as well as the two Shabbatot I spent at Encampment. The acquisition of 500 Etz Chaim chummasim this past summer for use at our events is one of the tangible events in which I take great pride. The USYers were very grateful for the books.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our assistant executive director, Don Schiller, who was invaluable in handling many of the day-to-day relations with our synagogues and, although impeded by a hip that needed surgery and in pain much of the time, nevertheless worked diligently with me. Similarly, Rabbi Posner and Wendy Pusateri needed only to be asked and whether the request was within their normal purview or not, they never said no.

Most of all, I will remember these two years for the friendships that developed with those who were previously just acquaintances and the opportunity to get to know and appreciate the talent and dedication of the entity that is known as METNY.

I wish the new administration success and the achievement of their goals.

From the Incoming METNY President

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In the next two years, I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible, visiting your synagogues, sharing your celebrations and challenges, and listening to what you would like to see in METNY.

Let's make a covenant to work together to revitalize our movement through education of our lay leaders and have them bring our Jewish values back to their homes. METNY, under our new administration, is here to help you accomplish this.