



Dear Friends,

October 2020

During Rabbi Shpeen's sabbatical, he was able to spend time reflecting upon, researching and speaking with colleagues about the current practices relative to intermarriage in the United States and specifically within our Reform movement. Undoubtedly, the demographics have evolved and changed since Rabbi Shpeen was in rabbinical school and certainly in the thirty-six years since he first came to Beth Emeth to serve our congregation.

Like many other changes that have taken place over the years at Beth Emeth, the last thing Rabbi Shpeen has ever wanted to do is to cause divisiveness within our congregational community. Under his leadership, we have prided ourselves in being a warm, welcoming and inclusive congregation as much as possible. With that said, from our worship to our religious observance and practices, Rabbi Shpeen has often commented that these have happened by consensus, by "evolution not revolution".

When Rabbi Shpeen returned to Albany this winter we began a conversation with the Officers and then with the entire board as he encouraged us to reconsider the longstanding practice of our congregation prohibiting his officiating at weddings in the Temple if both individuals are not Jewish.

According to the guidelines of the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis), rabbinic officiation at wedding ceremonies is personal and a decision each individual rabbi makes according to his/her own standards or philosophical position. As we know, for years now, Rabbi Shpeen has been willing to participate in an interfaith wedding ceremony within certain parameters and has done so for many members of our congregation. Yet, the decision as whether the congregation now wants to broaden that to include the availability of our members to be married by Rabbi Shpeen in the synagogue building is what the Board is now going to address more formally.

Although the Officers and Board of Trustees have wholeheartedly endorsed moving forward with this discussion, Rabbi Shpeen has encouraged us that, before doing so, we should elicit the input, feedback or address any questions that our membership might have in order to be fully transparent and for our practices to reflect the diversity of our congregation and to best address their needs within the parameters of our faith and the Reform movement.

To this end, we invite and encourage you to share with us any questions or thoughts relative to this issue either by emailing us at info@bethemethalbany.org or by mail addressed to the Temple marked to our attention to be received no later than November 6.

On THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, at 7:30 pm, we will be hosting a live stream discussion answering these questions and addressing any of the issues expressed before the Board then makes a final decision. We hope that you will sign on and attend this meeting even if you do not send any specific questions.

Congregation Beth Emeth has always been at the forefront and cutting edge within our Reform Movement. More importantly, we have always tried to embrace, to accept and to warmly include all those within our community who wish to affiliate themselves with our Temple family regardless of their spiritual journey. Considering this important issue is yet another attempt to do just that in fulfilling our mission. We appreciate your continued support and look forward to engaging in this conversation.

With warm wishes,

Michael Lurie, President

Scott L. Shpeen, Senior Rabbi

Scott L. Shpeen
Rabbi
Sharon Kohn
Interim Cantor
Alexandra Stein
Rabbinic Intern
Kathy K. Golderman
Executive Director
Shara L. Siegfeld
Director of Education
Deborah Sokoler
Program Director

Michael Lurie
President
Robyn Marinstein
1st Vice President
Melissa Greenberg
2nd Vice President
Robin Sobol
Treasurer
Robert Kivort
Secretary

Board of Trustees
Taylor Alfred
Moshe Bonder
Jack Burman
CBEYG President
Erik Cooley
Barry Z. Davis
Brotherhood President
Barry Feinman
Carolyn Ginsburg
Rose Golden
Alison Johnson
Karen Kaufman-White
Kerryn Kent
Steve Lobel
James Milstein
Abby Nash
Debbie Ratner
Meredith Ray-LaBatt
Sisterhood President
Jessica Richer
Joseph Schwartz
Steven Shrager

Past Presidents
Andrew Safranko
Lee Rosen
Lauren Iselin
Jill S. Goodman
Garry Sanders
Jan Reiss-Weitzman
Arthur J. Siegel
Cathy Kimmel
Ilene S. Sykes
Laurence G. Barnet
Steven L. Einhorn
Fred B. Wander
Charles M. Stern
Marvin A. Freedman
Alan V. Iselin