

# RABBI GREG D. WEITZMAN

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## RABBINIC EXPERIENCE

### **Congregation Rodeph Sholom, New York City, NY**

**2012-Present**

Congregation Rodeph Sholom is one of New York City's largest and historic congregations. With 1800 households, Rodeph Sholom engages its members through thoughtful planning and programming as we continually create a strong sense of extended family. Rodeph Sholom blends the teachings of our Jewish heritage with the best lessons of modern culture and the core values of today's Reform Judaism. There are many sub-communities within Rodeph Sholom that are both unique and intersecting, including our young families program 'Sholom Sprouts' our newest initiative for children 0-2.3; a cutting edge religious school from pre-K through high school; the Rodeph Sholom Day School, America's oldest Reform Jewish Day School; Shireinu community our Special Needs Worship Services, an active Brotherhood and Sisterhood; 'Jewish Basics' our introduction to Judaism class. Each of these communities is guided by Rodeph Sholom's mission to enrich the lives of our members, contribute to the continuance and vitality of the Jewish people, and Tikkun Olam.

*Associate Rabbi, 2017-present*

*Assistant Rabbi, 2015-2017*

*Rabbinic Intern, 2012-2015*

I have my own unique rabbinic portfolio as well as engage in full partnership with an outstanding clergy and programmatic team. I serve as one member of a five-clergy team – along with student rabbinical and cantorial interns. As a clergy team we interact with over 100 programmatic, educational and administrative staff. Over my tenure I have been mentored by a long-term senior Rabbi, who has guided me to increased responsibilities and deepened my leadership skills.

Present rabbinic responsibilities, include pastoral care and counseling, officiating at all life-cycle events, leading worship, sermons, teaching, song leading, leadership development, supervision, fundraising, and enhancing lay partnership.

Since New York City has been heavily impacted by COVID-19, it has challenged me to develop new strategies to connect and remain engaged in the families lives – the challenge of how to be a virtual rabbi. Due to my skill and comfort with new modes of technology, I have created, developed, and produced online meaningful content for our congregation. These experiences have included young family worship, adult-education, ZOOM funerals and shiva minyanim, virtual baby-namings and communal Shabbat worship. The clergy team has successfully navigated the transition from a brick-and-mortar legacy institution to an online virtual congregation through dynamic online content and pastoral presence.

## **Prayer & Spiritual Practice**

- **Havdalah Unplugged** - Instituted a new and exciting spiritual experience for adults and families. In partnership with the ritual chair, developed an innovative Havdalah experience that turned into a supportive community-within-the-community, where congregants are encouraged to experiment with prayer and traditional practice. Increased participation in worship service and successfully integrated this experience into the Family B'nai Mitzvah program.
- **High Holiday Alternative Service** - Created a new and engaging High Holy Day worship experience off site at a local church with over 150 people who were seeking a more intimate High Holy Day Experience. These members now participate in other alternative worship experiences.
- **Supported and encouraged congregants as they developed their prayer and spiritual practice.** Guided members as they explored our sacred texts, prayer books, poetry and music, as foundational resources as they sought their own personal relationship with God.

## **Life Cycle**

### **B'nai Mitzvah**

- With over 100 (157 this year) B'nai Mitzvah students a year, helped grow Rodeph Sholom's young family population by building strong personal relationships with students and their families through this process. A key component was setting the expectation for their participation in our transformational confirmation program/trip to Berlin.
- Analyzed data from listening campaign and working group to create a multi-year transition to a model that better addressed the changing needs and demographics of our community.
- Wrote and developed new programs and curriculum as well as worship experiences for B'nai Mitzvah families.
- Officiated in-person B'nai Mitzvah using a hybrid ZOOM worship experience. Worked alongside clergy, education, and medical advisory committee to maintain a safe and meaningful worship environment for community members.

### **Officiated at funerals, weddings, baby-naming and bris**

- Known for being a warm, comforting presence with families during times of grief; officiated at funeral services often in partnership with our cantor.
- Enhanced the personal connection of couples and families to create inspired and moving covenantal ceremonies and weddings. These pastoral moments often increased their involvement in other congregational programs.

## **Building Community**

**Sholom Sprouts** -This is a major area of responsibility in my portfolio. Sholom Sprouts is Congregation Rodeph Sholom's initiative for young children and the grown-ups who care for them.

- Worked in partnership with lay leaders, executive director, and professional staff to create innovative programming for young families.

- Developed prayer and holiday experiences, as well as formal classroom programming that recruited and created pathways for young families to enter into the congregation and day school communities.
- Took the lead working alongside executive director and educators to create a million-dollar budget for program.
- Consulted on multi-million dollar building redesign of space for program.
- Served as Rabbi and mentor for young families which ultimately led to the cultivation of donor relationships and new board members.
- In partnership with Sholom Sprouts director, successfully moved in-person Shabbat and HHD worship to virtual worship and programming. Currently in the process of moving back to in-person worship and Shabbat dinners.
- Maintained a strong and safe in-person learning and education program for children and adults according to COVID-19 protocols and safety measures.
- Worked in partnership Sholom Sprouts director to hire new program assistants, teachers, and song leaders to support a growing program.
- **Confirmation Program** - The Confirmation program is another key area in my portfolio. Together with clergy and educators I pioneered a new flexible curriculum approach to post-B'nai mitzvah programming designing it as a year of exploration that enabled our students to wrestle with some of life's big questions, such as "Who am I? Where do I fit in? What do I stand for?" In addition, a key component of the year is a trip to Berlin, the birthplace of Reform Judaism and Rodeph Sholom's roots. Enhanced relationship with donor for five-figure annual gift to off-set cost of trip for students and families. Confirmation numbers have gone from seven to 35 annually and over 100 Confirmation students have travelled to Berlin.

### **Leadership – Governance - Supervision**

- **Partnered with the senior rabbi in developing and communicating his unique vision for Congregation Rodeph Sholom and for congregational engagement.** As a member of the clergy team, helped to implement the vision of a dynamic and vibrant community with a wide array of entry points into Jewish life; took a lead role in formulating the vocabulary used to articulate this vision of congregational life to members and potential members.
- **Development** - Worked together with lay leaders, clergy and professional staff on a 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Collaborated with staff and team to launch quiet phase of multi-million-dollar capital campaign. Provided vision and proposed concepts for renovation of spaces to address growing needs of congregation and community in terms of youth and young families. Assumed a key role in salon participations and development asks. Personally identified donors and maintained relationships for an ongoing financial commitment to the congregation as well as their possible growth of commitment.
- **Mentored clergy and professional growth** - Coordinated interview process and hiring of rabbinic intern at Rodeph Sholom. Worked with rabbinic student for guidance in programming, conducting life-cycle events, working with volunteers, and navigating professional challenges. Frequently sought out by fellow clergy and staff for guidance in programming, conducting life-cycle events, working with volunteers, and navigating professional challenges. Designed retreats for clergy and lay leaders. Proposed and successfully implemented 360 review for clergy.

- **Hiring and Supervising** – Worked alongside lay leaders, clergy and professional staff to interview, hire, and engage with new Assistant Rabbi and Assistant Cantor. Helped with Chief of Staff to plan and design onboarding process and transition. Worked with new Senior Rabbi to guide transition from Rabbi Emeritus to new Senior Rabbi.

### **Torah & Jewish Learning**

- **Adult Education** - Developed and created high level and engaging adult-education classes such as: “4 Essential Jewish Texts”; “The History of Israel through her music”; “A History of the Reform Movement and its roots in Germany”. Developed programs: “Clergy Panel” and “Wine and Wondering”. Planned an engaging *parshat hashavua* model with our clergy to address needs and wants of congregation.
- **Jewish Basics and Conversion Program** - Improved and strengthened the Jewish Basics program. Grew the program from five to twenty participants annually. Developed a new curriculum for conversion and recruited new participants. Established a Jewish Basics 2.0 (I just converted now what do I do?) program that addressed the need to continue engagement and membership commitment for those who have converted. Lead educator and worked in partnership with rabbinic intern.
- **Brotherhood** - Identified capable participants and new leadership for a struggling Brotherhood. Successfully helped to navigate the transition of former Brotherhood leadership to a new leadership model. Developed new program ideas and vision of Brotherhood 2.0.
- **Freedom Seder** - Worked in partnership with local church and clergy to develop an innovative Seder. Facilitated a working group to help develop a new program that is focused around the spiritual and community needs of the individuals. Sought out new partnerships and opportunities for engagement with new faith partners.
- **Rodeph Sholom School**. The Rodeph Sholom School is the only n-8 Reform Jewish Day School affiliated with a synagogue in the country. Worked with school senior leadership, clergy and lay leadership to develop relationships and creative programming. Responsible for leading worship services for early childhood through middle school. Worked with PA to establish shabbat dinners and worship experience. Participated in camping trips and informal education experiences and leading in music.

### **Social Action & Advocacy**

- **Mitzvah Weekend**. Worked in partnership with lay leaders and community leaders to create innovative mitzvah work that established a lasting effect on community organizations through donations and “doers”. We created a working relationship with a local food pantry that is ongoing within our social action program and religious school. We also worked alongside caring community to establish a mental health awareness weekend centered on the mitzvah of self-care.
- **T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights**. Participated in six-month program with lay leadership called STEP (Synagogue Teams for Equity Partnerships). STEP is a cohort of synagogue leaders who engage in Torah-centered learning around racial equity and justice to then establish meaningful and sustainable relationships with communities of color. Working alongside lay leadership to identify, engage with, and establishing ongoing relationships with communities of color around NYC.

## **Israel**

- **Israel trip.** Reestablished a bi-annual congregational trip to Israel. Created a relationship with an Israeli tour company to develop an exciting Israeli trip that catered to our congregation's needs, wants, and expectations. Trip participation increased from 25 to 40 in two years.

## **Camp**

- **Served in various roles at the URJ Eisner Camp including education director, song leader, and faculty.** Wrote and implemented curriculum and worship experiences for entire camp. Oversaw Jewish life and learning for camp community. Worked alongside faculty and lay leadership.

## **PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE**

- **Temple Shaaray Tefilah, New York, NY, Fall 2012 – Spring 2014**  
Songleader, service leader, and band leader for 20s and 30s Shabbat Evening Service.
- **Next Dor NYC, New York, NY, Fall 2011 – Spring 2012.** Worked alongside a Co-Director and Rabbi Larry Hoffman to organize programs and events for the interdenominational initiative of Synagogue 3000 in NYC. Developed an outreach network to engage participation. Responsible for budget and administrations of program.
- **Central Synagogue, New York, NY Fall 2007 – Spring 2010.** Full-time Teacher, Youth Advisor, Lead Teacher for 8th and 9th Grade. Wrote Religious School Curriculum. Organized and ran Confirmation retreats with Senior Rabbi Peter Rubenstein. Organized Social Action Programming for teens and families.
- **American Jewish World Services Fellowship – Thailand/Burma.** Participated in a yearlong fellowship coordinated by AJWS including fundraising, social activism, and community organizing experience.
- **Certification in Congregation Community Organizing, Fall 2012**  
Join for Justice – New York, NY

## **EDUCATION**

### **Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY** **2010-2015**

- Rabbinic Ordination, 2015; Master of Arts in Hebrew Literature, 2024
- Text Immersion: Shulchan Aruch with advisor Dr. Alyssa Gray
- **Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at HUC and Jewish Home Lifecare of the Bronx, Summer 2014.** Attended to the spiritual, emotional, and educational needs of community. Led religious services for entire community. Created and taught courses on Jewish ethics

### **Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY** **2001-2005**

- Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with a concentration in Archeology, May 2005

## **PERSONAL INFORMATION**

- Married to Ashley Weitzman
- 2 children: Eden (5) and Jonathan (18 months old)

Life Beyond ZOOM  
**Rabbi Greg D. Weitzman**  
Personal Statement

This year has been one in which the Jewish community has lived our lives more in our homes than in our sanctuaries than ever before. It has not been easy to celebrate, commemorate, or even mourn as a Jew for the past eighteen months. As a Rabbi, I have lived each and every day making personal and meaningful connections with congregants and my community. I wake up each day and rush to work so I can be in that moment of holding a baby and celebrating their entrance into the covenant, hugging a wedding couple under the chuppah, or sitting with a young mother who has just lost her partner in life. Judaism is a religion that needs to be lived and experienced in personal relationship with others. This is what has made this last year so hard for many of us. No doubt we are all ready to turn off our computer screens for good so we can be together again learning and laughing. One of the great challenges of this post-ZOOM world is going to be defining for ourselves and our congregation what it is that makes us unique and special as we try to figure out the reason people will join us on Friday nights when there is so much free content out there as a result of the pandemic. Congregations and synagogues need to differentiate themselves from other communities while striving to seek the core of what it is that they stand for. Business models past, present, and future will need to be looked at and tools for engagement will need to be invented. People can get free “content” and learning from anywhere, but what they cannot get online is an in-person community - the feeling of what it is to be seen, heard and held.

As an enthusiastic guitar player and fan of music, I often think about each of the strings of the guitar. On their own, they make a beautiful and unique sound. When you apply a little pressure that tune can be changed to something even grander. On their own, each string is special, but the real beauty in the guitar and any instrument is when you apply just the right amount of pressure and play all of the strings together. I believe that the synagogue is built exactly the same way. Each community within it can operate to its own unique tune, but when called together and brought together by one individual, that is when the melody of the synagogue and of Jewish life is heard, all of the separate parts become a beautiful symphony. In the past nine years that I have spent as a rabbi at Rodeph Sholom I have committed my time to fine tuning programs with the goal of recognizing and reinforcing those sacred relationships.

Forging connections among families with young children is the cornerstone of a healthy congregation. As a father of two young children, I know this as well as anyone. When my daughter was born, I realized that, like many congregations, Rodeph Sholom had fallen victim to the belief that programs like Tot Shabbat or Chanukah Latke parties— (low-barrier programs that were fun, yet lacked any real content, where the only hint of Judaism is in the cuisine offered)—would suffice. We were paralyzed by the idea that if we offered something that was “too religious,” no one would participate or show up. Instead of real engagement with other families and clergy, they lacked follow-up and follow-through. We often put these events on the calendar because we knew we needed to do something, without giving enough attention to whether these events would forge true connections.

Five years ago, with the full support of our former Senior Rabbi and Board, I envisioned, spearheaded, designed, consulted on building renovations and raised significant operating funds to create Sholom Sprouts. The core value of Sholom Sprouts is to create a new and vibrant center for young families who are seeking meaningful and authentic connection to Jewish life. I wanted to connect young families (most whom are unaffiliated with our congregation) to our space and to our community. I saw the need to address a community that is underserved in authentic quality Jewish programming-programming that would engage their minds and, more importantly, touch their souls. I sought to connect families with programs, learning and rituals that they could not find in other Jewish venues. Today, we have a highly engaged sub-community within our 1700-family congregation, and

routinely bring in families who are not yet affiliated. Sholom Spouts has successfully challenged an outdated model and created entry portals for young families. This year, we were able to successfully transition our Sholom Sprouts program from in-person to virtual and back again.

I have focused on getting new families involved in our community as well as keeping them involved. Like many congregations, we often ‘lose’ students and their families after the children’s B’nai Mitzvah. This always is hard on me – to see families leave the community because they felt as though their connection was done. I don’t believe that – I believe sacred relationships both with and within a community are eternal. When we bring families or individuals in at any age and stage, we engage in a covenantal relationship with them. We are as much a part of their lives as they are with ours. The sacred connections are what fuels my rabbinate. It is what I say brings me the most joy – what fills my heart.

I began a process of reimagining our Confirmation program knowing how important it was to build upon the relationships that were created in preparing for their B’nai Mitzvah. Understanding the real pressures that teens struggle with, peer-pressure, academics, self-esteem, sexuality and of course their parents, I wanted to create a safe, welcoming and supportive environment as an extension of our relationship. I wanted them to know that Rodeph Sholom was a place for them as they journeyed through their teen years. Working together with our educators we developed a flexible program that responded to the present needs of our students and families. We heard from them that one of the greatest challenges that they encountered was the time commitment and interest in religious school now post-B. Mitzvah, as well as competing against all the after-school activities. It took me some time to let go and abandon the old model of religious school, so we designed a teen learning bi-monthly program for longer periods of time sensitive to the schedules of our students and centered around a meal.

We now have an outstanding confirmation program that not only includes quality educational learning, it also includes an annual trip to Berlin. In planning the details of this program and trip, I concluded that one of the main reasons this works is because we as a community have upheld our end of the covenantal relationship that we are in with these families and children. Based on what I have learned from Sprouts, I assisted in raising the funds to help off-set the cost for a hands-on experience that leaves a lasting impression on our students. When we go to Berlin, visiting the birthplace of the Holocaust, the greatest catastrophe that has ever befallen the Jewish people, it is always an extraordinary challenge. Yet, it is also an opportunity to deliver the greatest lesson that any Jewish leader can deliver: that Judaism can and does thrive not only in the face of challenge, but often in spite of it. I know that these experiences—connecting to each other, their rabbi, and their history—have given my students a foundation that they will always look back on. That is what I strive for as a rabbi every day - to bring Judaism to life for each and every person who walks into our sacred space.

I am passionate about everything that is Jewish. Our community. Our history. Our beauty. Our magic. It is a blessing to be able to share that with the members of my congregation. That is not to say it is never a challenge to craft dynamic, engaging, and authentic programming, events and worship that allow for a variety of pathways into the synagogue. Martin Buber wrote that “every person has a way to understand God, but for each person that way is different”. I believe that the synagogue must be a place where each member can find their own path. This is my vision of a congregation and its rabbi. They must enter into a covenant with each other to create dynamic, engaging, and authentic programming that allows for a variety of pathways into meaningful Jewish life. On their own they can enrich and inspire, but together they create a sacred community. As I engage in this search process, I am seeking a community that wants to partner with me on this path.