



Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills
Living Judaism

December 4, 2008

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Funders and Prospective Funders of PANIM's
Interdenominational Rabbinical Student Retreats
c/o Rabbi Sid Schwarz
6163 Executive Boulevard
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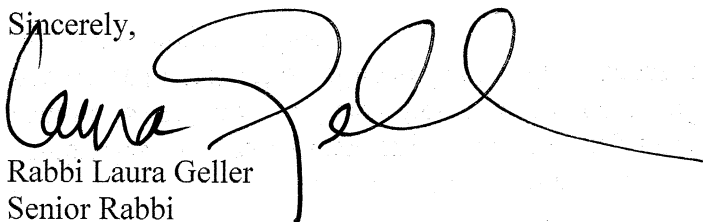
To Whom It May Concern:

I was privileged to be on the faculty with Rabbi Sid Schwarz and Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky of the Interdenominational Rabbinical Student Retreat sponsored by PANIM from November 20-23, 2008. The retreat brought together students from all denominations to explore the challenge of "Re-Imagining the American Synagogue." But it did so much more than that. It enabled these students to be reflective about their visions of their rabbinate in a surprisingly nurturing and supportive community of other future rabbis. Students actually said that they felt safer sharing their hope, dreams and even fears in this interdenominational setting than in their own seminaries. The experience of participating in prayer led by each of the seminaries was both an inspiration and an example of the thoughtfulness necessary to make it possible to Jews with different understandings of halacha to pray together.

Rabbi Sid Schwarz' vision is an important one. Enabling students to reflect with him and other veteran colleagues like myself and Rabbi Kanefsky about how to transform American synagogues from functional to visionary is the first step in making that transformation possible. It is also an important step in encouraging these new colleagues to consider serving a congregation as a challenging and rewarding career. The sessions were eye-opening for the students and important for the faculty as well; it isn't often in my busy life as a congregational rabbi that I have the luxury to really reflect on my work. To do that in the presence of such impressive future colleagues was indeed a gift.

I am grateful to your support for this endeavor and hope it continues into the future.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Laura Geller
Senior Rabbi

December 15, 2008
18 Kislev 5769

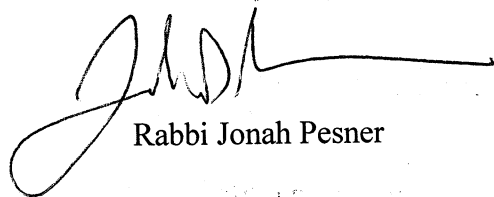
To Whom It May Concern:

I write in enthusiastic support of the PANIM rabbinic retreat program. I have had the honor of serving on the retreat faculty, and believe it is a highly effective strategy to engage rabbinic students as leaders for the future. Perhaps the most important element of the retreat experience is its pluralistic nature. The rabbinic students, who come from the diverse spectrum of religious backgrounds and seminary affiliations, learn to negotiate an authentic Jewish environment. They must find ways to worship, study, and relate to each other despite their different orientations. More important than the content of the retreat is the relationships that are forged among the rabbis of the future.

In terms of content, the retreats invite students to remove themselves from the demands of their seminaries and work placements, so they can focus on important questions of their leadership in the future. How will they build the congregations of the future? How will they lead their communities to be forces for social justice? PANIM provides an excellent context for students to develop their understanding of these questions.

I believe the PANIM rabbinic retreat program is an essential component of the broader effort to develop the next generation of rabbinic leadership.

U'shalom,



Rabbi Jonah Pesner

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky
B'nai David-Judea Congregation

December 12, 2008

To Funders and Prospective Funders of PANIM's Interdenominational Rabbinical Student Retreats, c/o Rabbi Sid Schwarz

It is my pleasure to write a letter of endorsement on behalf of PANIM's Rabbinical Student Retreats. I had the privilege and delight to serve on the faculty of the most recent retreat, November 20 - 23, 2008. Although I had never attended this sort of retreat before, and did not know exactly what to expect, I came away from it deeply impressed. There were several important benefits that the students derived from our time together, benefits that are uniquely available in this kind of intimate, and interdenominational setting.

Foremost, the students became acquainted with people from other seminaries and movements who will be their rabbinic colleagues in the years ahead. As one who believes firmly that the future of the American Jewish community depends upon all of the movements working in sync and functioning as resources for one another, these contacts are invaluable. And well beyond the establishment of these contacts per se, the Retreat gave the students insight into how rabbis of other movements think, endowing them with enhanced capacity to interact with whomever their future colleagues may turn out to be.

In addition, the students derived great benefit from interacting with the faculty members, all of whom have spent considerable time in the professional rabbinate. Both on an informal basis throughout the retreat, and in a scheduled way on Shabbat afternoon, the students posed questions, shared concerns, and sought help in terms of articulating their personal visions of the rabbinate.

Finally, the sessions themselves explored concrete, specific, and practical issues that face any rabbi in any congregational setting. I am confident that these are issues that are rarely, if ever, directly addressed in Rabbinical School curricula, thus providing eye-opening instruction and generating extremely thoughtful discussion among the students.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have about the PANIM Rabbinical Student Retreat, and I am hopeful that you can help to keep them going.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rav Yosef". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky

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RE-IMAGINE

The RE-IMAGINE Project of New York • Experiment in Congregational Education

December 4, 2008/7 Kislev 5769

To Whom It May Concern,

As the Director of the New York RE-IMAGINE Project, I witness the need for synagogues to become twenty-first century fulcrums for Jewish life. The Experiment in Congregational Education has worked with over 70 congregations across the country to support the transformation needed to nurture the Jewish people in their search for meaning and connection. We have learned a key difference between congregations that try something new only to return to their usual products and patterns and those making a positive difference in the lives of their congregants. Repeatedly, we see, a key difference is rabbinic leadership.

Rabbi Sid Schwartz's fall retreat: Re-imagining the American Synagogue is an opportunity for rabbinical students to learn the practical skills of a Jewish change leader. In 2006 and 2007, I was fortunate to be faculty on the retreat that brings students from across the denominations to conversations about common cause: Creating synagogues that nurture the lives of congregants.

Students expressed great appreciation for focused time to learn the skills they know they need, but have few if any opportunities to learn. How do I develop and express a compelling vision for synagogue life for the new century? How do I engage lay leaders as partners in creating a synagogue that matters? What are the *tachlis* things I can do to make the difference we need? These are some of the essential questions that rabbinical students grapple with in a safe and supportive environment during the retreat.

Funders need to consider where dollars will have a positive impact. Be confident that the Panim retreats are a worthy investment. Every field from the auto industry to government to synagogues demands innovation. The world has changed dramatically in a short period of time. Rabbis must be leaders in innovation. These retreats are fire starter for a generation of rabbis who embrace their new charge and are equipped to meet it.

It has been my pleasure to work Rabbi Schwartz. His passion and real life experience assure the quality of each retreat.

Sincerely,

Cyd Weissman

Where Open Orthodoxy Begins

April 29, 2009

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I am the Rabbinic Head and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School, a progressive Orthodox rabbinical school, now entering its tenth year. Over my ten years as Dean, I have seen rabbinical students from our school participate in a wide range of different retreats, a good number of them inter-denominational, and some even inter-faith. Over the last four years, many of our students have participated in the PANIM retreats on Reimagining the American Synagogue and on Spirituality and Social Justice. I can say without reservation that our students are consistently enthusiastic about these retreats, and rank them among the most worthwhile of the retreats in which they have participated. Perhaps the strongest testament to this, is the fact that participants from previous years regularly encourage their classmates to participate in future retreats.

In their high assessment of the PANIM retreats, students underscore three distinctive characteristics: the high quality and relevance of the content and teaching; the opportunity to get back in touch with their vision and why they have chosen to become a rabbi; and the opportunity to connect to fellow rabbinical students across denominational lines in an environment that creates safe space and cultivates reciprocal respect. A major challenge for existing rabbis and soon-to-be rabbis is that they can get caught up in the day-to-day responsibilities of the rabbinate of being a student, and lost their own vision, and inner religious life. They also can become very self-referential, as most of their activities take place among colleagues of the same denomination and worldview. These retreats encourage students to recharge their spiritual batteries, reconnect to their visions, and to appreciate, learn from, and develop friendships with colleagues from different denominations and religious worldviews. I know that some of my students have spent many hours on these retreats in intimate and intense spiritual and religious conversations with students from other rabbinical schools. Through these conversations, and through the retreat experience in general, they have learned a pluralism that is not only based on tolerance and respect for differences, but one that understands that sometimes our greatest opportunities for growth emerge from encountering those who are different from ourselves. Given the highly fragmented nature of the Jewish community, it is critical to the future unity of Klal Yisrael to continue to foster relationships such as these in our next generation of religious leaders.

I will end by noting that I had the opportunity this year to participate in the PANIM retreat on Social Justice. In addition to seeing directly all that I had heard over the years from my students, I was also struck by the combination of professionalism and warmth that infused the culture of the retreat. Moreover, I was particularly grateful of the sensitivity that Sid brought to the issue of communal prayer. Without a doubt, the most challenging part of any inter-denominational retreat that includes Orthodox students, is arranging prayer services that are respectful of everyone's needs and boundaries. Sid did this in an exemplary fashion, by both setting guidelines and empowering the students involved. It was a true pleasure to teach and participate in this recent retreat.

I would strongly encourage ongoing support of these retreats. Our students need them desperately.

Sincerely yours,


Rabbi Dov Linzer



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April 29, 2009

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Dear friends:

In 2007, I had the pleasure of serving as a faculty member on a rabbinical student social justice retreat that Rabbi Sid Schwarz planned and facilitated. Throughout the program, I was impressed with how strongly the participating students connected to Sid, and with the excitement among the students for learning from his experiences in the fields of social justice and synagogue leadership. Drawing on the connection that he forged with the students, Sid was able to help participants to find creative ways of engaging with challenges to pluralism, to expand their boundaries, and to think seriously about the role that social justice might play in their rabbinate.

From the students, I heard how much interest there is in the retreat program among their peers in rabbinical school. Admission to the retreat was limited and competitive, and many rabbinical students interested in exploring the relevant issues were not able to attend. I hope that, in the future, this retreat program will be expanded under Sid's leadership so that even more rabbinical students may benefit from his experience and insight.

Please feel free to contact me with questions, or to chat more about this program.

Thank you,

Rabbi Jill Jacobs
Rabbi-in-Residence
Jewish Funds for Justice

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