

Background:

Please describe what being a Conservative Jew means to you personally, and as a rabbi of a Conservative synagogue.

I believe in the most commonly used definition of Conservative Judaism known as “Tradition and Change”, keeping the central tenets of Jewish tradition while also staying progressive and modern by being able and willing to adapt and develop *Halakhah* (Jewish Law) to our contemporary reality.

To me, personally, Conservative Judaism, is a “Big Tent” where a meaningful Jewish journey and full rainbow of *halakhic* options and paths can be found for all sincere seekers, regardless of levels of knowledge and observance.

Ritual/Observance:

Are there ritual or other practices that you choose not to participate in, and if so, can you explain how you reached your position? (Examples: officiating at a wedding on Saturday night before Shabbat is over; saying mourners Kaddish with less than a minyan). Do you affirm Conservative Judaism’s standards (i.e. no interfaith officiating, no re-marriage without a *Get*)

I affirm Conservative Judaism’s standards (no interfaith officiating, no remarriage without a *get*)

I am flexible about officiation on Saturday night before Shabbat is over and saying Mourners Kaddish with less than a minyan.

I reach that position as I decided that I want to be an integral part in the lives of the members of the congregation, sharing in their simchas (Joyous life cycle events) and providing consolation, spiritual support and healing at the time of their pain. That is why, I am willing to compromise my personal standards for the high value of being a part in the life of the extended congregational family.

It is not a decision that I took lightly, but one that I reached after a lot of thinking and introspection.

Bottom line, I want to be there for the people that are hoping to count on me and for me to be a part of their lives.

Are you comfortable with reading Torah & Haftorah? With leading services on weekdays, Shabbat & Yom Tov?

Yes to all.

I am totally comfortable.

Inclusion:

TBT is welcoming to the LGBTQ community, including the full range of life-cycle events. Are you comfortable officiating at gay weddings?

Totally comfortable!

What has been your involvement with your current Hebrew School and post Bar/Bat Mitzvah students?

Have you initiated any new programming, learning and/or social events, for these age groups with your current synagogue?

I have always been a part of the extended teaching staff of our Hebrew School program. Coming to their classroom and teaching both formally and informally.

Q&A sessions with Rabbi Alex.

Teaching an intergenerational family Sunday morning minyan for 7th graders and their parents/grandparents.

Teaching Tefilah (prayer) and Torah discussions in afternoon Hebrew School.

I also teach Bar/Bat Mitzvah workshops to the students and their families.

Additionally, I meet and work with the children and their families in writing a D'var Torah for their B'nai Mitzvah celebration.

In the first 15 years of my rabbinic career, I was also the Principal of the Hebrew School, dealing with teacher and curriculum development and school administration.

Regarding post Bar/Bat Mitzvah students, I have led a Hebrew High School consortium of 3 synagogues sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Southeastern Connecticut, during my tenure in Norwich, CT.

I taught, brought speakers, engaged teachers, fellow rabbinic colleagues, dealt with administration and took care of logistics. I also provided venues in a conducive educational/social environment.

I also participated in co-leading our Hebrew High School program in Deerfield, IL Teaching 9th through 12th grade classes.

I organized class trips to Jewish New York for our 10th graders, and Jewish Caribbean (St Thomas and Puerto Rico) for the graduating 12th grade class.

Through my Puerto Rican Jewish contacts, home hospitality was provided, and we also reciprocated by hosting their 7th grade class in our Chicago homes.

I also organized visits by Israeli High School Basketball players to our community, with home hospitality, and American Jewish experiences.

Last, but not least, I have performed yearly visits to our College students at 4 Midwestern Universities (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin) and once recently

to a Washington DC/Maryland area student group. At all occasions I hosted a meal enabling a social gathering and a group discussion on contemporary issues.

General:

What would your current congregants say are your greatest strengths? What do you think they are?

Congregants may say that I am learned, open minded, have a sense of humor, flexible, down to earth, warm, friendly, perceptive, determined, creative.

I believe that I am diverse and eclectic, learned and constantly learning, easy at communicating with people of all ages, problem solver, outreach to all. I really like to be with people.

Without boasting, I would agree with how others see me.

Do you have a strong political or religious position in relation to Israel and Zionism? What are they?

I support Israel through AIPAC, American Jewish Committee, Jewish Federation. Having lived in Israel for about 5 years, Israel is one of my favorite places in the world.

Fundraising efforts have always been an important aspect of our congregation; please describe your view of the Rabbi's role in fundraising efforts.

As you may have seen from my resume, I have been successfully involved in synagogue fundraising.

I believe that my efforts in that area have tremendously helped the congregations I served.

What has been your experience with social action campaigns?

I have been a part of our Social Action committees, supporting activities, organizing Mitzvah days at the congregation and fully engaged in local food/goods/clothes drives for the needy and served meals at local Churches through Catholic Charities and PADS.

I would love to do more and be a part of the team!

It seems that national/international politics and current events are intertwined in our daily lives. How comfortable are you discussing these

topics whether within an adult education setting, a special lecture, and/or your High Holiday sermon? How do you navigate the red/blue divide?

I am an eclectic Jew that has lived in 5 different countries and interacted in 4 different languages. I follow international developments and have invited guest speakers who specialized in those areas. If the synagogue would be amenable, I can share ideas and thoughts on areas of expertise.

I am diplomatic when it comes to the subject of American politics, as it can be a very divisive issue.

Please list the titles of three High Holiday sermons you have delivered and the main theme/message of each and how they were made relevant to current events or times.

Typically, I do not give titles to my sermons, but I can mention the general subject of them.

Recently, I spoke about:

How can we be an inclusive Jewish Community?

The main set of ideas included:

Doing strong outreach to interfaith Jewish families who want real acceptance in our circles. I provided examples from Scripture and how the interfaith enriched the Israelite community.

Doing strong outreach to the LGBTQ and provided clarification that complex Biblical sections dealt with different historical circumstances, that were very different from today's understanding and perceptions.

Creating involvement to those who feel disenfranchised, by providing them with alternatives and options in our synagogues.

In conclusion, the message highlighted the contemporary reality that each of us and our synagogue communities should do everything to provide a warm and welcoming spiritual environment to all people.

How we as people fall down and have to try and stand up again

The main ideas dealt with our failures and shortcomings and how we can all "dust off" and start again, never giving up, going at it again, trying again, doing it right.

It applied on the personal level, family level as well as the in collective/societal level. The teaching I provided was that when we make mistakes, we stand up and try to do it right by trying our best again. That is the teaching of Teshuvah (repentance and return). When a failed situation of the past comes back, we should try again, do it right and change. We should always attempt to fix it because Judaism teaches us that are not stuck in the past and that we can do better next time around, starting at this time of our Days of Awe.

Antisemitism Today (here and abroad)

The main ideas stressed how difficult and painful the previous year had been for the Jewish people in America and around the world.

In our own country, physical attacks in Pittsburgh, Poway and against Brooklyn Haredim. Discrimination against Jewish college students at many universities, attacking their love of Israel and Judaism. Old hatreds and stereotypes resurfacing against Jewish people throughout our country and overseas.

But I also stressed that good things also happened. Following attacks there were shows of support and Solidarity.

I made the argument that we should double down in our love and embrace of our Judaism against antisemitic attacks. If they hate us because we are Jewish, therefore let us all be the best Jews that we can be. We should try doing more mitzvot every year. We should attempt to learn some new piece of Torah every year. We should involve ourselves in a new volunteer Jewish group, bringing Tikkun Olam to our towns and communities. We also ought to try coming to shul more as it reinforces our love and caring for our community and way of life.

The message stressed that we should beware of the bad trends but also appreciate the goodness of others.

I also called on all of us, that if anti-Semites are going to attack us, let them see that their hatred will not deter us, as we are determined to embrace our Judaism with pride.

Based on what you know about TBT, if you were to accept this position, what would be your vision?

I would embrace the Hamish and warm culture of the synagogue, and together with the lay leadership build on the great atmosphere and successes created by Rabbi Katz together with a committed and supportive leadership.

At the beginning, I would attempt to solidify the great existing framework.

Second, I'd try to expand and deepen my conversations and relationships with the entire membership, by having group get together, getting us to know each other and developing a "buy in".

These first steps would be followed by (and I quote),

1. The expanding of programs in the areas outlined in the questionnaire: innovating religious programs (that are accessible to all) to drive better attendance and participation.
2. Reimagining social programs to develop new, dynamic and engaging social programs.
3. Spending time in conversation with Rabbi Katz and Cantor Chesler, so to understand what works and what they suggest that perhaps may need to be tweaked.

4. Constantly stress inclusiveness, understanding cultural changes, while embracing our rich Jewish heritage.

In close cooperation with the membership and leadership of the congregation, propose other ideas, that I believe would appeal to the unaffiliated (I can expand more clearly on this during our zoom interview).

I would like to envision a synagogue that will always be a warm place that embraces everyone seeking a spiritual home, a place of learning and inspiration, a place that embraces Torah and that indeed is a *Kehilah Kedoshah*, a Holy Community, one that is inclusive, welcoming, creative and filled with kindness to all.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Alex Felch