Congregation B'nai Jacob

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Shana Tova Everyone,

               I write to you with the continued happiness and joy I have in my heart serving B’nai Jacob Synagogue. This year will be our 32nd High Holidays with this community and I want to thank you not just for your support but your love and commitment to our congregation and my family.

               We have much to be proud of as a congregation, the only community in West Virginia still maintaining traditional Judaism in an ever-changing world. What has made B’nai Jacob unique is always looking for ways to find the right the balance of upholding the traditions of our long heritage while embracing the modern world.

             Part of that balance is how to be as inclusive as possible without losing what makes us special, re-imagining our heritage for the next generation without rejecting what has gotten us to this point. In other words, how to be faithful to the mission of B’nai Jacob:

                                “Traditional Judaism for a Modern World.”

             In wanting to remain committed to a traditional yet dynamic Judaism, I always want to find ways to balance the authentic with the pluralistic, heritage with accessibility, halacha (Jewish law) with inclusivity. This year, we have authorized our holiday committee to honor women with ark openings for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. We have done this in the past for unique situations but I believe it is time to recognize, within tradition, the women of our congregation that have done extraordinary things and who should feel they are an important part of our synagogue. We consider this to be an appropriate and welcoming addition to our services, within the traditions of the synagogue and traditional halacha.

             For some, this may be jarring and difficult; for others, it may not be enough.

             That has been my challenge for over 30 years, balancing tradition with modernity. It has been the exciting “pushing of the envelope”, learning to leave a comfort zone, constantly looking for ways to create the conditions for both a vibrant and traditional Jewish community, making everyone feel welcome, helping long-time families and newcomers have a chance to join us in seeking the presence of G-d and finding meaning and purpose in Jewish tradition…..in a modern world.

             This High Holiday season, I will be challenging each of you to help me in this sacred task, developing a common sense of communal engagement. I will need all of you as participants, not as eyes on the outside looking at what is happening at B’nai Jacob, but spirited voices on the inside articulating and helping us craft our shared mission and purpose.

               K’tiva V’Chamita Tova, may G-d inscribe us all in the Book of Life.

Rabbi Victor Urecki