



# Academy for Jewish Religion | CA

*Serving as a bridge between the pillars of Judaism*

Spring/Summer 2005 Volume 1 No.1



Our mission is to train men and women to become spiritual leaders who will serve all Jews and Jewish movements, who will be steeped in the teachings and traditions of the sacred texts and, at the same time, will make Torah real and relevant to our lives as Jews today.



## News briefs from . . . .

### The Rabbinical School

Since the Fall 2004 semester, Dr. David Seidenberg, Dr. J.B. Sacks and Rabbi Aaron Katz have joined the Rabbinical School Faculty and students can now choose from three new course offerings.

### The Cantorial School

We're pleased to announce that Hazzan Avshalom Katz of Beth Jacob Congregation in Beverly Hills will be joining the Cantorial School Faculty in the Spring of 2005.

### The Chaplaincy Program

In January 2005, Rabbi Mel Gottlieb met with Cecille Asekoff, the director of the *National Association of Jewish Chaplains* who reviewed the Academy's Chaplaincy courses and internship placements. Mel reports that she was "extremely impressed" with our innovative program.

## How Far We've Come!

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Academy for Jewish Religion, California's (AJR, CA) newsletter! While space is limited, we hope that the brief articles noted here will give you a sense of the excitement that everyone connected to the Academy can't help but feel. From a handful of students in Fall 2000, our student body now numbers approximately 60 individuals. A few of them have been highlighted in this issue and their accomplishments are noteworthy. Our students are blessed to be taught by a faculty of renowned scholars and outstanding congregational clergy from such synagogues as Temple Beth Am, Beth Jacob Congregation, B'nai Horin-Children of Freedom, Congregation Mogen David, Kahal Joseph, N'vay Shalom, Sephardic Temple, Sinai Temple, Stephen S. Wise Temple and Wilshire Boulevard Temple. In 2004, we conducted the first cantorial ordination ever held in the Western United States. Our Rabbinical and Cantorial Schools have expanded course offerings and our Jewish Chaplaincy Program is garnering increased attention in the community. Recognition of the important work being undertaken here has resulted in financial support from such distinguished institutions as the Righteous Persons Foundation, the Milken Family Foundation and the Jewish Community Foundation.

As we continue to move forward, we offer our heartfelt thanks to all of you that have turned this dream into a reality! We couldn't have done it without you!

**Rabbi Stephen Robbins**

*President*

**Rabbi Mordecai Finley**

*Provost*

**Rabbi Stan Levy**

*Chair, Board of Governors*

**Dr. Tamar Frankiel**

*Dean of Students*

**Rabbi Mel Gottlieb**

*Dean, Rabbinical School and Chaplaincy Program*

**Hazzan Eva Robbins**

*Director of Admissions and Recruitment*

**Hazzan Nathan Lam**

*Dean, Cantorial School*

## Alumni Making an Impact

Although our first ordination was just two years ago, Academy alumni are already making an impact. The following is the first in a series of profile of our recent graduates.

### Rabbi Tsipi Gabai, '03

**Current position:** *Rabbi, Head of Jewish Studies and Assistant Director of Tehiya Day School (El Cerrito, CA)*

**Making an Impact:** The winner of the 2004 Grinspoon-Steinhardt Award for Excellence in



Jewish Education; a national honor designed to recognize outstanding Jewish educators. As the Chair of the Award

Committee noted, Rabbi Gabai's "contribution to Jewish youth was found to be exemplary."

### Hazzan Eva Robbins, '04

**Current position:** *Hazzan of Congregation N'vay Shalom (Los Angeles, CA) and Director of Admissions and Recruitment, AJR, CA. Member of the Cantors Assembly.*

**Making an Impact:** Teaching and leading workshops on meditation, mysticism and healing throughout the United States, as well



as bringing music to patients at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. She can be heard on the CD, "Spirit of Passover," produced by

the Cantors Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.



# Rabbinic Student/Doctor Aids War Crimes Tribunal

On January 31st, 2005, a former Bosnian military officer, General Pavle Struger, was found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to 8 years in prison by the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The ruling was based, in part, on the expert testimony of fourth year AJR, CA rabbinic student and noted forensic psychiatrist, Bennett Blum, MD. Last year, the Tribunal supported Bennett's evaluation that despite the General's claims to the contrary, he was, in fact, competent to stand trial. The case of General Strugar is just one of many high profile cases Bennett has evaluated and the Academy takes tremendous pride in his important work.



# Board of Governors Welcomes Three New Members

The Academy's Board of Governors is a visionary group of men and women who play a significant role in helping to achieve our mission and objectives. With that in mind, we're pleased to announce that three new members have joined the Board within the last several months.

**Peter W. Doerken** is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Doerken Properties, Inc., a multi-faceted real estate investment company with expertise in management, development/redevelopment, finance, and leasing. In addition to his professional affiliations, Peter serves on the boards of a number of organizations including The Spiritual Growth Center and The Development Council for the Dalai Lama.

**Dr. Stan Stahl**, a pioneer in the field of information security, is the President of Citadel Information Group, Inc., an information security management consultancy. Stan's civic involvement has included serving on the boards of such organizations as Los Angeles Team Mentoring and Free Arts for Abused Children.

**Neal Castleman** is the President of DCX-CHOL Enterprises, Inc., a military aerospace manufacturer with facilities in the United States and Germany. Neal is involved with a number of organizations including Jews for Judaism and Pups for Peace.

In noting the appointments, Rabbi Stan Levy, the Founding Chair of the Board of Governors, said, "Peter, Stan and Neal each bring extremely impressive credentials both as professionals in their respective fields as well as in their community involvement. Most importantly, they're dedicated to advancing the Academy's mission and we are very fortunate to have them join the Academy family."

## Plans for Ordination 2005 Underway

On Monday afternoon, May 30, 2005, we will be celebrating our third ordination ceremony. The event, which will be held at Stephen S. Wise Temple, draws hundreds of friends, family and Academy supporters, and is a moving tribute to the hard work and tremendous dedication of our graduates. Five rabbinic and two cantorial students are being considered for ordination this May. They are (from the Rabbinical School): Janet Bieber, Lynn Brody, Guy Greene, Bonnie Sharfman Morris, and Monty Turner and (from the Cantorial School): Phillip Baron and Paul Buch. On behalf of the entire Academy family, we wish them every continued success and we know that they will bring us much nachas fulfilling their commitment to serve the Jewish people.

Left to Right: Paul Buch, Janet Bieber, Bonnie Sharfman Morris, Guy Greene, Phillip Baron, Lynn Brody, and Monty Turner



## AJR|CA to move to UCLA Hillel Center

We are honored to announce that the Academy for Jewish Religion, CA has been invited to move our campus to the *Yitzhak Rabin Hillel Center for Jewish Life at UCLA*. We plan to move into our new home in the Summer of 2005. Being located at the UCLA Hillel Center, adjacent to one of our nation's most prestigious universities, is a tremendous honor for our pluralistic, spiritually-based Rabbinical, Cantorial and Chaplaincy Schools.

## Accreditation Process Moves Forward

After an intense evaluation, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) recently notified the administration that AJR, CA has passed the "eligibility" phase of the accreditation process. In announcing their decision, the Accreditation Committee was very complimentary, noting our creativity and professionalism. They also advised us on how best to proceed to the next phase ("candidacy" phase) of the process. As Rabbi Mel Gottlieb said in announcing the results, this is "a noteworthy achievement, since this approbation is only given to institutions that show great promise in terms of their longevity and contribution to 'consumers.'"

## Annual Retreat a Tremendous Success

About 60 people (students, alumni, faculty and board members) attended the Annual Retreat held on February 6 – 8 at Brandeis-Bardin Institute. The theme of the 2005 Retreat was "Building Holy Community." Rabbi Mimi Feigelson, lecturer of Rabbinic Literature at the University of Judaism, and Dr. Estelle Frankel, a practicing psychotherapist and the author of the book *Sacred Therapy*, were the scholars-in-residence. Both speakers articulated a vision of a compassionate community and suggested how the Academy can create those worthwhile standards within our own community.



## Fundraising Fact

The "best bang for the buck" – almost two-thirds of the Academy's total budget of less than \$1 million comes from student tuition! The other third comes from foundation grants and individual donations.

# Second Annual Concert to Honor Rabbi Schochet

On April 3rd, we will be honoring one of our most beloved colleagues and friends, Rabbi Elijah Schochet, at our Second Annual Community Celebration/Cantorial Concert held at Stephen S. Wise Temple (1 pm to 3 pm). At that time, we will announce the establishment of *The Rabbi Elijah Schochet Chair of Talmudic Studies*.

“ While tremendously deserving, Rabbi Schochet has never before permitted any institution to honor him. His agreement to do so in this case, reflects his real love of teaching at and his deep commitment to the Academy. ”

A Professor of Talmud at the Academy, Rabbi Schochet was the spiritual leader of Shomrei Torah Synagogue in West Hills, from 1960 until his retirement in 1999. He did his graduate studies in Psychology at Columbia University and received his rabbinic ordination as well as doctorate in Rabbinic Literature from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Rabbi Schochet is an Adjunct Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the University of Judaism as well as a licensed Marriage and Family Counselor. He was the founder of Kadima Hebrew Academy and is the

author of seven books on various Judaic subjects, including *The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna*, the definitive book on the origins of the Hasidic movement.



While tremendously deserving, Rabbi Schochet has never before permitted any institution to honor him. His agreement to do so in this case, reflects his real love of teaching at and his deep commitment to the Academy. He has become a beloved mentor to his students and has set a standard of Talmudic scholarship and practical application that they strive to meet. In establishing our first academic chair in his honor, our

hope is that Rabbi Schochet's personal and professional standards will become the hallmark of what rabbinic study at the Academy represents.

We urge everyone to attend this moving event! For information, call 310-398-0820.

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