

Moving Is a Mitzvah **Rabbi Michael Lotker**

I am delighted and not surprised that, to my knowledge, everyone of our Temple Ner Ami membership that has seen our new “Temple on Temple Avenue” is excited and positive about our move and about our new facility. As you know or will soon find out, the space is warm, welcoming, large, has a wide variety of rooms, classrooms and outdoor space and is, in my opinion, spiritually uplifting. Nonetheless, several people have voiced a concern about our worshiping in a building with the words “Church of Christ” on the door. They worry about how this fits in with their Jewish sensibilities and identity. This is an important, honest question and deserves a clear answer. Here’s mine.

I am often asked “what is our role as Jews – what is it that God wants of the Jewish people?” The answer contains our mission statement – one that we often forget. The simple answer is *Tikkun Olam*, to repair this broken world. You have all heard me and other say it dozens of times: Judaism is a religion which stresses what we are to do (*mitzvot* – commandments) rather than what we are to believe. Reform Judaism further refines this, focusing especially on the ethical commandments (how we treat one another, how we treat animals and the environment) rather than on the ritual commandments (whether we keep kosher, pray three times daily, wear a *kippah/yarmulke*, etc.). From the Reform Jewish perspective, you are religious, you are a good Jew, if you work hard to make the world a better place. This is true irrespective of your specific theology – whether you are observant, an agnostic or even a Jewish atheist.

The other major mission of the Jews is to bring the world to God by being a good example – a “light to the nations” in the words of the prophets. Note that this does not mean that we are supposed to convert non-Jews to become Jewish, only that we are to teach them about the one, true God. On this task we are doing pretty well. Of the 6.5 billion people in the world, about half worship the God of Abraham, that is something over 2 billion Christians and more than a billion Muslims and, oh yes, something like 0.015 billion Jews. It is clear to me that God would never given the only, absolute truth to only a quarter of one percent of the world and the rest have it wrong! No, I believe that God speaks to the different peoples and cultures of the world in different ways so that each people and faith can execute its part of God’s mission on earth.

The title of my Hebrew Union College rabbinic thesis was: “*Ezer K’negdo*: Toward a Theology of Jewish Christian Partnership.” If I don’t care why you, my fellow Jew, does a mitzvah, how much less should I care why a Christian starts a hospital (the hospitals in our community are named for St. John), staffs a soup kitchen, etc. The last time I visited the Church of Christ there were boxes and boxes of shoes scattered about – shoes collected for the people of Haiti. Do you think a Haitian mother cares about the theology of the person who arranged to put shoes on her children’s feet? She doesn’t care, I don’t care and I’m confident that God doesn’t care either. The important thing, especially from a Jewish perspective, is what we do, not why we do it.

Our move to Temple Avenue opens a wealth of blessings. It will enable us to continue to serve our community with added financial resources in a space that is more conducive to educating our children and fulfilling our spirits. Beyond this, we will be helping our Christian partners in *Tikkun Olam* to achieve their goals. Looking to the future, I see us working together with members of the Church on joint Social Action projects that we can both be proud of.

I'd like to quote the closing paragraph of the Introduction to my book, *A Christian's Guide to Judaism*. In this section, called "Why It is So Important That We Understand Each Other," I am speaking to my Christian readers. "My friends, I believe that this is a window in time when you and I must talk together, study together and pray together. Those of you with children know the special joy felt when we see our children support each other, help each other, and love each other. That our children have different personalities, different beliefs, different ways of living their lives diminishes our pride not one iota. We are all children of the one living God. Our time may be *the* time of the long-awaited family reunion. Consider this your invitation!"

I am excited about our future at this wonderful location and the joy of continuing to serve God there. The work of moving is strenuous and ongoing: the fun begins on May second as we escort our sacred Torah scrolls their new home as a family escorts a bride to her new home – under the Chuppah! Please join us there and then!