

Rabbi Michael E. Danziger

www.mdanziger.com | michaelledanziger@gmail.com
901.619.6630 | he/him/his

RABBINIC EXPERIENCE

Isaac M. Wise Temple/K.K. B'nai Yeshurun *Assistant/Associate Rabbi*

Cincinnati, OH
2016-present

Lead, envision and implement in all aspects of synagogue life at 1,100-family historic congregation with a 225-student religious school as part of 3-rabbi team. Expand and run vibrant 20's-30's network for un-affiliated young professionals to engage with Jewish life. Create a warm and dynamic community through pulpit, music, education, life-cycle, technology, and engagement work. Guide and collaborate with 20 staff members, lay leaders, and community partners to create compelling and welcoming Jewish Life for all ages and stages. Adapt to and anticipate changing needs, evolving demographics and new opportunities for connection with a flexible, energetic spirit, and an enduring commitment to relationship and Jewish values.

Outreach, Connection & Inclusion

- **NextGen@Wise 20s/30s Community** - Identify, welcome, and engage over 200 young adults through creative prayer, social, learning, and justice opportunities. Build an inclusive community for a largely unaffiliated, highly transient cohort to connect with Judaism, the congregation, the city, and each other. Empower young adults to envision and co-create the meaningful Jewish community that enriches their lives and reflects their values, building a foundation for involvement in Jewish life for years to come.
- **Seniors** – Build and sustain meaningful Jewish connections and relationships for homebound and senior living residents through regular visits and communication.
- **College Connect** - Create a sense of home for college-aged members by connecting them with Jewish opportunities where they are. Mentor emerging adults throughout college life and organize fun reunions on campus and during school breaks.
- **Teen Outreach**– Supervise and mentor Youth Directors, partnering to re-launch Temple Youth Group and to spark passion and leadership in young people. Recruit 50+ *madrichim* – teen assistants – annually to enrich our school and develop leaders.
- **175th Anniversary** – Assisted in a year of special events and community celebrations, accompanied by an endowment campaign.
- **Conversion/Exploring Judaism** - Welcome those who are interested in Judaism to explore, learn and experience our community. Guide candidates through the conversion process with a personalized course of study.
- **Brotherhood** – Advise and support the creation of community rooted in service and friendship. Help launch Black-Jewish men's dialogue series to build relationships of friendship and learning.

Worship & Spiritual Leadership

- Engage 20s/30s community in monthly warm, innovative Shabbat social and worship experience. Lead musical ensemble, translating tradition through contemporary song.
- Inspire thought, encourage action, and connect Jewish tradition and wisdom to everyday life through engaging sermons and Torah study.
 - ❖ *Winner, Best Sermon (American Israelite, Best of Jewish Cincinnati)*

- Initiate, design and lead alternative all-music Shabbat service, creating new opportunities for transcendence, connection, and *ruach* – spirit.
- Share in research, design and implement the congregation’s rapid technological innovation in worship during COVID-19.
- Create visual *t’fillah* to enhance prayer experiences in person and virtually; design safe, memorable outdoor holiday, life cycle, and Shabbat experiences.
- Spearhead congregational holiday observances, constructing celebrations full of joy, and meaning, including creating original, multi-media *Purimshpiels*.

Lifelong Learning

- Develop curricula and serve as lead teacher for middle and high school students and Confirmation Program. Create relevant classes for teens such as Jewish Comedy, The Search for Happiness, Ethical Dilemmas, and a Jewish Take on Teen Mental Health.
- Create and teach regular classes and educational series for adults, including Great Jewish Debates, Ritual Reimagined, Jewish Wonder Women, and Tremendous Texts of Judaism
- Partner in reimagining and design of new religious school concept and curriculum for the future along with staff, parents, and educational consultants

Community Leadership

- Collaborate with interfaith partners to launch an interfaith storytelling retreat for teens.
- Represent Jewish community as educational mentor of Kids4Peace interfaith summer day camp, and help to guide the organization as local board member
- Partner with broad community coalitions and empower lay leaders to organize our congregational community in support of campaigns for criminal justice reform, voting access, and racial equity. Participate in state-based community organizing with the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.
- Lead Rockwern Academy (local day school) weekly Shabbat experience as song leader and rabbi for Early Learning Center and K-7 students

Temple Sholom
Rabbinic Intern

Cincinnati, OH
Summer 2013, 2014-2016

- Shared in pulpit, pastoral, adult education, and life cycle responsibilities. Served as acting Rabbi and Spiritual Leader during the rabbi’s Parental Leave.
- Co-designed and lead “KIDdish” monthly Shabbat experience for young families.
- Assisted in creation of award-winning videos to communicate congregational vision and engage unaffiliated community members

HUC-JIR National Office of Recruitment & Admissions
Rabbinic Intern – High School and College Initiatives

Cincinnati, OH
2013-2016

- Designed and facilitated leadership retreats for teens and college students, managing publicity, registration, logistics, program and worship.
- Represented HUC-JIR and assisted with relationship building and recruiting efforts at national events and through network development.

Cincinnati Hillel <i>Cincinnati, OH</i>	High Holy Days Student Rabbi
Seminole Hebrew Congregation <i>Seminole, OK</i>	High Holy Days Student Rabbi
Temple Israel <i>Paducah, KY</i>	Student Rabbi
Synagogue of the Hills <i>Rapid City, SD</i>	Student Rabbi
URJ Jacobs Camp <i>Utica, MS</i>	Summer Education & Worship Director

PREVIOUS JEWISH PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Temple Israel	Memphis, TN
<i>Youth and Family Life Director</i>	2000-2005

At Temple Israel, I grew to understand the many, varied pieces of temple operations, program, leadership, personalities, and values, and the complex, important ways they are connected.

- Planned, publicized, and implemented social, spiritual, educational and social action programming for 800 K-12 youth as Senior Staff Member of 1,600 family congregation.
- Coordinated youth groups, youth advisors, trips and experiential education.
- Launched peer-mentorship program, re-engaging and training outstanding post-Confirmation students as leaders
- Assisted with Capital Campaign, including direct solicitation and visioning process for facilities upgrades.
- Created and lead monthly family *Shabbat* service and High Holy Days teen services.
 - ❖ *Named “Honorary Life Advisor” by NFTY Southern region.*

URJ Henry S. Jacobs Camp	Utica, MS
<i>Assistant Camp Director</i>	1997-2000

As assistant director, I came to appreciate the relationship of budget and management to carrying out our mission. I was management behind the scenes, and “Ziggy” with the campers.

- Recruited, hired, trained and supervised 80+ summer staff members.
- Recruited/retained 400+ summer campers (>25% of region’s eligible kids).
- Oversaw all programming and scheduling of campers and staff.
- Supervised and coordinated management team of unit leaders and specialty staff.
- Assisted in Capital Campaign events and coordination of capital improvements.
- Marketed Camp for off-season rental and directed hospitality and facility use for groups.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Stand-up Comic	2005-present
-----------------------	--------------

- Entertain at comedy clubs, colleges congregations, conventions and organizations.
- Original material published in Penguin Press’s The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Jokes .
- Teach comedy and Jewish humor classes and workshops for schools and organizations
 - ❖ *Winner, Funniest Person in Memphis*
 - ❖ *Winner, Funniest Jew in the Deep South (seriously)*

Malkin Management & Investment Co., Inc.
Affiliate Broker/Director of Marketing

Memphis, TN
2006-2011

- Marketed commercial and residential properties for sale or lease, utilizing print and digital advertising and targeted campaigns.
- Managed leasing process, including negotiating and writing lease agreements, for office, retail, and residential properties.
- Managed 100,000+ sq. ft. office tower in preparation for and during its sale

EDUCATION

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Jerusalem/Cincinnati

Rabbinical Ordination

2016

Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters (M.A.H.L.)

2015

Rabbinical Thesis: "Israel's Foreign Aid Programs: Light Unto the Nations?"

Thesis Advisor: Rabbi Dr. Jan D. Katzew

Awards & Experiences

- Rabbi Frederick C. Schwartz Prize for Furthering Objectives of URJ Camps & NFTY
- AIPAC Lefell Israel Fellowship
- Rabbi Jason Huebsch Memorial Prize for Excellence in Community Service

The University of Texas at Austin

Austin, TX

Bachelor of Science in Speech Communication, minor in Business

May, 1997

Emphasis in Organizational Communication and Leadership

CERTIFICATION & TRAINING

- Trained Educator in small-group exploration of Jewish values, The Mussar Institute
- Certified Premarital Counselor, Prepare & Enrich
- Clinical Pastoral Education Chaplaincy, Good Samaritan Hospital

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Jewish Federation of Cincinnati	Board Member	2019-present
Kids 4 Peace/Seeds of Peace Cincinnati	Board Member	2020-present
Camp Dream Street, Mississippi	Advisory Board	2002-2015
Memphis Jewish Federation	Board Member	2009-2011
Hillel of Memphis Advisory Board	Chair	2009-2011
Leadership Academy/New Memphis Inst.	Leadership Fellow	2007-2008

References available upon request.

Rabbi Michael Danziger Personal Statement

The goals of my work as rabbi and as stand-up comic are not always exactly the same. To the comedian in me, there is no sweeter word than “funniest.” That’s why the titles of “Funniest Jew in the Deep South” (Yes, there was an actual contest!) and “Funniest Person in Memphis” are high on my list of comedy achievements. There is some rabbi-comedian overlap, though. In comedy as in my rabbinate, the crucial raw material is the people in front of me, not the text or the jokes. Yes, I get laughs, but that is thanks, in part, to things I am proudest to bring to my rabbinate, and key qualities our Jewish future demands of its leaders.

On stage, laughing together is possible and fun because I forge a connection with the audience and commit to a great experience for everyone. In comedy or Jewish life, I know we need to be on the same page before we can journey forward together. The right timing lets us relish the high points together, and those are always about things that touch us and are relevant to real life. Most of all, the goal is not simply to leave people laughing, but to leave them with greater joy. The biggest successes come from bringing humanity, warmth, and that sense of joy to the stage. Those are things I treasure deeply about Judaism, and which I seek to reflect in my rabbinate and in our Jewish community.

The Judaism I teach and model is human. So much of its transformational power - in our lives and in the world - comes from relationships and community. Keeping teens involved in post-*b'nei mitzvah* learning, young adults connected to synagogue life and each other, and Jews of all ages interested in engaging in and supporting Jewish life – these efforts have shown me the impact of personal engagement and I am committed to maximizing it as a rabbi.

Judaism’s humanity extends beyond the confines of our community, too. Elie Wiesel, of blessed memory, wrote, “The mission of Judaism has never been to make the world more Jewish, but to make it more human.” We are torch bearers in an ever-relevant campaign to increase the decency of this world - to be mensches, to raise mensches, and to build a kinder and more just reality together. Inspiring teaching, opportunities for connection, strategic community partnerships, and my own passionate example can help us move our world toward greater humanity.

The Judaism I teach and model is warm. I live by the words of Rabbi Shammai, who taught us in *Pirkei Avot* to “greet every person with a cheerful face.” The power of a warm welcome has

opened worlds of possibility in my own Jewish life and inspired my understanding of what Jewish hospitality can be. A hallmark of my work is a commitment to convey to each person, “I’m so glad you’re here!” I have seen what it does; the difference even a simple affirmation of each person’s importance can make.

Warmth is also a reflection of communal excellence. The better we are at enriching lives with purpose and meaning, the more confidently we can go about embracing the unengaged. Our warm welcome is inspired by and expresses a beautiful confidence in what we do well together.

The Judaism I teach and model is joyous! We rejoice in life and its many possibilities, and celebrate holidays, festivals, and life’s milestones. Even when we help each other to face inevitable pain and loss, there is a deeply felt, soul joy that comes from being able to share them.

Our joy represents an important choice and animating value. We are optimistic, despite living in a world that badly needs repair. We forge a community of connection and commitment when we share joy amidst the potential for despair and share purpose in building together.

The Judaism I teach and model does what needs doing. In sermons, lessons, or conversations about issues that need our attention, I often find myself asking “If we don’t do it, why should anyone else? And if no one does, what will happen?” The call to bring *tzedek* – justice, *chesed* – mercy, and *shalom* into the world together is one accessible, powerful answer to those who may wonder, “Why bother with a congregation?” or, more simply, “Why be Jewish?”

COVID-19 has put this quality to the test, requiring us all to pivot time and again, adapt programming, master new technologies, and relate in new ways. It has been a helpful, if unwelcome and scary, chance to glimpse the changes we can make in the ways our communities work. We discovered that things previously unimagined can quickly become standard. We found ways to involve more people in worship and learning, and to give more hugs than ever, without being in the same room! We learned, in making needed shifts, that we are not stuck; that our traditions can be honored in many ways. I pray we will remember those lessons and abilities together as we face new realities in the months, years, and generations to come.

Shifting demographics, an evolving culture of faith, political division in our communities, new models for financial sustainability, anti-Semitic incidents, varying needs of families, and more will challenge us to be nimble, creative, thoughtful, and bold. Our community has learned,

anew - as have I - that we can meet that challenge and do what needs doing to grow stronger and more vibrant, to be ever relevant, and to enrich our lives and world.

In comedy, in COVID, in the congregation, how we navigate transitions can build foundations for wonderful successes to come. Our sacred task will be to hold these values dear as we work together – and pray, learn, and play together – with integrity, energy, and thoughtfulness. When we do, we know we can honor the past that brought us to this moment and be prepared to journey together to many wonderful tomorrows of humanity, warmth, and joy!