

Biennial 2015
Reflections from Laurie Frolich

- I. Three Aspects of the Biennial that I would like to focus on:
1. **Inspiration:** Coming to this as a first Biennial I was truly inspired by the quality of the speakers, the venues and how 5,000 Reform Jews from all across North America came together to worship, share ideas, renew their spirits and gain insights from one another.
 2. **Education:** Above all else it was a learning experience for so many of us as we attended breakout sessions in four distinct tracks: Strengthening Congregations, Audacious Hospitality, Tikkun Olam and Transforming Texts. Each session in the program was identified by icons as pertaining to one of these four areas which made it easy to identify which sessions would be most relevant to your particular areas of interest and make a more cohesive program. I selected Strengthening Congregations which appealed to me in my forthcoming role. Others in our contingent selected other tracks. For our December Board meeting I will solicit each participant's key take away and share them with you either as a report or an agenda item.
 3. **Transformation:** The speakers for this Biennial provided a truly transformative experience where I could clearly see that CSR is part of a much larger organization with shared goals, expectations, and outcomes. Everywhere you looked people were singing, praying, talking, crying, learning and sharing. It was both inspirational and in some ways overwhelming as well in the sheer power of so many dedicated Jewish clergy and lay leaders coming together in a commonality of experience.
- II. And now for some **highlights of the Biennial** – in no particular order other than what struck me as exceptional:
- Thursday Evening Plenary: Featuring an address by Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the URJ, which included a powerful message about Tikkun Olam, social justice and our obligations to repair the world through social action.
 - Seeing the dynamic and engaging 18 year old President of NFTY, Jeremy Cronig, take the stage and demonstrate with challenge and candor that the younger generation is out there and they want to be engaged, motivated, and brought into the congregational tent and we have a serious obligation to reach out to them and do so.
 - The noteworthy passage of the URJ Resolution providing full and equal access to transgender members of our community and full participation in all

aspects of Reform Judaism. Carried by most major news outlets and organizations as a watershed moment.

- Attending a Friday morning plenary with moderator Jodi Kantor of the *New York Times* where Ari Shavit, Author of *Our Promised Land*, Stav Shaffir, a young and charismatic member of the Knesset, and Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President Emeritus of URJ spoke candidly and without rancor about the current situation in Israel, the need for a two-state solution, and the many and varied roads to attaining last peace in the Middle East. This was an intellectual high point.
- Last, but not least, a warm and heartening address by Vice-President Joe Biden, who rocked the house with his statement that the United States will always stand with Israel, always have her back, and always be the guarantor of her safety. He shared with us that the progressive agenda of the Jewish people was in the forefront of social reform and it was the Jewish leaders in politics and government that shaped his career, supported and educated him. It was a wonderful send-off to a long supporter of the Reform movement.

III. And of course just having some shared time with our fellow attendees over dinner, at Shabbat services, and in the informal spaces between meetings allowed us to connect, share, learn from one another and come back with renewed appreciation and respect.

I would certainly encourage and recommend it to any congregant or Board member who would like to experience a Biennial first hand. Next one is in 2017 in Boston!

See you there.