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NEWS: Rabbi Nevins named JTS dean

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Rabbi Daniel Nevins

Rabbi Daniel Nevins sees his new job as dean of the rabbinical school at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York as "both an honor and a challenge."

The rabbi has served Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills for 13 years. He will begin his new post on July 1, moving to New York with his wife, Lynn, and their three children. The move also will take him nearer to his family in New Jersey.

"As dean, I will recruit and direct hundreds of new rabbis as they begin their journey of serving God and the Jewish people," wrote Rabbi Nevins, 40, in a Jan. 29 letter to congregants of the 1,050-family synagogue. "Without doubt, it is the great reputation of Adat Shalom that inspired the JTS search committee to ask me to serve as dean of our movement's oldest and largest rabbinical school."

Of becoming the dean of the school from which he received rabbinic ordination in 1994, he said, "I am honored and excited by the opportunity to serve as Pearl Resnick dean," Rabbi Nevins said. "I have had an extraordinary experience as rabbi of Adat Shalom Synagogue. I have experimented in the ultimate laboratory of Jewish life, learning what works through the prism of countless pastoral, intellectual and spiritual interactions with my congregation. I will miss my community, but I will take what I have learned from them to benefit the next generation of rabbis."

Adat Shalom leadership is already working on choosing a successor for Rabbi Nevins.

The synagogue also is served by Rabbis Herbert Yoskowitz and Rachel Lawson Shere. A cantorial search has been under way since last summer's departure of Cantor Yevsey Guttman.

Background Of A Rabbi

Rabbi Nevins, who came to Adat Shalom in 1994 as assistant rabbi, currently serves the congregation as senior rabbi. He received a master of arts in Hebrew Letters from JTS in 1991, and a bachelor of arts, magna cum laude, from Harvard College in 1989, where he also received a master's in history. A native of New Jersey, Rabbi Nevins studied at Yeshivat HaMivtar in Jerusalem and was the recipient of the prestigious Wexner Foundation Graduate Fellowship.

"Rabbi Nevins brings to his new tasks the wealth of experience, wisdom and compassion gained during his 13 years as a congregational rabbi in a thriving community," said Arnold M. Eisen, JTS chancellor-elect. "He also impressed the search committee and me with his energy, his ideas and his passionate commitment to Torah, the Jewish people and Conservative Judaism."

"Danny's deep appreciation for our movement's standards, its principles and its pluralistic nature will serve us well at this time of challenge and transition for the movement. His years of work on the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) Law Committee are a testament to his vision, his leadership and his scholarship. I am excited at the prospect of working with Rabbi Nevins as I assume the leadership of JTS, certain that he will meet our challenges with confidence and seize hold with both hands the many opportunities before us."

Rabbi Nevins serves on the RA's International Executive Council and is a member of its Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS). His halachic writings include several responsa approved by the CJLS as well as co-authorship of "Homosexuality, Human Dignity and Halakhah," a responsum arguing for the normalization of the status of gay and lesbian Jews approved by the CJLS last December. His essays have been published by various Jewish publications.

Locally, Rabbi Nevins is past president of the Michigan region of the RA and serves on the board of the Frankel Jewish Academy of Metropolitan Detroit in West Bloomfield. He is past president of the Farmington Area Interfaith Association and the Michigan Board of Rabbis, and a member of the board of the Detroit chapter of the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion.

In May 2005, Rabbi Nevins led a group of Protestant and Catholic leaders on a unique trip that included Pope Benedict XVI's first public audience, Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) at Titus' Arch in Rome, and a week in Israel visiting Jewish and Christian holy places.

'I Will Miss Him'

Communal reaction to Rabbi Nevins' new post is bittersweet.

"A perfect shiddach (match)," said Rabbi Paul Yedwab of the Reform Temple Israel in West Bloomfield. "I know that I will miss him. Danny is intellectual but not detached. He is warm and will provide a caring presence for the students, while at the same time having the academic integrity that an institution such as JTS requires. He will make a wonderful role model for future generations of rabbis. It is a great move for JTS and for Danny, but it is a sad loss for our community."

That sentiment was echoed by Adat Shalom members, community leaders and other colleagues.

"He is my rabbi, and I think that we'll all miss him terribly," said Robert Aronson, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. "On the other hand, I'm very happy for him and for the seminary, for which I serve on the board, because I think Danny is just a great hire. He will bring tremendous vitality and creativity to a much-needed part of the seminary - the rabbinic school. After all, the rabbis of the seminary will be the ones really transforming the movement in the years ahead - and that's what the movement needs.

"It's a credit to the Detroit Jewish community when we have somebody who goes on to major national office," Aronson said. "It's a reflection of how great this community is in terms of our professional and spiritual leaders."

Rabbi Jason Miller, who grew up at Adat Shalom and now serves Congregation Agudas Achim in Columbus, Ohio, said, "Danny is a rabbi's rabbi and always seems to just 'get it.' When I was in rabbinical school at JTS, my classmates would ask me to call Danny when they had questions.

"He is an academic and a spiritual guide. He is progressive and yet always guarding the tradition. This is a wonderful choice for JTS and for our movement. Together with Chancellor Arnie Eisen, Dean Danny Nevins will help get us to where we need to be."

Joshua Wohl, an Adat Shalom member and current JTS rabbinical student studying in Israel, said, "I, along with many of my classmates in Israel, are thrilled that my rabbi and mentor has been chosen as the new dean.

"The rabbinical school community at JTS is no different than any other Jewish community around the country. We want a leader who inspires us with words of Torah. We want a leader who works with us to create a meaningful community. We want a leader who is a mentsh of the highest order. Rabbi Nevins embodies these characteristics, along with many others. Rabbi Nevins was a driving force in transforming Adat Shalom into one of the most vibrant and powerful Conservative synagogues in the entire country. I have no doubt that he will have the same impact upon the JTS Rabbinical School."

Rabbi Nevins succeeds Rabbi William Lebeau, who twice served as dean of the rabbinic school.

In a letter to his congregation, Adat Shalom President David Schostak wrote: "We are very sorry to see him go, but we take pride in the fact that he has excelled to the point that he has been asked to be dean of the rabbinical school, one of the highest and most important positions in our movement."

In his congregational letter, Rabbi Nevins wrote: "As I reflect upon these years, I am filled with gratitude to God for allowing me to work with such an extraordinary community. These years have been ones of deep satisfaction. I feel truly blessed and cannot imagine being happier as a congregational rabbi."

Praising his rabbinic colleagues, professional staff and lay leadership, he said, "I am confident that our congregation will continue to flourish."

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