

As we all know when you get 2 rabbis together you get 3 options (at least!). So imagine what happens when you get 30-40 rabbis together as happened this last month with the annual gathering of the South Western Association of Reform Rabbis!

As you can imagine we had lots of opinions, and were eager to share them! But more importantly we had lots of stories and ideas and experiences to share with each other as well. We shared stories of our congregations and ideas that are being generated in our communities. And we shared experiences from our congregations so that we could learn from our similar situations and understand the many different expressions of Jewish congregational life around our region. It was wonderful to see how diverse and vibrant our region is. We have congregations that are very Reform, some that are much more traditional and many like ours that span the range of Reform and more traditional Conservative practice and belief. The diversity makes us a great and dynamic region with lots to learn from each other.

We also got to connect with the larger Reform Movement through representatives of the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbi), The URJ (Union for Reform Judaism) and HUC-JIR (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the rabbinical school for the North American Reform Movement).

All these connections confirm that there is a lot going on Jewishly in TX and around the country and much creativity to tap into for us as a congregation in South TX. In particular I was impressed by The College Commons, a new multimedia way to connect congregations around the country with the Hebrew Union College and the wonderful Jewish scholars who teach the rabbis. Their great minds have been an untapped resource for most congregations outside New York, LA and Cincinnati where the college has campuses. Now they are creating educational programs and podcasts to share that wealth of knowledge with the rest of us! I am excited to see what comes out of this and to see how we can enjoy these educational resources in our community. But most importantly this conference reminds me we are connected to a larger Jewish community in TX and nationally and that community is strong and vibrant and ready to do great things for our region and the Jewish world in general.

Rabbi Ilan Emanuel