

Ordination 2024

Good morning and welcome. Welcome to our students, faculty, staff, and members of our boards of Advisors and Governors. Welcome to our Reform movement partners. A particularly warm welcome to all the family and friends of today's ordinees here to witness this ritual of profound transformation. Welcome to all of you joining by livestream. Thank you to Rabbi Josh Davidson and the staff of Temple Emanu-El for hosting us with characteristic grace and collaboration. And most of all—welcome this morning to the 21 of you sitting in the front rows, our soon to be newest clergy colleagues and leaders of our people.

We are surely in need of your leadership. These are challenging times. The landscape in which you will serve, in our city, in our country, in Israel and throughout the world is shifting and tilting and there is much cause for anxiety as we confront an uncertain future. An already rapidly changing Jewish reality has become an embattled one since October 7th. We agonize for our Israeli family, friends, and colleagues and over this devastating war. We yearn for better times that we know are not coming soon. We feel overwhelmed, perhaps alongside an urge to do anything to make things better. We may be steeled for a fight or paralyzed with fear.

But our immediate reactions are not our only option. Rabbi Marc Margolius reminds us that Viktor Frankel writes that “Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Dear new clergy colleagues—in these turbulent times, your leadership will take root in your awareness of that freedom. We just finished Passover and the reenactment of freedom. The Meor Eynaim teaches that what was enslaved in Egypt and liberated was Da'at: awareness. You can sustain yourselves and guide others to a life of hope by holding tight to the awareness that there is so much more available than just this crippling, clenched, narrow fear.

When you pause between anxious impulse and thoughtful response, what might you find to guide you? You will find that which you have immersed yourselves in for these five or six years, and in many ways, for your whole lives.:

Torah. Talmud. Middot. Music. Practice. The covenant that binds and obligates us. The prophetic call to justice. The liturgy that articulates our cry. And love. Real love of one another. Love of our neighbors as ourselves. Love of our people and all people. And love of God, who gives us this breath, this pause between provocation and response, and in it the awareness of God's love of all of us in every moment.

Beautiful students—now our colleagues and our teachers, you may well be apprehensive about assuming leadership in times such as these. But you have cultivated the deep habits of study, teaching, leading, and living in God's presence. You have everything you need.

And now we say to you, this is a time of rejoicing. Mazal tov.