

Greetings from the Rabbis of Shir Hadash

Rabbi Michael B. Eisenstat and Nancy

Dear Friends at Shir Hadash,

Nancy and I are very happy to wish you "mazel tov" on this special Congregational Anniversary. Our memories of the time we spent with all of you are fresh and alive and we think of you as dear friends. The challenges we faced as you strove to create a warm, loving, welcoming face of Liberal Judaism in an environment not always nurturing has been nothing short of heroic!

I truly believe that your beautiful children have been given a very precious gift in what you have provided for them. And although you sometimes wondered whether it was all worth it, when you stop and reflect, I think that you will also realize that you have done something wonderful for yourselves, as well.

We tell the story of the Roman soldier who scoffed at the man who was planting a fig tree; "you will never live to eat the fruit," he mocked. The old man responded: "no, but my children will." Whether you realize it, or not, your children are already eating the fruit; as you watch them eat... as you provide the spiritual food, teaching them, and living Judaism with them, you are also sustaining your own Jewish souls.

While there were seven children in the congregation when we were there, there was a whole congregation who were also their parents. Congregation Shir Chadash was and is a family. You share each other's joys and sorrows. You share each other's fears and you face your mutual challenges together. That is why you are a "shir chadash, a new song." You sing a new song with the old notes of our tradition, and it is a song for the Jewish future.

May you go "meichayal el chayal," from strength to strength" and from height to heights not yet even imagined in the years to come.

Nancy and I are grateful for the time we spent with you building and climbing! We send our love and our best wishes for the future.

Rabbi Fred N. Reiner and Sherry

Mazel tov, congratulazioni, e tanti auguri on this milestone of ten years! Sherry and I are delighted to send our warmest wishes to you from Washington. We have many great memories of our time with you.

I remember the warmth of your welcome, and the dedication of a loyal corps of leaders and volunteers. Over the months that we were together, I recall the highlights of our congregational forum, addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the community and the need to bring more members into the leadership. As far as I can tell, you were successful in following up and broadening the base of the congregation. You have

addressed the many diverse needs and interests of the Progressive Jewish community in and around Firenze, which are as diverse as I have ever seen.

Together we worked on some social action projects: the dedication of the memorial to the Holocaust and the partisans; helping with the Christmas meal at our host church. Together we studied some interesting texts as part of our worship and on Sunday mornings. We enriched our worship with the presence of two visiting American cantors one Shabbat. We provided a strong beginning to Jewish education to the children in the congregation. And we survived the historic snowstorm of December 2010.

Over the months Sherry and I were with you I saw how well you could pull together to create a very special congregation. And I saw how warmly you welcomed us, and so many visitors to Firenze.

May you continue to grow from strength to strengthen and support one another as you build a vibrant Progressive Jewish community.

Rabbi Bob Gan and Sheila

To our dear friends at Shir Hadash,

Mazel Tov on your tenth anniversary. We have only the fondest memories of being part of your lives and we think of you often with great affection. Shir Hadash is a new song and a beautiful melody because so many of you have made it blossom. It is because of your spirit, your commitment, your dedication and hard work that you are now celebrating this wonderful moment. Though we cannot be with you, you are in our hearts. Chazak V'amatz, be strong and of good courage and enjoy your great achievement.

With much love,

Rabbi Andrea Zanardo

"Shiru l'Adonay Shir Hadash, ki niflaot assa" - Sing to the Eternal a new song, because God has done miraculous things. (Ps. 98:1)

Dear friends of Shir Hadash,

This passage comes to mind every time I think of our community. To have founded and sustained a progressive congregation in Florence for 10 years is truly a miracle. And this community, this congregation, is not only 10 years old; it is looking forward to the future with an enviable surety. A miracle that is standing on its own two feet, and more, is walking steadily, notwithstanding its often-unfavorable environment.

We have successfully been able to bring together different Jews (and this is already a miracle!) from different backgrounds and cultures: Italy, the United States, Israel,

England, Sephardis, Ashkenazis, Italians... We can point to Shir Hadash as an example of how pluralism and mutual enrichment are the pathway for the future of Judaism in Italy.

Hazak hazak veithasek, and of course, yeshar koach,

Rabbi Robert A. Rothman

It is vital for your community to have a Liberal congregation in its midst. For Reform Judaism enhances our shared tradition exalting flexibility, innovation, pragmatism and contemporary infusion, all of which Shir Hadash represents and exemplifies. Unquestionably, as Goethe taught, "it is good to know but even better to do". Consistent with the egalitarian nature of our Reform practice, in Shir Hadash men and women pray, study and socialize as one congregation, thus transmitting viably the valid teaching and spirituality of our precious heritage. This I found to be a vibrant quality of the "new song" which is Shir Hadash, that I was privileged to share during the all too brief year I was with you, the echo of which I still happily retain. Keep that refrain intact! Sing God's songs in the land in which you reside! Continue to implant loyalty to our heritage among your receptive progeny! Keep them aware of the significance and meaning of our commitment and legacy, its beauty and positive impact by your example of support for a living and enduring people which harmoniously chants "Am Yisrael Chai", "the people Israel lives!"

May God bless your congregation in the year and years ahead and may you grow and glow in the light of Judaism's blessed luminosity.

Rabbi Joel Oseran

To My Dear Friends at Shir Hadash Congregation in Florence,

On behalf of the volunteer and professional leadership of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, it is my sincere pleasure to send to you these words of greeting on the occasion of your 10th anniversary. Over the many years of my association with Shir Hadash and your dedicated leadership I have come to appreciate the important role the congregation plays in the Jewish life of so many families in Florence.

Shir Hadash is for so many members of the congregation a surrogate family, which provides the warmth, caring, and love which a family is all about. Shir Hadash not only binds its members together as a family does, but it also represents a Jewish home in which to celebrate our ancient tradition and infuse it with ever new meaning.

In Jewish tradition the number "10" has great significance. We remember the 10 Commandments, the 10 Lost Tribes, the 10 plagues in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the 10 Sephirot in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, and of course, the 10 days of repentance between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

But there is another reference to the number 10 in our tradition that seems most

appropriate for this special occasion. For Shir Hadash to have come into existence in the very beginning 10 years ago it needed the minyan, the group, the core of 10 dedicated and committed people who constitute the quorum, the community. As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of Shir Hadash we truly celebrate the people who make up this remarkable community. Without the group, without the community, there is no congregation.

May Shir Hadash continue to serve the Jewish community of Florence with renewed vigor and purpose as you begin your second decade as a Progressive Jewish community. We at the World Union are proud of your accomplishments and wish you much success in the years ahead.

With a full heart of joy and in friendship,

Rabbi Harvey and Meryl Tattelbaum

Dear all our wonderful and UNFORGETTABLE FRIENDS at Shir Hadash,

We send truly deep and heartfelt good wishes on your 10th anniversary. We had such a profoundly good and meaningful time with you that that experience has never left our hearts and minds. We conducted services with you, named your babies, enjoyed the most beautiful conversion interlude with you, officiated at the wondrously amazing and moving Rachi Bat Mitzvah with you, loads of adult education conferences, explored the artistic wonders of Florence with Sam, had great fun at the Havdalah children's services, had great dinners in your homes, all of which is simply a deep part of our memories and on-going lives. We truly exulted in the informal and warm atmosphere of the Protestant center where we continually met.

May Shir Hadash be blessed with many decades more of meaningful and warm spiritual and social times. The music and camaraderie you made and shared with us will always reside in the in the deepest part of our hearts!!

With special love,

Rabbi Mark Strauss Cohn

Being a Diaspora Jewish community is never easy – but I find it admirable and remarkable that members of Shir Hadash have created and developed something special and unique in the heart of Tuscany for progressive-minded, liberal Jews. I am grateful that such a place exists as an option for both Jews who live locally as well as travelers seeking a Jewish home away from home while exploring Italy. I wish you a hearty mazal tov on ten years – on to 120!

Rabbi Bernard H. Mehlman

My memory of the Florence Progressive Community centers on two words, energy and dynamism. The enthusiastic leadership caught me off guard. I soon learned that this was a serious group trying to find a Liberal Jewish path in a wilderness of traditional Jewish form and practice. Three aspects of your communal life come into sharp focus as I think back to the two autumns I spent among you.

First, is the spirit of the service each Shabbat eve. There was an immediate sense of community as people began to gather bearing some food element for the Shabbat Oneg. The volunteers schlepping out the ark, arranging the reader's table, setting tapers in candlesticks, pouring wine into the Qiddisah beaker, and distributing prayerbooks was an immediate indication of the transformative power of a community dedicated to Jewish continuity. The eclectic service, traditional and progressive, Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Italianate reminded me of the multilayered nature of our tradition. Hearing NFTY tunes blend with Sephardic melodies assured me that this was a place struggling to make its own Jewish statement while asserting its identity.

Second, I recall the dedicated seekers who came to study about Judaism on cold, near-winter Sunday mornings. The warmth of the discussion and the steaming cups brimming with tea enabled us to persevere despite the bone chilling cold. There was a range of interest: The Jewish Past, the Jewish Present and the unspoken question: What does the future hold for us here? There was always lively discussion laced with more questions than we ever had time to answer. I remember Simone, patiently waiting for me to answer the last query before he hurried me to his car, stopping at a small café so I could buy a sandwich for my train ride back to Milano, and delivering me to the train station just in time for my train.

Third, I remember the sweet Havdalah Hour gatherings at the Waldesian Church center where the little ones drew pictures and colored biblical heroes and heroines. The time of Havdalah brought a hush. The spices, four branched candle, and Kiddish cup were mysterious and the eyes of the children sparkled as we sang the blessings, smelled the aroma of cinnamon stick and cloves. Shabbat lingered, as do my memories of sweet people engaging in the mitzvah of educating another generation about the beauty of our vigorous Liberal Jewish tradition.

I salute you on this notable 10th year celebration. May you continue in full strength. I wish I could be with you and maybe we'll be able to celebrate your Bar/Bat Mitzvah year together.

Warmly,