

Rabbi Samuel Stern

1008 SW Dartmoor Lane 

Topeka, KS 66604

210-587-9331 

RabbiStern21@gmail.com 

www.linkedin.com/in/samuelstern 

www.rabbistern.net 

Education

2022-2023

Professional Certificate in Supervision / Central Conference of American Rabbis

MAY 2021/MAY 2019

Rabbinic Ordination and M.A.H.L. / HUC-JIR, Los Angeles

MAY 2012

M.A. Jewish Communal Service / Baltimore Hebrew Institute at Towson University, Baltimore, MD

MAY 2010

B.S. History/Jewish Studies / Towson University, Towson, MD

Rabbinic Experience

JUNE 2021 – PRESENT

Rabbi / Temple Beth Sholom, Topeka, KS

I am the solo rabbi in at Temple Beth Sholom, a community that serves Topeka and northeastern Kansas. I supervise three staff members and a volunteer religious school director. Because we have very little staff support, I get lay leaders engaged in all areas of planning in synagogue life. I'm an active presence in the community, often appearing in print and television in support of our synagogue events and the local Jewish community. I am a state co-chair for the Kansas Holocaust Commission, appointed by Governor Laura Kelly in 2021, and I lead a group to plan a commemoration on Yom HaShoah for hundreds of people, including schoolchildren and lawmakers. I have helped grow the synagogue and its influence across northeastern Kansas, reinvigorating the Topeka-Manhattan Jewish Federation and keeping us connected to communities in Lawrence and Kansas City. Teaching Torah is a passion of mine, and even helps in performance of pastoral care duties.

JULY 2020 – MAY 2021

Resident Student Rabbi / Temple Chai, San Antonio, TX

Every week I led engaging services over Zoom (also streamed on YouTube), including making a virtual *siddur* which I ran as a slideshow doing the service, giving a sermon, and working with a cantorial soloist. One of the most rewarding parts of my work is to offer Pastoral Care to congregants, including to those dealing with job transition, relationship issues, financial distress, illness, and hospice/end of life care. I wrote and recorded a message for our weekly “Chai Notes” newsletter. I worked with our cantorial soloist to develop engaging (and mostly live over Zoom) High Holy Days services, and programming and services for other holidays as well. I led adult education sessions (including topics such as Zionism and Rabbinic Texts for the Perplexed) and joined with our educator to deliver a video, a message, or a program for each day of Elul. I also taught Hebrew to religious school students. I was proud to represent Temple Chai in the community as the only rabbinic presence at the synagogue, including leading an explanation of Hanukkah and Hanukkah blessings for the citywide Catholic-Jewish Hanukkah celebration.

AUGUST 2019 – MAY 2020

Rabbinic Intern / USC Hillel, Los Angeles, CA

I worked with the student leadership and other staff members to develop interesting and innovative prayer opportunities and offer rabbinic counseling to staff and students. I also taught the Jewish Learning Fellowship class each semester.

SUMMER 2017 – MAY 2019

Student Rabbi / Congregation Brith Sholem, Ogden, UT

I was responsible for developing welcoming prayer experiences, leading Torah Study, offering engaging adult education series, teaching religious school, visiting ill congregants, and officiating life cycle events such as baby naming and B’nai Mitzvah.

SUMMER 2017

Summer Rabbinic Intern / Temple Chai, San Antonio, TX

I spent the summer being mentored by Rabbi David Komerofsky, helping lead services and adult education, and learning about officiating at life cycle events.

Jewish Professional Experience

JUNE 2013 – MAY 2016

Director of Youth Engagement / Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, TX

My opportunity was to manage and expand programming for youth (birth through college) at Temple Beth-El. I also encouraged participation in regional, national, and international youth programs through NFTY, URJ Camps, and Israel programs. I handled all budget, policy, promotion, and programming for the Youth department. I supervised not only student leaders but Greene Family Camp interns. I organized the most successful Purim Carnival in Temple Beth-El history each year I ran it, and integrated new niche programming for Temple throughout my time there. I also taught 9th grade pre-confirmation, organized a NFTY regional conclave, and served as Madrichim (Student Teaching Aid) Program Coordinator.

JUNE 2012 – JUNE 2013

**Director of Youth & Family Engagement / Temple B'nai Shalom,
Fairfax Station, VA**

I oversaw programming and mentoring for three youth groups, BeaSTY (9th-12th), Jr. BeaSTY (7th-8th), and FeaSTY (5th-6th). I also helped run the religious school and helped develop and enhance the curriculum for middle school grades. I served as the Family Educator, organizing a family education dinner each month, where families came and ate with each other and then participated in programming designed by me before services. I organized retreats for each grade between 6th and 9th offsite. This was the first of many jobs in which I would get to work with lay leadership, in this case the youth committee of the synagogue.

AUGUST 2010 – JUNE 2012

Youth Director / Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Pikesville, MD

SUMMER 2011

Unit Leader / Camp Airy, Thurmont, MD

Associations, Activities, Publications and Awards

- Completed CCAR Certificate of Supervision course designed and facilitated by Larry Dressler
 - Co-chair of Kansas State Holocaust Commemoration, putting together the event for hundreds of participants and our own lawmakers and governor.
 - Planning Committee Member for Re-Charging Reform Judaism Conference
 - Police Chaplain for Topeka Police Department
 - Spent two summers at the Shalom Hartman Institute's Rabbinic Torah Seminar
 - Published an article in the CCAR Reform Jewish Quarterly Journal titled: **Redemption and the State of Israel: How Liturgy on Redemption is Handling Zionism (Winter 2020)**
 - Member of Zionist Rabbinic Coalition
 - Fellow, AIPAC Leffell Fellowship
 - Rabbinic Student Fellow, Shalom Hartman Institute of North America
 - Recipient of the Presidents' Volunteer Service Award, Gold Level
 - HUC-JIR LA Rabbinical School Intern 2019-2020
 - HUC-JIR Gabbai Team Coordinator 2019-2020
 - HUC-JIR Los Angeles Campus Leadership (HaKeshet) Team 2019-2020
 - Phi Alpha Theta, National Honors Society for History
 - Twice winner of the Baltimore Hebrew Institute's Judaic Studies Award Scholarship
-

References are Available Upon Request

Caring for the Jews, and the Jewish People

I see the primary role of a rabbi as being a servant-leader, one who leads out of genuine love for Jews and the Jewish People. Rabbis can serve the Jewish people by serving as a community rabbi, or in any non-profit Jewish organization. For me, being a synagogue rabbi means not only caring about the Jewish People but caring about Jews. Pastoral care, guiding families and leading their life cycle events, and being present to counsel people are the some of the important roles of a synagogue rabbinate and I feel particularly attuned to this holy work.

Pastoral care and counseling are a core to my rabbinate. I enjoy getting to know people, and I have been told many times that I have a calm and balanced presence. I have found the work of comforting and counseling to be among the most meaningful parts of my week. I'm eager to return a call or meet with someone who wants to talk to me, or to let someone who is ill or in distress know that I am thinking of them and want to help. A connection to God is important for Jews to explore, and through teaching and conversations I want to help people develop how they think about God and God's relationship with both them as an individual and the Jewish People as a whole. There is no single way for a person to relate to God. I want people to feel comfortable talking about God and thinking about God, as these are the ways we can struggle with our relationship with God.

Many people become closest to rabbis when approaching a life cycle event. While I hope to be close to my congregants even if I've never officiated a life cycle event for them, I also lean into those occasions. A focus of my rabbinate is being a presence in the lives of my congregants. When I am the rabbi helping a couple understand the ways in which the traditional wedding may or may not appeal to them, I seek to get to know them through multiple meetings and help them personalize the ceremony. When I work with religious school students and children becoming *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, I seize on the opportunity to build a relationship with the young person and their family, and I learn about them to improve my own teaching and to make the process more meaningful to them. I am especially aware, having lost my own father in the last few months, of the power a caring rabbi has to make rituals like a funeral or sitting *shiva* meaningful and impactful so that we pay honor to the deceased and the family can look back on the occasion as having helped them process their grief and prepare them for how mourning unfolds over time.

Teaching is incredibly important to me. Not only teaching about the Torah, but especially helping people make informed choices about their relationship to *mitzvot*. Reform Jews can define their own religious lives while exploring the importance of *mitzvot* in the practice of Judaism. Our tradition's beauty rests in Reform Jews' ability to shape their choices and participation according to their understanding. I try to teach people to look at the many *mitzvot* that could be part of their practice. My mission is to open the toolbox of *mitzvot*, so Jewish people can live lives that are Jewish, ethical, and moral.

Much of my teaching comes from one of our most important values, "*Ma'alin B'Kodesh*." (Increasing holiness) Explaining why we light an additional candle each night of Hanukah, our ancient sage, Rabbi Hillel taught that we should be *ma'alin b'kodesh*, those who seek to elevate ourselves in matters of holiness. I want to work with people to pay attention to their actions, to be thoughtful about their practice of *mitzvot*, and to always strive to increase in holiness through *mitzvot* for themselves, their families, and their Jewish communities.

Finally, caring about the Jewish People involves being attentive to and able to explain Israel. I have always been deeply connected to Israel, and while in rabbinical school I lived in Israel, visited Israel, and was involved in fellowships with the Shalom Hartman Institute and AIPAC to learn all I could about Israel. The value of "*K'lal Yisrael*" (Jewish Peoplehood) is very important to my teaching and to how I approach the building of Jewish communities.
