

In 2008, the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) honored WRJ, naming it as the first organization ever to receive the International Humanitarian Award. Former URJ President Rabbi Eric Yoffie presented the award that evening in NY saying, *“I have faced many difficult challenges in my years at the Union, but I have never had a more impossible task than the one that I have been given today: to pay a comprehensive tribute to the Women of Reform Judaism, doing full justice to their achievements while staying within a time framework that absolutely, positively is not to exceed five minutes. It cannot be done. And so I apologize in advance for the many things that will not be said...”*

Rabbi Yoffie began by saying, *“...two things about the Women of Reform Judaism. The first is that without our sisterhoods, there would be no Reform Movement, and there probably would be no Reform synagogues—at least not as we know them today”*.

He went on to say, *“In the last half century, there have been tumultuous changes in our society, and women’s groups have been impacted in a variety of ways. NFTS was not immune to all this, but its leaders have been remarkably adept at keeping up with the needs of modern women. Along the way they changed their name, continued to speak out for social justice, and just completed what may be their most significant accomplishment of all: the creation of the Women’s Commentary on the Torah, a pioneering work of scholarship that showcases our Movement’s best teachers and affirms, by its very being, the equality of women in Reform Jewish life.”* He continued, noting, *“You know, I didn’t think that they were really going to produce this Torah commentary, and boy was*

*I wrong! But to underestimate these women is always to be wrong.”*

*Rabbi Yoffie concluded his remarks saying, “There are too many people in our Movement who do not know the story of WRJ. The major reason, it seems to me, is that WRJ is not engaged in a continual campaign of self-promotion—which tends to be the norm in the Jewish world. They are simply too busy encouraging the grassroots efforts of their members, and in doing the everyday, nitty-gritty work that sustains our synagogues and strengthens the Jewish people.*

*But: “M’oded anaveem adonai” “God upholds the humble,” we read in Tehilim (Ps. 147:6)*

*God upholds, and we honor, praise, and thank these women for their untiring efforts to advance the cause of Liberal Judaism.*

Today it is my honor, on behalf of Women of Reform Judaism to present the Sisterhood of Congregation Beth Shalom with their charter and gavel. Note that the gavel is presented by an endowment established by Washington Hebrew Congregation honoring our first NFTS President Carrie O. Simon. Every new affiliate to WRJ received an identical gavel to continue a tradition established many years ago.

As with many congregations, women continue to play a key role both as individual leaders as well as a collective

women's group. Congregation Beth Shalom is no exception. The ten women here this weekend bring strength, resilience, enthusiasm and leadership. The congregation is blessed with their insights and guidance. May it grow from strength to strength.

Rabbi Yoffie commented about communities within your district, *"It's interesting. Much of WRJ's strength is in the Midwest and in smaller communities, and there are those who think of the Midwest and small town America as an America First kind of place, exclusively concerned about American institutions and American values, in religion as well as in politics. But from its earliest days, WRJ has had a very different vision."*