

## Education Personal Statement – Rabbi Stacy Petersohn

I am passionate about learning with Jews from across our varied spectrum, engaging in conversations about the modern Jewish landscape. One conversation that continues to inspire me is about the best way to bring Jews of different movements together. Many appear to agree that trying to achieve this through prayer and/or food is difficult. Although prayer is a central aspect of Judaism for every denomination, the differences in liturgy are enough to cause disagreements. Even food presents quite a bit of difficulty. Not only are there differences between food traditions of Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and other Jewish ethnicities, but the suspicion of the level of kashrut from one house to the next can prevent people from gathering together. However, there is one activity that any Jew can engage in: Torah study. Unlike the other two, Torah study is a viable option for bringing together Jews across denominational lines. Jews of all backgrounds accept our textual tradition as the source of our rituals, laws, and practices. **Torah study provides a space and context for Jews to come together, learn from one another, and build community.**

Looking at my own educational background, it might seem surprising that a young woman who dreamed of entering the rabbinate would go to University of San Francisco, a Jesuit institution, for an undergraduate degree in Performing Arts and Social Justice, or that she would work as a rabbinic intern in another Jesuit university several years later. Yet, it was at these institutions, with their emphases on educating the whole person and social justice, that I learned how to express my understanding of a good Jewish education. **A good Jewish education uses the Jewish textual tradition to educate the whole person, heart and mind, and encourages the learner to use their education to affect positive change in the world, *tikkun olam*.**

Right after I became Bat Mitzvah, I knew that I wanted to be a *madricha* in my religious school. I was already interested in working with children, I tutored younger students at my school, and I wanted to teach the children in my community the lessons I had learned from my teachers. My first *madricha* assignment was to assist the Kindergarten teacher, reading stories, helping with art projects, and even running the class from time to time. During college and the following years, I discovered that Jewish education was not restricted to school age children and teenagers. As my university's Hebrew tutor, I worked with peers to help them learn Modern Hebrew. And during my summer pastoral internship, I worked with residents and patients of the Jewish Home of San Francisco, where the oldest student who regularly showed up for classes was 102. **Jewish education is a lifelong pursuit, from the small lessons learned as a child to the tough questions brought up by old age.**

As a rabbi and an educator, I hope to use these lessons to educate and guide the Jewish community. I hope to encourage people to create community around Torah study. I hope to educate the whole person and steer people toward acts of *tikkun olam*. And I hope to engage people with the lifelong pursuit of Jewish education, from the first time they enter the door to the last time that they leave.