

It's a long commute. In some ways, I am a regular congregational rabbi: I lead services, give sermons, teach, officiate at different life cycle events, and have student interns. In other ways, I am not a regular congregational rabbi because my congregation or more accurately, congregations, are so widespread. I am an itinerant rabbi who visits multiple pulpits, and each of them is very different. But they all share the same qualities: they are Southern and they do not have full-time clergy. They may have a student rabbi, a part time rabbi, or a retired rabbi who visits them once a month. There are congregations just like them throughout the country.

The demographics of the congregations that I serve are very different. Some are old enough to have been founding congregations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations [now the Union for Reform Judaism] in 1873. Some have sprung up in the last twenty years. Because of the advanced age of the congregants, religious school is a distant memory for some of these congregations, but for other congregations, with members who are young families with children,

Jews in town, but if there is anything Jewish happening, everyone is there to support it.

We sometimes have to be creative in how we bring the services of a rabbi or cantor to an isolated community. Each week I write a *bima*-ready *d'var Torah* that is sent by e-mail and is available on our web site, [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org). For some communities that have lay readers for *Shabbat* services, this means the difference between having a *d'var Torah* at services or not.

I have used other computer technology as well. I had a student who became a *bar mitzvah* last summer at United Hebrew Congregation in Fort Smith, AR. He had a tutor in Fort Smith who worked with him on his *Torah* portion, his *Hafarah* portion, and his prayers. He studied with me weekly by web-cam. It was a little strange at first, but we soon settled into our routine and figured out the technology. When I spoke with a friend of mine, who runs a very large religious school in New Jersey, about my technological tutoring, her immediate response was, "Well of course, you'll see him a couple of times in person before August." I had to explain that I wasn't counting on seeing him in person at all before the *Shabbat* he became a *bar mitzvah*. As it happened, I was wrong. He and his mom went to Space Camp in Huntsville, AL, for Spring Break and we were able to get together at the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience for a tutoring session.

Some of the work that I do for the Institute isn't as specific as leading *Shabbat* or holiday services for a congregation. Some of what I do is for the surrounding community, representing both the Institute and the Jewish people.

I have had the honor of being invited to participate in interfaith sunrise services on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast. When the University of Louisiana at Monroe asked the Jewish community for someone to sit in on an interfaith panel about the Book of Job, they were able to call on me to represent a Jewish viewpoint. As part of the Mississippi Coalition for Racial Justice, I stood on the steps of the State Capital and gave an invocation for the ceremony kicking off "The Welcome Table," a year-long program promoting dialogue on race in Mississippi. When a company that operates tow-boats on the Mississippi River wanted to name its newest vessel for the patriarch of a Jewish family in town, I was invited to participate in the launch of the MV David Solomon (and steer it as well!).

Then there was the unusual unveiling in Brookhaven, MS, for Mr. Elias Bowsky, 1848 – 1896. I received a call from the Sons of Confederate Veterans in Brookhaven asking if I would help with the dedication of a marker for a Jewish Confederate soldier as well as another memorial that had been created by the brother of the deceased for the remains of 23 unidentified Confederate soldiers. This wasn't anything that I could have expected before coming to Mississippi. We made arrangements for the details of the service. I also invited Rabbi Eric Wisnia of Congregation Beth Chaim of Princeton Junction, NJ, to assist me. Rabbi Wisnia is a colleague, a friend, and a Civil War buff since the fifth grade. He sent me "The Prayer of the Confederate States Soldier" by Rev. M. J. Michelbacher, Minister of the Hebrew Congregation, "House of Love," Richmond, VA, which was carried by Jewish Confederate Soldiers during the war, to include in the unveiling service.

## The Circuit-Riding Rabbi of The South

**Rabbi Batsheva Appel, N '96**  
**Former Director of Rabbinic Services,**  
**Goldring/Woldenberg Institute**  
**of Southern Jewish Life**



*Garrett Kuma with Rabbi Batsheva Appel*

it remains a very vital part of the community. Some of these congregations are very rural and some are in the midst of good-sized cities. I serve communities that are Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, and unaffiliated, which makes leading worship interesting each *Shabbat*. In each place, I find an underserved Jewish community that is committed to being Jewish. There may be fewer than a dozen



*Rabbi Batsheva Appel at the helm of the MV David Solomon.*

The unveiling service itself was very different from any other that I had done. Present were members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Daughters of the Confederacy, Civil War re-enactors, citizens of Brookhaven, and members of the Mississippi Jewish community. We were able to combine successfully elements of a marker dedication usually done by the Sons of Confederate Veterans with a Jewish unveiling that included some of the words read at the original unveiling in 1897.

All in all, being an itinerant rabbi has allowed me to be present at amazing moments in the lives of individuals, of families, of congregations, and of communities. I have driven further through the South than I had ever considered doing and encountered people who have treated me to the best of both southern and Jewish hospitality. I have been blessed to work with this “congregation.” ■

*Rabbi Marshal Klaven, C'09, is taking over from Rabbi Appel, who after three years as a circuit-riding rabbi is moving on to serve as Director of Rabbinic Services at KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation in Chicago.*



*Rabbi Eric Wisnia, Jim Baker, Rabbi Batsheva Appel, and Mike Webb at the dedication of memorials for Jewish Confederate soldiers.*



# Following the Signposts: From Ukraine to Ethiopia

**Joy Sisisky, MJCS, MPA, '00; Executive Director, The Jewish Women's Foundation of New York**

Two years ago, I took an untimely and unlikely turn off the path of many young married couples. Just after my husband and I bought our first piece of real estate in New York City, I decided to move to the Former Soviet Union (FSU).

Formerly, as the Associate Director of National Women's Philanthropy at United Jewish Communities (UJC), I often accompanied donors on missions to help them understand how their federation dollars were being put to work. I realized then that there must be a better way to connect North American donors to overseas Jewish communities. Missions, I thought, should be more than a one-time experience.

The idea to relocate east came while I was visiting Russia as a participant in the Muehlstein Institute for Jewish Professional Leadership (a joint certificate program of UJA-Federation of New York and New York University's Wagner School of Public Service). It was my second formal visit in two years to the *Adain Lo* kindergarten and center for young Jews with physical and mental disabilities in St. Petersburg. A little girl I met on my first trip remembered me and we took another picture together after she updated me on her latest accomplishments – she recently celebrated her *bat mitzvah* and won an award in a singing competition.

My desire to build more lasting relationships with the global Jewish community became a reality in early 2007 when I was awarded the Ralph I. Goldman Fellowship in International Jewish Communal Service by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). Designed to encourage interest in the field of *international* Jewish communal service, the fellowship is a yearlong overseas work/study program in one or two of the over 60 countries where JDC is active.

And so, while my husband stayed home to renovate our new apartment, I moved abroad to spend a below freezing winter in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, home to some 60,000 Jews.

It's not surprising to me now that the hospitality of eastern Ukraine's Jewish community embraced me as one of its own. Just before I left, I discovered that my great-grandparents were born in Ekaterinoslav, now Dnepropetrovsk. My great-grandfather owned furniture shops in the Ozerka and Troitsky bazaars, both in walking distance of my new apartment. It seemed to me that at one time or another, I was meant to live in this part of the world.

