

New Rabbi at Metropolitan Synagogue, the Music and Culture Shul

By Ellen Propp

Our local Reform Synagogue has a new rabbi, one who is inspiring and multi-talented. Rabbi Joshua Eli Plaut, PhD,



Rabbi Joshua Plaut

is the son and nephew of prominent rabbis, Rabbi Walter Plaut and Rabbi Gunther Plaut. He has followed in their footsteps, adding some of his personal accomplishments and varied experiences. Rabbi Plaut succeeds Rabbi Joel Goor who passed away last December.

Rabbi Plaut is a specialist in doing two jobs simultaneously. In addition to his new post at the Metropolitan Synagogue, he is the fulltime Execu-

tive Director of American Friends of the Rabin Medical Center, the second largest hospital in Israel. Throughout his professional life he has energized congregations and increased their membership substantially.

His vision for the Metropolitan congregation is to create a warm, vibrant, non-judgmental urban and neighborhood community with emphasis on providing young families in Murray Hill, Gramercy Park and Midtown a warm and welcoming Jewish environment based on culture and music. He looks forward to working with children's Jewish education on an individual basis.

In addition to reviving services, he plans cultural events and music to generate excitement, assisted by the artistic director (and Murray Hill neighbor) Leah Tehrani, a magnificent soprano who is present at all services and events. Please see their advertisement on page 14 for details.

Rabbi Josh spent his early childhood years in Great Neck, the son of the rabbi of Temple Emanuel (where he was a nursery school friend of my son). His father died when he was very young, and as a Zionist, his mother raised two of her three sons in Jerusalem. He returned to the U.S. and earned his B.A. in International Relations and Economics at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Josh went on to earn his Masters in Folklore and Mythology at UCLA. And then he studied for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, completing his degree in three years rather

than the usual five. In May 2012 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity by HUC for his 25 years of service.

At age 29 he assumed the dual roles as the first rabbi of a congregation in Glastonbury, Connecticut and the director of Hillel at Trinity College in Hartford. Eight years later, on Martha's Vineyard, Rabbi Josh again revitalized a fast-growing Jewish community, while simultaneously serving as the Jewish Chaplain at MIT. In 2001, he was awarded the prestigious Daniel Jeremy Silver fellowship at Harvard that permitted him to complete his PhD dissertation at NYU in Hebrew and Judaic studies. The doctoral thesis is also the subject of his forthcoming book, *A Kosher Christmas—Tis the Season to be Jewish*, to be published in October 2012 by Rutgers University Press. He is also the author of *Greek Jewry in the Twentieth Century, 1913–1983*, published in 1996 by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, with its fourth edition in 2010.

The rabbi is also a talented photographer, with special interest in the diaspora communities of Greece, Turkey, New Zealand and Central Asia. His current interest is the American South. He has created more than 10 different exhibitions, displayed in museums and prominent galleries in the U.S., Israel and Europe, and is now working on documenting the Lower East Side.

Come and welcome Rabbi Joshua Plaut, participate in services and the exciting cultural events, and help make his inaugural year memorable. 

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You can live for years next door to a big pine tree, honored to have so venerable a neighbor, even when it sheds needles all over your flowers or wakes you, dropping big cones onto your deck at still of night.

—Denise Levertov