
Erik L. Uriarte (he/him)

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Pulpit Experience

Congregation Beth Aaron

2018 – Present

2017 – 2018

Billings, MT

Director of Religious Programming

Student Rabbi (~Bi-weekly pulpit)

- Provided spiritual and community leadership as the sole paid, professional staff member of a 55-household congregation in a small city in a resident, part-time basis. Membership located in Southern-Central and Eastern Montana, and Northern Wyoming.
- Engaged in local, regional, and state-wide communities and projects.

Worship and Life Cycle

- Introduced *Kabbalat Shabbat* component to Friday night services
- Started once-a-month Saturday morning services, increasing participation by members who live over an hour away or who cannot drive at night
- Assisted in creation and implementation of virtual services in response to pandemic
- Successfully created and led a hybrid in-person and virtual High Holidays service for 5781 with safety precautions based on medical advice.
- Coordinated and Participated in annual interfaith “winter solstice” services with local Methodist and Unitarian Universalist communities.

Education

- Designed and implemented a comprehensive adult education curriculum.
 - Weekly Torah Study
 - Semi-Weekly Advanced Text Study (*Nevi'im*, *Ketuvim*, and *Talmud*)
 - Multi-session classes include 4-session programs on Jewish Thinkers, History of Zionism, History of Antisemitism, *Halakha* and Jewish Practice in a Reform Context, Understanding Liturgy, and many others.
- Sole curriculum planner and instructor for the community’s very small early childhood education

Community Development and Engagement

- Served as volunteer Chaplain for Billings Police Department since April 2019. Helped to foster positive relations and visibility between the Jewish community and local, county, state, and federal law enforcement as a proactive measure to combat antisemitism.
- As a Member of MAOR (Montana Area Organization of Rabbis) assisted in creating and contributing to “Shabbat Across Montana”, a quarterly virtual Shabbat gathering for all non-Orthodox Jewish communities in Montana, in response to COVID restrictions. Also, directly engaged with both Senators Tester and Daines regarding challenges of Jewish communities in Montana, and support for combating antisemitism.
- Coordinated and led a city-wide memorial for the Tree of Life Synagogue attack in October 2018, which included participation by city government and other leaders. At the request of the Mayor of Billings and the Imam of the Billings Muslim community, assisted in the planning of, and spoke at, a city-wide memorial for the attacks on the New Zealand Muslim community in March 2019

- Engaged with numerous local religious, civic, educational and activist groups to teach about Judaism, the Jewish people, and antisemitism.
- Coordinated Jewish community participation in the 2nd Billings Pride March under the banner of “Billings Faith Communities”
- Member of the Montana COVID-19 Vaccination Plan Coordination Team through the State’s Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS)

Temple Shalom

2014 – 2016

Yakima, WA

Student Rabbi (Monthly Pulpit)

Related Experience

Beit T'shuvah

2016 – 2017

Los Angeles, CA

Spiritual Counselor

Temple Ahavat Shalom

2015 – 2015

Northridge, CA

Summer Rabbinic Intern

University Synagogue

2014 – 2015

Brentwood, CA

Judaica and Hebrew Teacher, 5th Grade

URJ Camp Newman

2014

Santa Rosa, CA

Rosh Eidah

Professional work in sales, marketing and banking from 2002-2013 provided upon request

Military Experience

United States Navy Reserve

2013 – 2015

(Resigned for Health Reasons)

Chaplain Candidate/Ensign (O-1)

United States Marine Corps

1998 – 2002 **Intelligence Analyst/Corporal (E-4)**

(Honorable Discharge)

CONGREGATION EXPERIENCE

Congregation Beth Ami

2011 – 2012

Santa Rosa, CA

Vice President of Youth & Education

EDUCATION

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

Anticipated Ordination

Master of Arts, Hebrew Letters

Los Angeles, CA

May, 2021

May, 2017

Sonoma State University

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

Minor in Jewish Studies

Santa Rosa, CA

May, 2012

References provided upon request

Nearly everywhere I've gone, and in everything that I've done, I've struggled to find my "place." As a child of an interfaith and interracial couple, born of an Ashkenazi Jewish mother and a Roman Catholic Latino father from Nicaragua, there were simply no other Jews "like me" while I was growing up in the 1980s in Los Angeles, or the 1990s in the Bay Area. Being from a mostly secular family, I did not grow up with a Jewish community. Save for a few years of Jewish Day School in my early years, we were not members of a synagogue for nearly all of my childhood, I did not attend Jewish summer camps, and I did not become *Bar Mitzvah* or go through confirmation.

Even with all of these obstacles, I still knew that I was Jewish. The combination of those few years of Day School, the stories of my maternal grandmother's family fleeing Germany before the horrors of the Holocaust fully manifested, and the influence of my mother's extended family taught me I was Jewish even if at times I didn't know what it fully meant. With all this in mind, my "ah-ha" moment, the time in my life where I began to fully embrace Judaism and my Jewish identity – and ultimately pursue the Rabbinate – came from a relatively unlikely source: the United States' Marine Corps.

As the first member of my extended family in two generations to enlist in the military, my family understandably questioned my decision; but the reality was, that at 18 years old, having already put in 2 years of community college with no idea what I wanted to do, I needed a change. Looking back, that choice was something that would mark much of how I have lived my life since, and developed my identity, especially the Jewish parts of it. It inspired me to think "outside the box" when encountering new opportunities, to see challenge and adversity as potentials for growth, and a realization that my struggle to "fit in" was a great catalyst for blessing, rather than a curse.

In the Marines, stationed like Japan and Korea, I found that if I wanted to be Jewish, I had to work at it. I had to assert my identity and religious practices in a system that promotes uniformity to accomplish the mission. I was fortunate enough to be stationed on a base in Okinawa that housed the Jewish chapel, and so for the first time in my life, I regularly attended Friday night Shabbat services

The Jews I met in the military were the most diverse that I've ever seen. Jews from New York prayed side-by-side with Jews from tiny communities in the Midwest and the South. Black Jews, Hispanic Jews, and Asian Jews, from the most secular to the most Orthodox, came together as a single community on holidays, united by our common Jewish identity and our choice to

serve our country. In this circumstance, *everyone* was diverse, and this collected diversity strengthened my commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people.

Despite a lack of formal Jewish education, I began to serve as a lay leader in the absence of a military Rabbi, helping to coordinate and lead services (often from rote memory). By the of 9/11 and my final year in uniform, I was working hand-in-hand with military Rabbis to ensure that Jews in uniform were served, whoever they were, and wherever they were in their Jewish identities. This led a Jewish chaplain to suggest that I should consider becoming a Rabbi, something that I had never before considered.

It would be another decade before I could return to school and earn my Bachelor's degree in, let alone begin Rabbinical School. I hoped to return to military service as a Jewish Chaplain, but this dream had several insurmountable complications and I was forced to abandon it. However, this too helped me realize that the needs of people in uniform that drove me to that career, and the skills that I possessed could help serve other Jewish communities as well.

What I realized is that the small, tight-knit, and diverse Jewish community found in the military could also be found in many places around the country. In smaller synagogues that existed far away from the major urban centers and their tens or hundreds of thousands of Jews. In larger cities where the Reform Movement strives to be a big tent for people of different family, ethnic, and racial – not to mention Jewish – backgrounds. In all places where an emerging understanding of gender and sexual identity might cause some Jews to hesitate to affiliate for fear of acceptance and inclusion

As I embark upon my Rabbinate, I continue to appreciate all of the experiences that I have had, and what my those unique experiences allow me to offer. Being a Jew of Color helps me connect with people with other minority identities to encourage communal growth. Not having experienced much active Jewish life growing up is a way to find common ground with people seeking to connect with Judaism as Jews by Choice, or reconnect as adults with similar minimal Jewish upbringing.

My service in military intelligence as a Marine, combined with my political science education has given me the tools necessary to facilitate honest, nuanced, and inclusive conversations in our current political climate. This experience has been vital in roles as a teacher and a representative of the Jewish community in interfaith, community, and government bodies. Finally, my desire to utilize my unique skills have come to fruition in a desire to meet people where they are, educate them about the wide diversity of Jewish history, thought, and

practice in ways they can understand and relate to. This, in turn helps guide individuals and communities to challenge themselves and be the best Reform Jews they can be.