

# Emerging Jewish leaders meet to reenergize young Bostonians

By Jacob Sugarman

Although a mounting number of young Jews across the United States seem to be growing tired of the social norms of the traditional synagogue community, a dozen or so Jewish leaders of emergent communities may have a few ideas on how to bring them back into the fold.

In mid-January, a group of these leaders met at the Brandeis-Bardin Institute in Simi Valley, Calif., for the Synagogue 3000 (S3K) conference to help revitalize the Jewish house of worship. These emergent leaders, including three representatives from Boston-based communities, met under the auspices of the Working Group on Emergent Sacred Communities for a two-day forum to reaffirm their commitment to changing the idea of the synagogue.

"We came together in order to discuss what our experiences were in doing this work, in and out of the mainstream, and learn what we need to do," said Rabbi Jeremy Morrison of Temple Israel in Boston and the director of the Riverway Project for Jews in their 20s and 30s. "It accomplished creating a network of folks across the movement engaged in this work

who may not have known about each other."

"Synagogue 3000 is an ongoing adventure," said Rabbi Elaine Zecher, also of Temple Israel. "So often with conferences, they end it and that's it. [S3K] is just tilling the soil and making sure that the garden is fertile so relationships and connections can grow."

"It was really exciting to meet other leaders of emergent communities," said Margie Klein of Kavod House. "Our experiment here in Boston is new, and often creating something from the ground up, and it can feel overwhelming or even lonely. It was inspiring to see that our work is part of a larger movement."

However, the most remarkable addition to the conference was the inclusion of a group who embarked on their own transformation of their own houses of worship — a group of young Christian

gaged in the same work, but from a different group, and that was enriching. Any kind of real dialogue, especially about the work that we do, is helpful in creating understanding in this intricate faith context."

"It was really inspiring how far the Christian emergence has gotten and their message of creating a post-modern religion," Klein added. "It was inspiring and showed me something that we can teach to the larger Jewish community."

The real test of their visit to the conference, however, is how the three leaders plan to bring their new-found guidance back to their synagogues and to Greater Boston as a whole.

Both Rabbi Morrison and Rabbi Zecher plan to take their experience back to Temple Israel to help improve the Riverway Project even further.

"It's helped me to start re-

imagining, now that Riverway is in its fifth year, to improve what's going on and help reinvigorate this area of Jewish life," he said. "I haven't yet formalized a next step within Riverway, but it did encourage me to continue gathering with this group and learn from them."

"Temple Israel is very fortunate to have Riverway — we're a model congregation in how to synergize an emergent group like it and have it have a healthy connection to a congregation," she added. "Other congregations are looking to Temple Israel as a model as well ... and we're happy to share those lessons with others."

Klein plans to use her experience at S3K to help shape Kavod House for the future. "In the marketplace of American religion, it's easier to start something new than to change mainstream organizations. One thing I learned from the conference is that there's all these older congregations that are excited about these ideas. The emergent and mainstream communities that are willing to innovate have a lot in common with each other and have a lot they can work with together."



Margie Klein of Kavod House attended the S3K conference.