Dear Friends,

With this second issue of our new quarterly newsletter, *The Council Messenger*, we have great progress to report to our supporters and associates. The past few months have seen significant developments in our new programming and outreach. The response to the inauguration of this newsletter in December has been very enthusiastic. Many readers have complimented the “new look” and seem to welcome the opportunity to follow the Council’s work, as a supplement to our other publications—*ISSUES*, our journal of opinion, and *Special Interest Report*, our periodic digest of current events within the purview of the Council’s concerns. This issue of the *Messenger* will highlight a number of areas of activity, as the Council moves forward in its renewed vision of advocacy for the Classical Reform position within American Judaism. In addition, we are developing a new structure for active membership, and are also broadening our efforts to reach those many people who we believe share our values and principles.

Passover is just behind us, and I hope that all of you found joy and inspiration in celebrating our ancient annual affirmation of freedom and liberation. The Festival of Shavuos will soon follow, with its fond memories of Confirmation, and its timeless challenge to each generation to “stand at Sinai”… receiving our Jewish tradition and confirming our own personal commitment to our faith. May the hope and promise of Springtime bring a sense of renewal and anticipation to all of us!

Faithfully,
Rabbi Howard A. Berman
Executive Director

Council Leadership Adopts new Statement on Israel

At the National Board Meeting of the Council, held in November, 2005 in Chicago, the ACJ leadership ratified a new position paper on the relationship of American Jews to the State of Israel. Recognizing that the new focus of our mission is the reaffirmation of the Council’s original advocacy of the Classical Reform position, rather than the complex questions on the nature of Zionism, the Board nevertheless remains committed to articulating a respectful dissent from Jewish nationalism, and an alternative view of the place of the State of Israel in our identity and commitments as American Jews. We believe that the following statement reflects both our positive support for Israel’s wellbeing, and our appreciation for its spiritual and historical meaning for us, as well as our commitment to Judaism as a universal faith and spiritual community.
American Jews and the State of Israel:
The Position of the American Council for Judaism

The question of our relationship as American Jews to the State of Israel, is one of great importance, both for the American Council for Judaism and in the broader Jewish community. As a liberal religious commitment, Classical Reform Judaism embraces a broad diversity of opinion on this complex question. However, there are a number of perspectives that many of us would share.

One of our major principles affirms that Judaism is primarily a universal religious commitment, rather than an ethnic or nationalist identity. The historic Reform position has always held that the national period in the early history of our faith was an important formative chapter, creating the shared sense of experience and the spiritual and ethical values that it was our destiny to proclaim and share with all the world. This dynamic view of Jewish history rejects the concept that we are in “exile”. Our link to the land of Israel is a deep historic one, as the “cradle of our faith” - but Israel is not our “homeland”. We believe that America alone is our Homeland, not only geographically, but because Jewish Biblical values of freedom, liberty and justice have helped shaped the democratic tradition of the United States from the beginning. We are grateful and proud of the major contributions American Jews have made in the founding and building of this nation from its earliest days.

We share with all Jews everywhere common bonds of history and destiny. The State of Israel has deep significance for the Jewish experience. As a refuge for many Jews who have suffered persecution and oppression in other places, Israel certainly has special meaning for us. However, that relationship is a spiritual, historical and humanitarian one - it is not a political tie. We are American Jews – proud, loyal, responsible citizens of the United States, fully embracing our rights and obligations to our country. We are also the part of the timeless, universal “House of Israel” - but we are not Israelis ...and we have no political allegiance to the modern State of Israel. We share with all Jews - and with many other people of good will - the hope and prayer for a secure, prosperous Israel, committed to a pluralistic and democratic society, and living in peace and justice with its neighbors. We support all the potential contributions that the Jews of Israel can make to the creative development of Jewish spiritual values and thought in the modern world - a vital part of that nation’s destiny that hopefully will be realized when its energies can be directed to peaceful endeavors. However, we believe that the major setting for the continuing dynamic development, influence and mission of Judaism in the future will lie here in a revitalized and spiritually renewed American Jewish community.

“Friends of Classical Reform” Gather in Dallas

In the first of a series of regional meetings envisioned for the coming year, almost 100 people attended a special luncheon gathering coordinated by Council members in Dallas on March 28. This effort was sponsored by an ad-hoc committee of local Jewish leaders, Friends of Classical Reform, conceived as a way to bring together supporters of our work in the advocacy of our historic spiritual ideals and worship traditions – both long-time associates of the ACJ as well as potential supporters who share our commitments. The Council’s Executive Director, Rabbi Howard A. Berman spoke on “The Coming Revival of Classical Reform Judaism”. Following are excerpts from his address:

“…We cherish the distinctive worship traditions of historic Reform Judaism, embodied in a meaningful liturgy, primarily in English, in its highest literary form. While we share a reverence for the Hebrew language as a symbolic link to our ancient history and to our ties to all Jews everywhere, Hebrew is not our native tongue -and for most American Jews cannot be the means of authentic worship as the expression of our deepest yearnings and needs in prayer. What makes a worship experience truly
“Jewish” is not its degree of Hebrew usage, but rather the ideals and values it reflects. Classical Reform worship also embraces the role of inspiring choral and instrumental music that elevates the spirit, and reflects the highest artistic standards – drawing on both historic compositions and contemporary sources. Yet another dimension of historic Reform worship is the importance of intellectually and spiritually challenging preaching that offers the wisdom of our Jewish tradition in addressing both the pressing moral and social issues of our day, as well as the deeply personal experiences of our lives. We believe that these characteristic qualities of Classical Reform worship Services, which for many of us are most meaningfully embodied in the Union Prayer Book, continue to offer a vital, creative option for many Jews today – not only those who were raised in and cherish this tradition, but also for many younger people – particularly interfaith families – who are searching for a meaningful and accessible form of Jewish prayer that embraces them with Judaism’s universal message for our life and times…

“Friends of Classical Reform” Gather in Dallas

(Continued from page 2)

“We celebrate the rich diversity within today’s changing Jewish community. We are particularly committed to offering a warm, loving and unconditional welcome to the ever-increasing number of interfaith and multi-cultural families in our midst. We believe that we must support our young people and their partners and spouses with ‘open hearts and open doors’ - celebrating their weddings and offering them a spiritual community that respects both of their identities and integrity. We believe that Classical Reform Judaism’s broad, universal message and embracing, accessible worship, have a unique role to play in reaching out to our young people in interfaith relationships, and empowering them to find a meaningful setting for sharing their experience of our Jewish faith and tradition together…

“Our contemporary Reform Movement includes a broad diversity of interpretations and styles. Our hope and commitment is that the historic traditions of Classical Reform are recognized and honored for their enduring value and potential to speak to a new generation of Jews today…”

New ACJ “Rabbinic Advisory Committee” Organized

Reaffirming the collaboration of rabbis and lay leadership that marked the original birth of the Council in 1942, a new Advisory Committee is being developed to deepen the connections of rabbis from around the country who support our mission and programs. This group will serve as a resource for leadership and advocacy, in our efforts to broaden the public profile of the ACJ in different communities. We also look forward to their contributions of essays and sermons for our publications. It is significant that this group represents both long-time supporters of our work, as well as a new generation of younger colleagues who share the commitment to the Classical Reform option in the contemporary Reform Movement. They join our Executive Director, Rabbi Berman and our Board members Rabbis Arnold Belzer and Wolfgang Hamburger in providing important spiritual guidance for the Council. We welcome the following rabbis to the Committee and look forward to their active participation as we move forward!

Rabbi Jay Brickman (Milwaukee, WI)
Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn (Kansas City, MO)
Rabbi Everett Gendler (Great Barrington, MA)
Rabbi David J. Goldberg (London, England)
Rabbi Paul Kaplan (Bloomington, IL)
Rabbi Michael LeBurkien (Austin,TX)
Rabbi Andrea Myers (Riverdale, N.Y.)
Rabbi David Powers (University Heights, OH)
Rabbi Robert Schreibman (Northbrook, IL)
Rabbi Nadia Siritsky (Louisville, KY)
Rabbi Michael Sternfield (Chicago, IL)
THE AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR JUDAISM

Founded in 1942, ACJ has long offered a distinctive alternative vision of identity and commitment for the American Jewish community. Our major principles embrace:

- Our interpretation of Judaism as a universal religious faith, rather than an ethnic or nationalist identity.
- Our commitment to the Prophetic ethical ideals, liberal religious values, and the distinctive worship traditions of Classical Reform Judaism, as a vital, creative, and accessible option for many Jews today.
- Our embrace of the rich diversity, both of people and opinion, within today’s changing Jewish community. No one group or perspective reflects the broad range of positions among American Jews.
- Our celebration of the uniqueness of the American Jewish experience, and the vital role Jews have played in the development of our nation and its democratic ideals. We embrace our rights and obligations as responsible citizens of the United States.
- Our appreciation of the historic and religious ties that link us to our fellow Jews around the world, and our shared hope for the security and wellbeing of the State of Israel, living in peace and justice with its neighbors.
- Our faith in Judaism’s timeless vision of a world of justice, love and peace for all people.
In Appreciation

The American Council for Judaism gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the following friends and associates who have contributed to our work in recent months:

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Mr. Donald I. Abrahams
Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Ackerman
Mr. John W. Adler
Mr. Richard M. Adler
Mr. Abbas Ali
Ms. Mary G. Appelman
Mr. Harry Appelman
Mrs. Marjorie Arsht
Mr. Paul Basch
Ms. Rosalie J. Baum
Mr. Jost Baum
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Dr. David E. Blank
Mr. Michael D. Blum
Mr. Samuel Bosch
Rabbi Jay Brickman
Mrs. Bernard M. Brooks
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Ms. Harriet Freiburger

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Mr. William Friedman
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Mr. Joseph Goldman
Mr. Paul Gottfried
Ms. Maxine Greenberg
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Mr. Robert S. Hartman
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Mr. Julian Hirsch
Ms. Helen Ann Hurst
Mr. Franklin Harris Hytken
Mr. Herbert L. Isaac
Mr. Bernard Joseph
Mr. Daniel R. Kane
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Mr. William J. Katz
Mr. Aaron Katz
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Mr. Arthur E. Korenblatt
Mr. Julius Kretzer
Mr. Charles A. Krohn
Mr. Fred Lehman
Mr. Lawrence D. Levine
Ms. Morelle I. Levine
Mr. Arnold J. Levy
Mr. B.H. Levy, Jr.
Dr. Leo Lewin
Mr. Gerald Lieberman
Mr. Albert S. Lindemann
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Sissy Schram and Henry Levy
Rabbi Robert D. Schreibman
Stanford and Susan Sholem
Mr. Robert S. Siegel
Ms. Ann W. Silverstein
Mr. Joseph Simmons
Mr. Lewis D. Solomon
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