

# Wilmette Life

## Northfield synagogue receives prestigious national accreditation

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BY JACKIE PILOSSOPH | Contributor May 1, 2013 9:28AM

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"Every child here is a star."

That's what Anne Lidsky, director of education at Temple Jeremiah said about the students who attend religious and Hebrew school at the synagogue.

Now, Lidsky and Temple Jeremiah are also stars. The temple recently received a prestigious and elite accreditation by the New York-based National Association of Temple Educators, making Temple Jeremiah only the 21st congregation out of 875 reform synagogues in the United States to be accredited.

"This was an enormous, but worthwhile task for us," said Lidsky, who has been in her position for 32 years. "It says that the school has gone through the process of examining all aspects and has met a level of national recognition in regard to programs, curriculum, staff, vision and more."

Lidsky was at a national conference for religious educators almost three years ago when she found out about the opportunity to become accredited, and what was involved in the two year process. She said she knew immediately that doing the work was a good fit for the temple.

"It was an opportunity for all of us to truly reflect and ask ourselves, 'What is our school about? Where are our strengths?' and 'Where can we improve?'" said Lidsky, who holds a Masters degree in counseling psychology and a Doctorate in education.

The accreditation application involved a number of steps, the first being the completion of an administrative checklist clarifying that the school is focused on 10 of NATE's goals. Next, Lidsky compiled stories, reports, and observations from senior staff, the board of directors, congregants, teachers and teacher assistants.

The final step was an on-site visit from two NATE members, one of whom was Marlene Myerson, Chair of the organization.

"We spent two days meeting with educators, senior staff, the board of directors, teachers, student teachers and the accreditation committee, and we also observed classes," said Myerson, "One of the first things we noticed was how warm and welcoming the atmosphere was. Anne's love of children and her passion for Judaism and Jewish education comes through in everything she does and says."

When asked why there are so few accreditations, Myerson said not every synagogue is up for the task of going through the two year process.

"This is not a one person job," she said, "This requires a partnership and having the entire congregation involved in the process of self evaluation and self improvement. Some synagogues just don't have the time or the confidence to build that partnership."

Rabbi Paul Cohen is the Senior Rabbi at Temple Jeremiah, and said the accreditation is an external validation of the work that is done at the religious and Hebrew schools at

the temple.

"We always thought we were running a first class educational process and now we have objective confirmation that we are, indeed, doing excellent work," Cohen said, "Our program is an excellent one led by a first class educator, Dr. Lidsky, who has surrounded herself with a wonderful team of professional and volunteer leadership."

Cohen also said the process was very productive, because it caused the temple to look critically at all facets of the educational program, and that the temple is always looking for new ideas and new ways to grow and improve.

Congregation Or Shalom in Vernon Hills also holds the accreditation. NATE has been in existence since the seventies.

Temple Jeremiah is celebrating its 50th anniversary. The religious school and Hebrew school offers classes from pre-Kindergarten through post confirmation.

"We have established a culture here where students feel we are all extended family in regard to how we treat each other and watch out for one another," Lidsky said, "We teach to the soul, and most importantly we teach how to be a good, decent human being."

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