September 14, 2020

Dear Rabbi Candidates:

Congregation Albert’s membership of 550 passionate and diverse families welcomes your interest in joining our team and leading our congregation.

We have prepared the following narrative to further describe the opportunity to lead our distinctive congregation, share with you the story of our community, and expand upon our character, our current strengths, and our challenges. We also provide our thoughts on the qualities we seek in our next rabbi and our vision for the exciting journey ahead.

Congregation Alberts is a “rabbi-centric” congregation whose rabbi often is considered the “Rabbi for New Mexico” because of our role as the oldest and largest Jewish organization in the state.

We are certain our next rabbi will find New Mexico, the “Land of Enchantment,” an inviting, appealing, and comfortable place to call home and will be captivated by its 310 days of sunshine, scenic beauty, rich history, and cultural diversity.

We are excited to learn more about your vision, and we look forward to getting to know more about you.

Thank you for your consideration. We truly appreciate your interest in leading our sacred work.

L’Shalom,

Charna Lefton

Joe Weiss

Congregation Albert Rabbi Search Committee Co-Chairs
Who We Are

Congregation Albert is a diverse and vibrant reform community located in the heart of New Mexico. It is a congregation that cherishes the Jewish faith, strives to serve members’ needs, delights in life-long learning, and embraces social justice. Our congregation fosters the vibrancy of Reform Judaism through Torah (lifelong Jewish education), avodah (worship of God through prayer and observance), g’milut chasadim (acts of loving-kindness), and tikkun olam (repairing the world).

We are a congregation that values and respects the skills, abilities, and talents of our rabbi. In The Wisdom of Our Fathers, it is written, “Ah-say ‘cha rav, v’kab-nay l’cha chaver” — “get yourself a rabbi/teacher and acquire a friend.” Each of us needs a friend, someone who can journey with us in life. And each of us needs a “rabbi” — someone who can help guide us along our path. At Congregation Albert, we welcome the opportunity to have our new rabbi fill these roles.

Congregation Albert
Albuquerque, New Mexico

RABBI APPLICATION

3800 Louisana Blvd NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110
congregationalbert.org
Our History

Congregation Albert was founded in 1897 and is the oldest continuing Jewish organization in New Mexico.

It was established by Alfred Grunsfeld, Henry N. Jaffa (who was also the first Mayor of Albuquerque), and Berthold Spitz (who served as the city’s Postmaster). The naming rights of the new synagogue were auctioned off. The Grunsfeld family won the auction for $250 (roughly $8,000 in today’s dollars), and they chose to name the synagogue after Alfred’s deceased father, Albert Grunsfeld. The latter immigrated from Germany to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1870.

The Congregation’s clergy have enjoyed remarkable longevity. Rabbi David D. Shor served the congregation from 1948 to 1978. Rabbi Paul J. Citrin led the synagogue from 1978 to 1996, followed by Rabbi Joseph R. Black, who held the pulpit from 1996 to 2010.

Harry L. Rosenfeld has served as Congregation Albert’s Rabbi since July 2011. Barbara R. Finn began her position as cantor at Congregation Albert in 2004. During the past seven decades, each of these clergy members have brought their unique talents to lead the congregation. And as Congregation Albert embraced them with trust, the bond between clergy and congregation enabled each rabbi and cantor to achieve significant congregational and personal goals during their tenures.
Our building responds both to its location in the Southwest and to its role as a focal point of Jewish life in our community. The earth tone materials and the use of natural light incorporate the look and feel of the local surroundings. The rough-hewn masonry of the walls is reminiscent of Jerusalem stone. All of these elements meld together to convey our Jewish heritage and our home in New Mexico.

The sanctuary is the focal point of our building. It is filled with unique pieces of art. A stained glass sculpture entitled “Lights of the Generations” sits atop the ark, and a specially-commissioned weaving entitled “Covenant” hangs on the back wall of the bimah. The light-filled sanctuary serves as an inspiring and welcoming setting for prayer, ritual and contemplation. We also have a smaller indoor chapel, an outdoor chapel that is used throughout the year, and a small memorial rose garden on the grounds. Additionally, our building houses our religious school, a social hall, a library, a youth lounge, and our administrative offices.
In keeping with our Congregation’s strong social action commitment, we have installed solar panels and low-water landscaping. Four to five times a year, we use our religious school classroom and kitchen space to house homeless families as part of our work with Family Promise.

The most beautiful features of our temple are invisible and inaudible, yet they fill the structure, radiating from the walls and echoing throughout the building. They are the spirit of reverence that permeates the sanctuary from many years of gathering in prayer and ritual; the gladness of heart that emanates from friends and families coming together to share the deep connection of community; the profound grief and sadness of saying goodbyes; the exuberant joy of welcoming a new life, sharing a commitment of love, and watching our children absorb and demonstrate our Jewish values and traditions; the capacity to make space for and embrace differences; the bond that is forged by going through difficult times together and emerging from them more resilient – more empathic, more devoted, wiser and stronger.
What We Value About Our Congregation

As an integral part of our rabbinic search process, members of our congregation engaged in an in-depth conversation about what makes us unique and what characteristics best define our identity. That feedback dovetailed with the views of our past and present clergy, board members, and other prominent local Jewish leaders. From that introspective input, the following values emerged:

Sense of Community. Our members feel a strong, magnetic sense of community at Congregation Albert. We recognize that the essential practices of Judaism are grounded in relationships and most fully realized in a communal setting. Thus, our congregation has developed an environment of friendship, trust, mutual respect, and support. In short, we see ourselves as a family that shares a strong sense of belonging. During our congregation meetings, comments like, “when I walk into Temple Albert, I feel like I am coming home” were widely shared and repeated.

Diversity. New Mexico is a land of deep-rooted and long-standing cultural diversity. We embrace that rich variety within our congregation. This multi-faceted diversity includes demographics (age, races, cultural and educational backgrounds), beliefs and practices (spiritual orientation, music, speaking and reading Hebrew), and lifestyles (teens, single, partnered, married, interfaith families and seniors). We recognize the divine spark in every individual and value people without regard to age, race, sexual orientation, or financial station. Our congregants welcome all, including interfaith couples and families, as important members of our community.

Commitment to Learning. Congregation Albert is a congregation of learners; we are committed to a shared practice of lifelong Jewish study. At all ages and life stages, continuing education offers intellectual challenges, moral guidance, spiritual enrichment, and the opportunity to form deep and sustaining friendships. As steps towards achieving all of these goals, Congregation Albert offers both an Early Childhood Center and full religious school as critical components of our educational program. Adult education is equally valued, and the Congregation provides a multitude of different classes and programs on a broad spectrum of topics and subjects. Weekly Torah study is well-loved and well-attended.

Community Service. As the largest Jewish congregation in the State of New Mexico, we understand and embrace the key role we can play in the community at large. These efforts are numerous and far-reaching: working with immigrants and asylum seekers, marching together in the local pride parade, providing
shelter and food for local homeless families, and installing solar panels and low-water landscaping at the synagogue. We work together to elevate the vulnerable, uphold civil and human rights, protect our natural resources for future generations, and build a more just and equitable society. In 2019, the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism recognized Congregation Albert with an Irving J. Fain Social Justice Award. Grounded in Jewish values, the Fain Awards are presented to congregations who advocate for and organize around social action issues, protect vulnerable populations, and engage across lines of difference.

Commitment to Worship. We are passionately Reform Jews, and Jewish spiritual expression, in all of its diversity, is at the heart of our life together at Congregation Albert. We thrive on welcoming, participatory worship services that help us connect to the Divine and relate to each other. We also provide essential and meaningful support to commemorate the celebrations and moments of grief in our lives. Collective life cycle rituals are a meaningful component of our religious lives as a community.

Music. Our members highly value music as a form of Jewish spiritual expression. This appreciation embraces traditional liturgy, holiday and Shabbat favorites, and children’s songs and secular favorites. Music is especially valued in worship, at times of celebration, and as a critical component of our youth education programs. Our High Holiday services traditionally feature our cantor, a zamir, and other musical accompaniment for the worship.

“We work together to elevate the vulnerable, uphold civil and human rights, protect our natural resources for future generations, and build a more just and equitable society.”
How We See Our Next Rabbi

Congregation Albert is a rabbi-centric congregation. We are looking for a rabbi we can welcome and embrace as our spiritual leader, as our educator, as our guide, and as our friend. Our congregation can and will thrive with a warm, empathetic, and dynamic rabbi who builds personal connections, listens with integrity, and prioritizes getting to know the individual members of our professional staff and our diverse community. Admittedly, we seek a rabbi who can be any number of things to a wide array of congregants. Those attributes include:

An Inspiring Educator. As a congregation of life-long learners, we want a rabbi with wisdom who can instruct and coach on a broad spectrum of subjects: rabbinical, spiritual, historical, Jewish tradition, and religious practice. We would like a rabbi who is equally comfortable sitting with a room of preschoolers as they are guiding adults through the intricacies of a Torah passage. A rabbi who can apply and communicate Jewish values to everyday challenges and the world we live in through sermons, group engagement, and simple conversation. We want to be inspired and educated.

An Approachable Companion. Rabbis are respected and revered, and rightfully so. Still, they should not be aloof or unsociable. We truly desire an amicable rabbi who interacts with members of the congregation and their families and takes the time to learn about our professional staff members. We seek a sincere and compassionate rabbi who can greet congregants and their families by name and warmly engage in personal conversation, particularly before and after services and other congregational events. We are excited to find a welcoming rabbi who is easy to reach and has an open-door policy; a rabbi who exemplifies our congregation’s hospitable and open nature.

A Compelling Communicator. It is essential that our rabbi have strong communication skills and be comfortable and willing to interact with diverse and varied individuals. We are not looking for merely a spell-binding orator at the bimah; we hope to have a person who can connect with people just as effectively in quiet conversation, through a heart-felt touch, or with a well-placed humorous story. And because communication is a two-way street, our rabbi should be an effective and empathetic listener who can facilitate meaningful dialogues.

A Religious and Spiritual Leader. It most likely goes without saying that our rabbi is the religious and spiritual leader of Congregation Albert. But that means more to us than simply conducting services and presiding over rituals. We hope to find a creative rabbi who can enliven our services both in liturgy and music while still respecting the traditions that our members like best. A rabbi who grasps the inspirational power of music in worship and spiritual practice. A rabbi who loves God and comprehends the many concepts of a divine creating force. Our rabbi should provide leadership not just in prayer but in conduct and any activities that assist our members in connecting and unifying with God. We look to our rabbi to help us explore and enhance our commitment to Israel.
A Leader in the Jewish Community and the Larger Community. Congregation Albert is the state’s largest Jewish congregation. As a result, our rabbi should be comfortable serving in a leadership capacity outside of our synagogue. Our rabbi will be expected to interact with rabbis in other New Mexico congregations and actively participate in the interfaith community. The Congregation Albert rabbi is broadly considered to be the New Mexico rabbi, and is often called upon to serve as a spokesperson and representative of the larger Jewish community. Elected officials, the media, and other institutions look to our rabbi to provide a Jewish perspective on current events and community issues, offer insights on ethics, and deliver convocations at important events. Our congregation values a rabbi who can provide this type of presence, and takes pride in a rabbi who can fill such a leadership role in the New Mexico Jewish community.

A Catalyst for Change. At Congregation Albert, our population is aging. We need a rabbi who understands that attracting and retaining younger members is both a critical strategic challenge and an exciting opportunity. We want to find pioneering ways to keep our front doorway open to younger members and their families while continuing to nurture and care for our existing members. We hope our rabbi can fashion new models of membership and engagement that will attract a younger generation and allow them to find spirituality in new places outside of traditional settings.

A Role Model. We seek a rabbi who is not just comfortable being a rabbi, but who honestly wants to be our rabbi. Our rabbi should generate excitement about being part of Congregation Albert and create a positive feeling about being Jewish. In addition, our rabbi needs to serve as our moral compass and as a positive and comforting counselor when times are hard. Congregations can face difficult times, and individuals must endure tragedies and hardships. To help chart all of these unsettling waters, we hope to find a rabbi who can exhibit a confident and hopeful demeanor, someone who can provide hope and be a comfort to those in need.

A Mensch. Ultimately, we want a rabbi who is a good person. We want someone honest and fair; open-minded and considerate; reliable and trustworthy. We hope to have a rabbi who can be bright without being pompous, candid without being insensitive, and insightful without being condescending. Our rabbi should be kind, warm, and compassionate. Someone who is the type of person who speaks to Uber drivers and Starbucks baristas the same way they speak to mayors and our Board of Trustees. And s/he should do it all with a sense of humor that is both self-deprecating and disarming—two traits that every rabbi should strive to display.

"We hope to find a creative rabbi who can innovate services both in liturgy and music while still respecting the traditions that our members like best."
Where We Have Been and Where We Hope To Go

Our Recent Past

If we are serious about attracting new members and engaging more broadly with our existing members, then we must assure them that they can access pertinent information about Temple Albert. As a congregation, we value honesty and transparency. Trust can be built only when there is full and open communication, and we believe that all members of our family have a right to know about the manner in which we conduct our affairs. In that spirit, we must disclose an unfortunate episode in our recent past.

In June 2019, we discovered that the Congregation’s bookkeeper and administrator had embezzled over $700,000 from Congregation accounts over roughly a two-year period. The embezzlement was done by posting electronic signatures on unauthorized checks and other means. Immediately upon learning of this fraud, the Board of Trustees removed this individual. The Congregation is now vigorously pursuing a civil claim against our former employee to recover these funds. We are also aware that the New Mexico Attorney General is investigating this incident for potential criminal prosecution.

More importantly, following this discovery, Congregation Albert conducted a complete overhaul of our financial authorizations. We have brought in auditors and attorneys to revamp our entire financial system. We have implemented new safeguards, policies, and procedures, and installed oversights to ensure that our financial assets are safe and secure. In short, we have strengthened and revised our entire accounting system and implemented strict new procedures to ensure that this type of loss does not happen again.

Despite this regrettable incident, Congregation Albert remains financially secure and poised for future growth. We remain fully able to satisfy all our operating expenses, including salary and benefits for our clergy and professional staff, and we have healthy balances in our endowment accounts. The Congregation owns the synagogue building and the land, as well as our cemetery. There are no debts or mortgages against any of our property.
Our Hopeful Future

With that lamentable occurrence behind us, we are now focused on the path ahead of us and realizing a dynamic vision for our future. Over the next few years, we envision a congregation actively and effectively engaged in strengthening itself. Our rabbi will be intimately involved in charting our course and leading our congregation in the following areas:

Expanding Our Membership with Younger Members and Families. This goal is perhaps our Congregation’s primary concern; attracting and retaining younger members is a critical and strategic issue for Congregation Albert. We want to find new ways of engaging and making Judaism relevant and meaningful to young people, young families, and the unaffiliated.

Improving Our Educational Programs. In order better to serve younger members and their families, the congregation will need to pay significant attention to youth, teen, intergenerational, and family education. But adult education also is highly prized, and we are interested in expanding those programs and learning opportunities offered by other synagogues in the area. We also want to explore more imaginative and creative educational approaches, such as offering more online programs and classes offered in unique settings.

Deepening Our Impact on the Broader Community. Congregation Albert wants to continue to be a force for good in the larger community. That should entail expanding our current social justice projects, engaging more congregants and younger members in these efforts, and creating stronger bonds with the interfaith community and other community organizations that share our values.

Allowing More of Our Members to Feel a Meaningful Sense of Belonging. In Reform Judaism, one size does not fit all, so it is essential that each person who attends Congregation Albert have opportunities to worship, seek spirituality, and learn in ways that are most meaningful to them. We must find ways to inspire our members to grow in their Jewish commitment and find deeper meaning in Jewish practices at every stage of life. We want a congregation that can evolve and adapt its religious offerings in a manner that demonstrates that traditional values and beliefs are compatible with the ideals and challenges of our new world.

Striving for Greater Transparency. Transparency is both a congregational goal and an important characteristic desired in our new rabbi. We want to operate in a manner in which information is shared openly and frequently, as appropriate. If we are serious about drawing new members and more broadly engaging our existing members, then we must assure that they can access pertinent information about our temple’s governance, activities, and opportunities.
We are setting an ambitious agenda, and we also recognize that our goals may seem hard to achieve. That is why we are committed to welcoming a rabbi who shares and appreciates our aspirations and is willing to navigate and partner with us as we move forward. We desire a rabbi who can inspire, motivate, and participate. We want a rabbi who can foment strong personal relationships and encourage our members to form binding connections with one another. This type of interconnected family is best able to work together to move our congregation in new directions.

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What We Are Offering Our Next Rabbi

You can do great things

Congregation Albert is offering a unique opportunity. We are a congregation that sincerely endeavors to be worthy of its rabbi. We believe that our past rabbis’ tenures reflect that we are committed to and have been successful in this undertaking. As we approach our 125th year as a Jewish assembly, our next rabbi will have the unparalleled chance to fill a very special role.

You will be welcomed and embraced. We are a warm and supportive community looking for a rabbi to whom such things really matter.

Your thoughts, opinions, and suggestions will be valued. Your efforts as a creative innovator will be appreciated and integrated into our existing traditions and practices so that we explore the best practices in the Reform movement. We are eager to advance, improve, and adapt to a changing landscape.

You will be supported. Our Board of Trustees will work with you to manage all of the different aspects of synagogue life. Our professional staff is anxious to help orient you to our procedures and work with you to establish an efficient office. You can be a mentor, guide, and trusted partner to help empower our staff and lay leaders. In addition, there is a vibrant Jewish Federation and Jewish Community Center who look forward to working with you.

You get to be a macher. As we have said, Congregation Albert is the largest and most recognized Jewish congregation in New Mexico. As a result, the rabbi at Congregation Albert is well known both in the local and statewide Jewish community and the larger New Mexico general community. In essence, the Congregation Albert rabbi is often seen as “New Mexico’s rabbi.” You will have the opportunity to interact with other Jewish leaders, the leaders of other faith-based communities, and influential leaders in government, media, and education.

Historically, the Congregation Albert rabbi is asked to sit on non-profit boards, participate in local, state, and tribal activities, speak at educational programs, and appear on various media outlets. As our rabbi, you can influence the direction of New Mexico’s Jewish community and impact issues facing our general society.

Being the the rabbi at Congregation Albert affords you with an opportunity to put your education, training, and experience to their greatest use. And you have the chance to develop and implement your ideas and distinctive vision about what a vital and essential Reform congregation can be.
You Can Live Here

Perhaps, best of all, you get to live here. New Mexico is known as "The Land of Enchantment" or "Tierra del Encanto" because of its scenic beauty and rich history. It is an inviting, appealing, and comfortable place to call home.

New Mexico has one of the most diverse landscapes in the world, with a range of incredible outdoor adventures to match. The geography ranges from snow-capped 13,000-foot peaks to wildflower fields, from thick forests of cottonwoods to white sand dunes, from volcanoes and lava fields to vast expanses of ranchland and desert. Because of its many natural wonders, it is also a great place for outdoor activities, including biking, skiing, or golfing on some of the Southwest's best golf courses. Within less than a two-hour drive from Albuquerque, there are world-class whitewater rapids, sheer cliff rock formations, and natural hot springs.

New Mexico offers a wide variety of art, music, dance, and other cultural activities. The world-renowned Santa Fe Opera performs each summer, and other musical events, from chamber music concerts to jazz festivals, are found throughout the state. The University of New Mexico's Popejoy Hall brings to Albuquerque outstanding dance, music (including the New Mexico Philharmonic), Broadway cast roadshows, and a wide array of other performance arts throughout the year. You will find scores of unique art galleries and studios along Santa Fe's famed Canyon Road (a 60 minute drive) and in Albuquerque's Old Town area. The annual Native American Market, Traditional Spanish Market, International Folk Art Market, and numerous arts and crafts festivals fill the calendar each year and draw enthusiasts and collectors from around the country.

We are also one of the most culturally diverse states in the nation, encompassing a unique combination of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo cultures that cannot be found in any other state. New Mexico's large Hispanic population includes descendants of the original Spanish/Mexican settlers who have lived in the area for more than 400 years (including descendants of the crypt-Jews who continued to secretly practice Judaism after their forced conversion to Catholicism), as well as more recent Latinx immigrants. It has the second-highest percentage of Native Americans as a proportion of the population in the United States, including members of the 21 Pueblo Nations, the Navajo Nation, and two Apache Tribes. There are also growing urban Black and Asian populations.

Oil and gas production, agriculture, tourism, and federal government spending are important drivers of New Mexico’s economy. There is also a robust and growing
Albuquerque is the largest and most vibrant city in the state, with a varied and energetic community that has its own unique identity. Our rich culture and history dates back more than three centuries, and today the greater metropolitan area has over 900,000 residents.

Albuquerque's temperate climate offers more than 310 days of sunshine per year. Year-round recreational opportunities abound on more than 28,000 acres of open space and miles of biking and walking trails throughout the metropolitan area. Skiing, golfing, hiking, biking, and many more outdoor activities are all close by. The city boasts breathtaking landscapes: the Sandia Mountains soar to over 10,000 feet high and run along the east side, and the Rio Grande River flows through the city's western side. At night, Albuquerque is bathed in the glow of neon signs, a reminder of the city's vintage neon signs along historic Route 66.

Although Albuquerque has experienced steady growth in its population, it remains an affordable place to live, thanks to its reasonable housing, costs, and prices in general. Its cost of living compares favorably to other cities in the region such as Denver, Phoenix, and Las Vegas. Because of the area's growing population, health care providers are investing in the city's future. Two new full-service hospitals were recently completed within the past two years. And the University of New Mexico is a nationally recognized Class I research institution, with a Cancer Center that offers world-class treatment and clinical research.

The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) is New Mexico's largest school district. In addition to providing strong K-12 public schools, APS also recognizes that diverse student learning styles demand responsive schools and offers a variety of innovative magnet and charter schools. Albuquerque is also home to a number of top-rated private schools. The University of New Mexico (UNM) is the state's flagship institution. Founded in 1889, UNM offers bachelors, masters, doctoral, and professional degree programs, and its Albuquerque campus encompasses over 600 acres.

Albuquerque's distinctive neighborhoods reflect the great diversity of our city: residential areas located close to city parks, urban lofts near downtown and the University, and the quiet beauty of the hacienda-style homes in the North Valley. Each of these areas has a unique personality suitable for a variety of lifestyles.

New Mexico is home to one of America's most cherished regional cuisines. New Mexican cooking incorporates Mexican, Native American, and Spanish flavors, with chile peppers being one of the most important elements. In fact, our official state question is, "Red or green?" in reference to your chile preference. Favorite local dishes include Native American fry bread-style sopapillas, breakfast burritos, green chile cheeseburgers, posolé (a hominy
dish) and calabacitas (a sautéed zucchini and summer squash dish). The Albuquerque area is home to dozens of craft breweries and wineries that provide wonderful opportunities to enjoy a craft beer with a view of the Sandia Mountains, or to taste local wines in the lush greenery of Albuquerque’s North Valley.

Activities abound throughout the year and around the city. The Sandia Peak Tramway is one of the longest aerial trams in North America and offers a spectacular view of the entire Rio Grande Valley. Albuquerque is home to the International Balloon Fiesta, the world’s largest gathering of hot-air balloons and the most photographed event in the world.

Albuquerque’s many museums feature unique and captivating exhibits on history, the arts, culture, science, and more. There is something for everyone: the Albuquerque Museum of Art & History, the National Museum for Nuclear Science and History, Explora! Science Center & Children’s Museum, and the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center are just a few of the offerings. The city also is surrounded by archeological, paleontological, and historic sites.

Sports fans enjoy athletic events year-round. UNM competes in more than 15 varsity sports in the Mountain West Conference, and “The Pit” is one of the most iconic college basketball arenas in the county. Albuquerque also has professional baseball (the Albuquerque Isotopes, the AAA baseball team for the Colorado Rockies) and professional soccer (New Mexico United).

One of the country’s first urban National Wildlife Refuges, Valle de Oro, was established six years ago just south of downtown. The Albuquerque BioPark complex includes a highly regarded zoo, botanical gardens, an aquarium, and an urban beach complex (complete with fishing ponds and other features). New Mexico truly is a captivating place to live, and Albuquerque is a wonderful place to call home.

"New Mexico truly is a captivating place to live, and Albuquerque is a wonderful place to call home."