



Interim Rabbi Frequently Asked Questions

May 2024

This month, the Temple Micah Board of Directors, on the recommendation of the Transition Committee and the rabbis, decided to engage an interim rabbi for the year following Rabbi Zemel's retirement, while our congregation undertakes the search for permanent leadership. Some of you may have wondered why that decision was made and what the impact will be on the Temple Micah community. These FAQs address many of the questions and concerns we have heard from our membership.

Do you have more questions? Please contact the Transition Committee at transition@templemicah.org.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Q: First, what is an interim rabbi?

A: An interim rabbi is an experienced rabbi who is specially trained to temporarily serve congregations during a transition period. The interim rabbi's role is to help prepare the congregation for a new permanent senior rabbi, while also fulfilling congregational rabbi duties. Importantly, an interim rabbi is *not* eligible to apply for the permanent rabbi position.

Q: How long will this rabbi serve at Temple Micah?

A: The interim rabbi will serve for one year, from July 1, 2025, following Rabbi Zemel's retirement, through June 30, 2026. We anticipate that a new senior rabbi will begin on July 1, 2026.

Q: Is it possible that the interim might ultimately be selected as our new Senior Rabbi?

A: No, as noted above, the interim rabbi is not eligible to apply for the senior rabbi position.

Q: What role will the interim rabbi play with respect to our other talented rabbis?

A: We are privileged to have a deep bench and we believe that an interim rabbi will complement our existing clergy team of Rabbis Beraha, Crawley, Frank, and Slakman. We will seek someone who is aligned with, and supportive of, our warm and probing culture, and embraces the values reflected in our Temple Micah Roadmap.

Q: Will this rabbi serve as the senior rabbi?

A: No, the interim will not serve as a senior rabbi. The interim rabbi will collaborate with our other rabbis to help ensure that we continue to operate at full capacity during our transition period. The interim rabbi will take on the duties shared by all the rabbis, such as leading services, supporting our congregants in lifecycle events, conducting educational programs, and providing pastoral care. Further, as a rabbi trained for this unique role, the interim will also provide guidance and support in the transition process itself.

Q: What led the Transition Committee to recommend that the board hire an interim rabbi? Did the committee consider alternative approaches?

A: The Board of Directors asked the Transition Committee to recommend how best to approach the transition period—whether to immediately hire a permanent senior rabbi or take another approach. Over the course of the late winter and early spring, the committee consulted CCAR’s guidance (the CCAR considers hiring an interim rabbi a best practice during a transition) and spoke with many Micah members, experts in organizational change, leadership at other Reform congregations that had recently hired interim rabbis, and met multiple times with our current rabbis and senior staff.

We identified the following benefits to hiring an interim rabbi:

- An interim rabbi period can be a “palate cleanser” before hiring a permanent senior Rabbi.
- The interim rabbi can expose the congregation to new thinking – analogous to a “scholar-in-residence” – without making permanent changes.
- The interim rabbi period can help allow the space for a full celebration of Rabbi Zemel’s incredible leadership and guidance without simultaneous distractions of hiring and onboarding a permanent senior rabbi.
- Related, the interim rabbi period will allow for a non-distracted welcoming of the permanent senior rabbi after that hiring occurs.

Perhaps most critically, our rabbis unanimously supported hiring an interim rabbi.

Based on the far-reaching fact gathering and extensive discussions among the Transition Committee and staff, and weighing the pros and cons, the committee concluded and recommended to the Board that we hire an interim rabbi. The Board unanimously voted to pursue this path.

Q: But two big transitions in two years? Isn't that too much?

A: We did consider the downsides to hiring an interim rabbi. These issues include the reality that the congregation, its clergy, staff and others would have two major adjustments to staffing changes. Also, we will need to conduct two – although very different – rabbinic searches in a relatively short period of time. In discussing these downsides with other congregations and our own staff, we concluded, and all agreed, that the benefits of an interim far outweigh the costs.

Q: What happens next?

A: The Board established an Interim Rabbi Search Committee to recruit, interview and recommend an interim rabbi. Over the coming months, we will initiate the interim rabbi search.

Q. Who is on the Interim Rabbi Search Committee?

A: Our former cantor Meryl Weiner and current board member Lauren Laitin will co-chair the committee. The Transition Committee members also will be part of the search committee. The Interim Rabbi Search Committee will have a significant but narrow role: to select an individual whose background, manner and experience will help our community adjust and grow during one year of transition.

Q: How is the interim search conducted?

A: As a member of the Union for Reform Judaism (“URJ”), we are required to participate in a search process overseen by the Rabbinical Placement Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The CCAR provides the application form for our interim rabbi search and posts the application to its online database of congregations searching for rabbis.

We anticipate submitting our application at the end of the summer/early fall 2024. The Interim Rabbi Search Committee will be responsible for conducting a preliminary review of applicants, and will select certain rabbis to continue further in the process. We plan to engage our current rabbis in the process to ensure that the interim rabbi is not only a good fit for Temple Micah, but also a good fit with our current team. Rabbi Zemel will not be involved in the vetting, but we will consult with him through the process.

The Interim Rabbi Search Committee will ultimately make a hiring recommendation to the board.

Q: When will you announce the selection of the interim rabbi?

A: There is no set timeframe for making a decision, but we anticipate that the hiring process will take several months. Nonetheless, our hope is to have a plan in place well before the July 1, 2025 start date.

Q: And then . . . what about the selection of our new Senior Rabbi?

A: Our current plan is that the Board will establish the search committee for permanent rabbinic leadership no later than the spring of 2025, with the search

beginning in the summer of 2025, and the new senior rabbi joining Micah in July 2026. This timing is consistent with the guidance of the CCAR.

We want to hear from you! Members of our congregation already have played a key role by sharing perspectives on our culture, identity and vision for the future. As always, members are encouraged to send private questions and feedback to [**transition@templemicah.org**](mailto:transition@templemicah.org).