



WORLD
UNION FOR
PROGRESSIVE
JUDAISM



האיגוד
העולמי
ליהדות
מתקדמת

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



DEAR FRIENDS,

We are proud to present highlights of our work worldwide in this 2017 report of all we have achieved together over the past year.

The events and experiences of **CONNECTIONS 2017**, our international biennial conference in Jerusalem this past May, captured the very heart of our global mission. Over the course of four days, 450 delegates from 30 countries – including more than 100 young adults – filled the World Union's Jerusalem campus with ideas, discussions, and prayers that build our movement, nurture rabbinic and congregational leadership, and inspire the next generation.

Around the world, we continue to advance and expand our impact, providing frameworks for meaningful Reform Jewish life wherever Jews choose to live. During 2017, we began a multi-year effort to expand and reenergize our youth, young adult, and camping programs.

When we come together to share and pray, from the smallest community to the largest, the strength of our voices is powerful.

We thank you for your support and partnership in this sacred work.

L'SHALOM,

Carole Sterling

Carole Sterling
Chair

Dan Freeland

Rabbi Daniel Freeland
President

OPENING THE DOORS TO JUDAISM

In May 2017, Russian-born Rabbi Alona Lisitsa presented ten conversion candidates from Spain and Portugal to the **European Beit Din** in London. The first female Reform Rabbi in Israel to be appointed to a religious council, Rabbi Lisitsa's comprehensive conversion course, which includes on-site meetings and counsel, has been attracting individuals interested in Judaism since its launch in May 2014. To date, 25 candidates, including children, have successfully converted and become active members of growing congregations in the Iberian Peninsula.

On that same Shabbat morning in May, one of the newly converted families, Yael and her two children, Moshe and Miriam celebrated their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs at London's congregation Shir Hayim. Warmly welcomed by the congregation, this was the second time Shir Hayim opened its doors to Rabbi Lisitsa's students after the Beit Din. During the service, the other converts were publicly acknowledged, embraced as members of the people of Israel, and called to the Torah to be blessed.

"I cannot think of a more moving and meaningful ending for the long and challenging process of return and conversion for these candidates. This is a moment when Jews from different geographic and cultural contexts are united in prayer, in Torah, and in peoplehood" Rabbi Lisitsa reflected.

With the backing of the **European Union for Progressive Judaism (EUPJ)**, Rabbi Lisitsa is helping to revitalize an inclusive and welcoming Judaism across the Iberian Peninsula after more than 500 years of dormancy. As a result of her work, Congregation Ohel Yaakov, in Lisbon, joined the EUPJ in 2016, and a new Reform congregation, Bnei Sefarad, in Valencia was established.



In Jerusalem in May 2017, during the World Union's biennial conference **CONNECTIONS**, over 400 participants celebrated the adult Bat Mitzvahs of 13 women from South America at the Kotel. After reading the Torah at the egalitarian section of the Kotel, we moved peacefully to complete the service at the main plaza.



SOWING THE SEEDS OF NATIVE RABBINIC LEADERSHIP

In August 2017, the World Union and its partner region in Latin America, Union for Reform Judaism (URJ-AmLat), launched the **Iberoamerican Institute for Reform Rabbinical Education in Buenos Aires** to recruit and train rabbis and educators for Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Reform congregations. As the first school of its kind in the region, the Iberoamerican Institute lays vital groundwork for the growth of Reform Judaism across Latin America.

Twenty rabbinical candidates from Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Brazil, and Spain have enrolled in the joint program between URJ-AmLat, Fundación Judaica – the Argentine network of Jewish institutions, and Mishkan – the Center of Jewish Spirituality. Its curriculum incorporates Jewish text study with leadership training to build vibrant Jewish communities that respond to regional issues.

“Training native rabbis in their own communities is an important step for the Reform world,” said Carole Sterling, Chair of the World Union. “The Iberoamerican Institute will play a significant role in the region as we take action to meet the growing needs of our communities.”

Around the world, a total of over 100 students were enrolled in our rabbinic schools at the **Institute for Modern Jewish Studies in Moscow**, the Iberoamerican Institute for Reform Rabbinical Education in Argentina, Geiger College in Germany, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in the US and Israel, and Leo Baeck College in the UK.



Over the course of 2017, more than 100 Reform Jewish leaders and educators attended our Center for Leadership Development and Education seminars, exploring new paradigms of Judaism.

TAKING THEIR SEAT AT THE TABLE

As a **Roswell Klal Yisrael Fellow** in 2016-17, Lily Jendroska spent the year networking with other young adult leaders, training in Jewish communal leadership, and developing a project for young adult engagement in her home country of Germany.

When she arrived in Jerusalem as a young adult delegate at the World Union's biennial CONNECTIONS conference in May, Lily met with more than 100 other young adults from our young adult movement, **Tamar**, including Jodie Friedman, a young adult delegate from the United States. Having grown up in the movement and now a college graduate, Jodie was interested in working as a Jewish professional. Each of these two young leaders represents the best and brightest of our next generation, poised to make their mark on the Reform movement in the coming years.

In October of 2017, Lily accompanied 15 *madrichim* (counselors) from Netzer Germany on their first, week-long tour of Israel. "This trip gave them a different experience of Israel, of Zionism, and of Reform Judaism that is critical to their work in Netzer Germany."

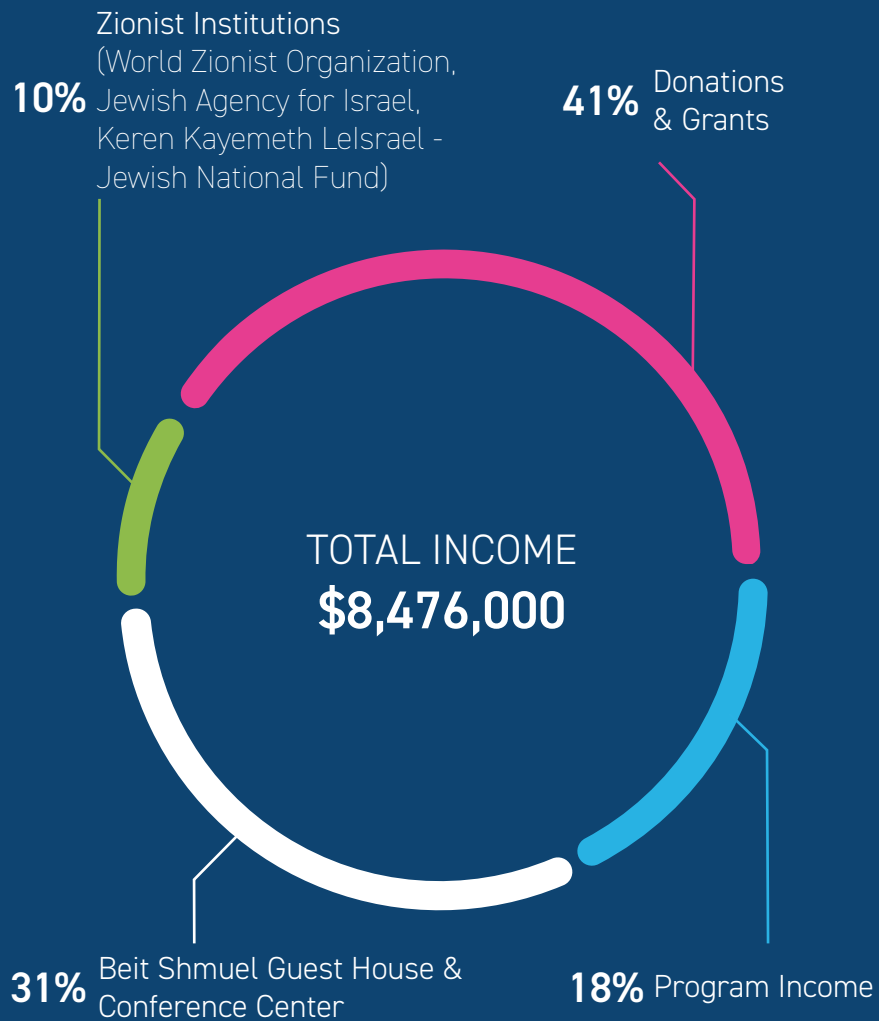
In December 2017, the World Union sent more than 40 young adult delegates, including Lily and Jodie, to the URJ Biennial in Boston, Massachusetts, to ensure that the voices of the next generation of our movement are heard.



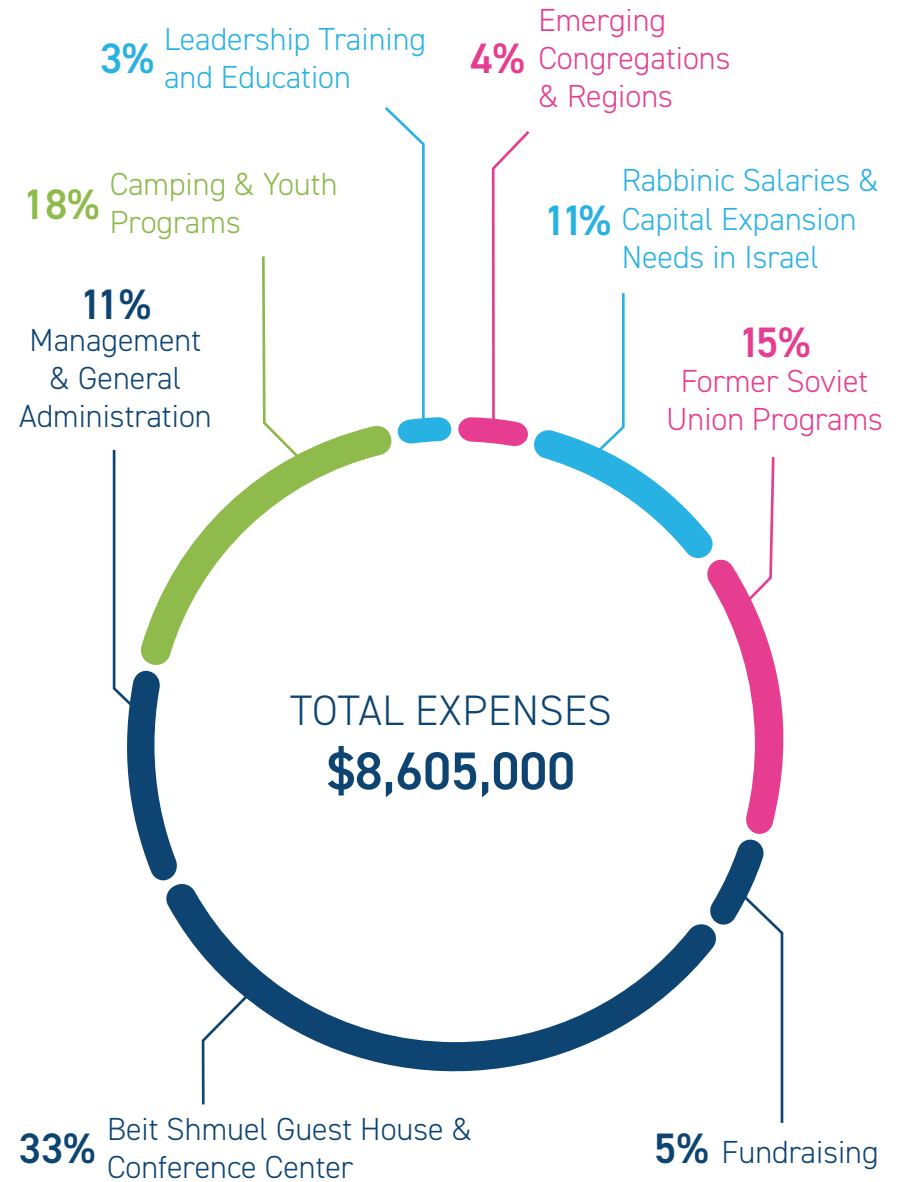
During the summer of 2017, 21 Netzer summer camps, outside of North America, hosted more than 2,800 campers and over 640 young adult counselors.



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A LEGACY OF COURAGE AND COMMUNITY MARGIT VADASZ

After the Holocaust, **Margit Vadasz** and her teenage son, Peter, left Hungary for Australia. Like so many other survivors, Margit arrived in Sydney with a small suitcase and a determination to survive.

Margit made clothes on her ancient sewing machine, working day and night while caring for Peter who suffered from schizophrenia.

Eventually, Margit opened a clothing store, purchased the building, and moved into a small flat above the store. With the help of a fellow congregant at North Shore Temple Emanuel, Margit began to build a real estate investment portfolio.

Business genius, devoted mother, and dedicated to her local Jewish community, Margit honored the memory of the victims of the Holocaust by supporting Israel and Jewish causes.

Margit bequeathed a large part of her estate to the Progressive Community in Australia via the United Israel Appeal. In 2017, the World Union became a significant beneficiary of Margit's estate.

CREATE YOUR LEGACY TO THE WORLD UNION

Margit's generous bequest demonstrated her deep commitment to the Jewish community and the values she held dear.

Through your will or other estate plan, you can name WUPJ as a beneficiary of your estate. The lasting impact of this gift will allow us to continue our important work for years to come.

To leave your legacy, visit wupj.org/donate or email us at wupj@wupj.org.



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