



World Union for Progressive Judaism in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine.

Nearly 30 years ago, Jewish life began a renaissance in the FSU and **today, we are proud to operate 35 congregations in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, spanning 11 time zones, are part of the World Union family.**

In the past 8 years **four synagogue-centers in our capital cities in the FSU: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Minsk and, Kiev** purchased by the World Union.

Five rabbis working in our FSU communities. Belarus: Rabbi Grisha Abramovich; Russia: Rabbi Alexander Lyskovoy Moscow Congregation, **Rabbi Leonid Bimbat**, Moscow Congregation; **Ukraine: Rabbi Alex Dukhovny**, Kiev Congregation, **Rabbi Julia Gris**, Congregation Shirat Ha-Yam.

Recognizing a growing need for Russian-speaking Reform rabbis, professional educators, and community organizers to support the entire Jewish community (not only Reform) across the FSU and the world, the World Union launched the most unique and successful project **the Institute for Modern Jewish Studies in Moscow** in 2015 in cooperation with the Russian State University of the Humanities (RSUH), Abraham Geiger College (Berlin) and Potsdam University. The Institute is a high-level academic training program, which prepares the next generation of Russian-speaking Jewish professionals for work in Russian-speaking communities in the FSU and around the world.

Formal and informal education: The Reform movement in FSU operates both a Kindergarten and Sunday school network in the formal education framework. Hundreds of students are studying according to unique educational program that was developed by our educational team.

Netzer Olami FSU youth movement: Netzer is one of the largest Jewish youth movements in the FSU, operating youth clubs and holding regular weekly activities. The summer camps are the highlight of the year for the youth movement. Each year, participants in WUPJ's activities in the FSU grow in number. FSU summer camps and programs had a record of over 1100 participants of all ages with an ever-lengthening waiting list.

One of our priorities is to expand the **twinning project in the FSU**. Twinning connects FSU congregations with other Reform communities from around the world, supporting and sustaining them by fostering meaningful bonds with the worldwide Reform movement, creating fundraising opportunities, and connecting us as a global Jewish Reform family.

The twinning program has a positive impact on those congregations where enough effort is being put into its successful operation. While majority of congregations have at least one twin community from the U.K. or Northern America, the relationships in many cases tend to die out, and the focus should be on maintaining the existing relationships (constant communication, trips, etc.).

A wide range of religious and educational publications were also produced in Russian over the past year.

2018-2019 Highlights:

The WUPJ in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine is delighted to share our activity and work over the last two years.

1. Community Development

- The WUPJ Conference in Odessa, held in late October 2018, was a long-awaited event for the members of our Community. Could the Maskillim Jews, who arrived in Odessa at the beginning of the 19th century, assume that after 200 years, Reform Judaism will not only exist in Odessa, but also gather its supporters for the Conference in this wonderful coastal city.
The theme of the Conference “Strong Diaspora – Strong Israel” was expressed in the unity and cohesion of the staff, volunteers, and members of our communities and in the desire to develop our movement in the future. The members of the Shirat Ha-Yam community could take part in religious services of the conference, communicate with representatives of the communities of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, listen to lectures by teachers and rabbis and feel themselves part of a large reform community.

- Tu BShvat was celebrated in Progressive congregations in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus this year, with many hosting a community ‘seder’, learning about the significance of the holiday, and planting trees. FSU congregations hosted several celebratory and significant community events for the holiday. A festive outing had members planting hundreds of trees in their community gardens – more than double last year’s tree planting event, and not counting the trees funded and plated by their sister communities, who gathered in Israel to plant trees on behalf of their partnership and in an effort to “help Israel bloom”.

- During Sukkot celebration in October, the Sandra Breslauer Beit Simha Center in Minsk hosted its annual “Readings in the Sukkah” where guests took part in reading from Ecclesiastes (“Kohelet”) and prayers for peace in eight languages, as by Irina Belskia, Beit Simha’s Jewish educator. Festival participants developed the

initiative to create an interfaith text for reflection to read at various memorial services after a peace prayer.

2. Leadership

Third Pedagogical Conference of Reform Educators brought together 30 educators from Reform congregations in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine to Gomel, Belarus for three days of learning and sharing best practices in early childhood education and Jewish education. Along with the children of the Hatikva kindergarten in Gomel and their parents, the conference hosted more than 170 individuals for Jewish text study, Hebrew lessons, and Israel workshops. The Jewish community of Gomel, the Kadima Reform congregation, the local Jewish community, Keshet women's organization, Hesed, Netzer, the global Zionist Reform Youth movement, also took active roles in leading experiential activities as well as representatives of the education department of the city.

The conference focused on the subject of the "Jewish home" and the role of education at home, in families, and between generations. Participants studied Jewish texts with Rabbi Grisha Abramovich, explored the links between programs in Jewish communities, participated in art workshops, and enjoyed a musical presentation on "My home and my family." Master classes, led by the talented teachers of the local "Atikva" kindergarten, addressed how to talk about Shabbat at home and baked Jewish deserts such as *ponchikes*, *lekach*, *rugelach* and *teiglach*.

3. Rabbinic Training

In 2019 the first graduates of the Institute for Modern Jewish Studies – Dan Menzhynov, Artem Kozliner, Shimon Nikitenko and Daria Sevastsyanchyk – received their bachelor's degrees in Jewish Theology from the Russian State University for Humanities in Moscow.

4. Netzer Youth Movement

- The Purimshpeil is a traditional, fun Purim event where theatrical productions are held for communities focusing on the events of Megillat Esther and elements related to the Jewish people and its history. This year, Netzer FSU brought three teams from youth clubs in Minsk (Belarus), Kiev (Ukraine) and Moscow (Russia); they came away with three awards:
 - Netzer Minsk (Belarus) won "Best Scenario" as they challenged traditional interpretations of the Megilla and the story of Purim.
 - Netzer Kiev (Ukraine) took the second place in the competition of the first day with their "Mesiba-25" performance, noting their love for the festival.

- Top honors went to Netzer Moscow (Russia) who won the Grand Prize with their skit, “Change Yourself to Change the World”. The story presented 1960s-era hippies fighting against the war in Vietnam and the media propaganda. The message questioned how much one individual can change the world, and suggested that by finding other like-minded individuals to rally together around a cause, more impact can be achieved.

Overall, the annual festival brought together Progressive and Reform Jews, leaders and rabbis, of all ages, to celebrate the holiday and the strength of our movement. It was a joyful and exciting cultural event for the entire region.

- 60 youth and young adults came together in Belarus for a Netzer, Reform Zionist youth movement, conference. With students of the University of Moscow in attendance, participants explored ways to advance Netzer in the coming years, including strengthening current projects in communities in the region, and developing new ones to meet growing needs among the next generation.

With the phrase by Ben Zuma as its focus, “הלמד מכל אדם—איזה הוא חכם”, Who is one that is wise? One who learns from every person,” participants spent three days in workshops, learning sessions, prayers and more around such topics as: Zionism, our global Progressive Movement, the Jewish Calendar, My Shabbat, Jewish Mysticism and more. Highlights of the conference including evening “audio sessions” learning Jewish text with local rabbis and rabbinic students, and coming together for Kabbalat Shabbat.

An important part of the conference was strategizing Netzer’s vision for growth across the Former Soviet Union. Conclusions reached by participants and new ideas identified as necessary for change included:

- Investing in education
- Developing local, young leadership
- Increasing collaborations with other Jewish organizations
- Increasing the number of participants in Netzer youth clubs and summer camps

5. Public Relations and Advertising

We increase social media presence and exposure on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and update on a regular basis.

Please follow FSU activities on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for more updates and photos.

Rita Fruman
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