Throughout history, the Jewish people have been tested by persecution, exiles, and traumas. The Torah details many stories of resilience: Moses leading the people out of Egypt, Ruth persevering through loss, Esther courageously facing peril, and David overcoming the giant Goliath. The message that these stories impart is this: throughout our history, we have faced seemingly insurmountable challenges, but remained resolute and emerged stronger. In 2023, we have experienced division, trauma, and tragedy. Yet we remain dedicated to reflection, reconnection, and unity within our Movement and the global Jewish community.

REFLECTION, RESILIENCE, AND CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF REFORM JUDAISM IN A PIVOTAL YEAR

When discussing the Jewish experience of 2023, there is a pre- and post-October 7th world. As the year began, we were excitedly preparing to celebrate URJ’s 150th anniversary. Our joy at reaching this milestone cannot be exaggerated. In December, we gathered in Washington, D.C. for three days to celebrate how far we’ve come, reflect on how dramatically our Movement has transformed Judaism and the Jewish People, and recommit to building a bolder, better tomorrow together.

Throughout the year, we uplifted voices from across our movement that examined what being a Reform Jew means, what we’ve accomplished in the past 150 years, and how we can work together to build a vibrant, vital future. We also centered the voices of those who are too often pushed to the margins of the Jewish community, including Jews of Color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ Jews.

UNITED IN SORROW AND SOLIDARITY, COMMITTED TO JUSTICE AND PEACE

The week before October 7th saw us gathered to protest the proposed judicial overhauls in Israel. Then, with Hamas’ brutal attack and the resulting war to protect our homeland, the right-
left, Orthodox-Reform-secular, rich-poor, and Ashkenazi-Mizrachi-Sephardi divides were fused together. The URJ acted quickly to provide resources for individuals and congregations in North America, suggest actions congregations could take to support our Israeli siblings, and compile a guide about antisemitism in a post-October 7th world. The events of October 7th reminded us that our lives and the lives of our Israeli siblings, though oceans apart, are inexorably bound together. We will not forsake these bonds, nor will we forsake our prophetic imperatives that the Jewish people maintain solidarity in our commitment to honor our shared humanity by furthering equity, justice, and peace for all God's children. We continue to urge for the resolution to the horrific hostage situation and agonize over the tremendous loss of life and displacement of innocent Israelis and Gazans. We have repeatedly called on the Israeli government and international community to ensure that desperately needed humanitarian aid reaches innocent Palestinians in Gaza.

**FACING THE FUTURE WITH COURAGE AND HOPE**

The founders of the Reform Movement in the 19th century believed that the messianic time of universal harmony and peace was attainable in their lifetimes. In hindsight, we know of the trials our people have endured and the challenges the world has faced since then. We see the gargantuan task of building the world we envision. Yet, as we celebrated our 150th year, we continued to dream big and recommitted ourselves to our mission.

Our congregations, camp communities, donors, partners, activists, youth leaders, and allies have continued to inspire us during this past year. May the coming year bring peace and wholeness (*shalom*), justice (*tzedek*) and healing, the safe return of our hostages, and may joy and peace (*shayachut* and *simcha*) prevail.

Signed,

Rabbi Rick Jacobs (he/him)  
URJ President

Shelley Niceley Groff (she/her)  
URJ North American Board Chair