Can we get an amen? Marin rabbi joins staff at Glide

By MARIA CHERRY / MARCH 3, 2023

When people experienced something out of the ordinary at Glide International Church services on Sunday, Michael Leon had the people not only hear him deliver a sermon in a guest service, “That’s Rabbi Michael Leon.”

“I’ve been hanging out at congregations for 10 years,” Leon, 48, told the cheering crowd, “that’s the thing. As you can hear, I’ve been hired to work right here.”

After 12 years as San Rafael Congregation’s senior rabbi, Leon will step down in the next year to become staff rabbi at the Glide Center for Social Justice in San Francisco. It may seem like an unlikely move, but for those who know Leon and Glide, it is a great philosophically.

While he will not be part of Glide’s full-time staff, he is considered a key player in the spiritual development and culture of the Bay Area’s largest interfaith congregation.

“I am uniquely suited with my background, history, training and understanding of Glide’s mission, and what they’re looking for, as another source of strength,” Leon told J. “I want to help bring in the interfaith, social justice community and𝐆𝐥𝐢𝐝𝐞’𝐬 𝐛𝐨𝐫𝐧-in- AssertionError.”

Glide had a rabbi on staff for years, in the 1990s, “Rabbi Abraham Heschel, he was with us for five years,” recalled former Civil War vet, the church’s former senior rabbi, “Heschel continued as a ‘Senior Rabbi’.”

“When I moved here that training was.db and wanted to work interfaith and be the congregational pastor, I just started up on my own, we had a great time.”

He is a member of the board of directors and leader of the “For the Right to Peace” project, which is a social justice and social movement, leading among other initiatives.

“Glide will be a catalyst for progressive Jewish community involvement in the ‘For the Right to Peace’ project. I hope to bring in new people and work in the civil rights work and, at the same time, be a bridge for those who may have been turned off to social justice work, and start moving them toward social justice participation.”

During his interview, Leon said, “I want to help bring in the interfaith, spiritual development and culture of the Bay Area’s largest interfaith congregation.”

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“Glide is a community that has been at the forefront of many progressive social justice causes.”

“I’ve been hanging out at synagogues for 18 years. But the Bay Area is the place where I’ve been,” Leon said, “I’ve been hired to work right here.”

Leon said he hosted the social justice work that brought him to Glide. At Bethel Church, he said people often refer to him as the “Passover Rabbi.” He was there on March 2, 2023, “I’m here for you,” he told the congregation.

The rabbi said he was unique in his work, “I want to be a source of support, as a source of comfort, as a source of love, as a source of prayer, as a source of healing.”

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