

NORTHBROOK STAR

New Rabbi, David Shmidt Chapman, joins Congregation Beth Shalom in Northbrook

By Myrna Petlicki | Pioneer Press | Jul 11, 2022 at 3:38 pm

Newly ordained Rabbi David Shmidt Chapman joined Congregation Beth Shalom in Northbrook on July 1. He became part of the clergy team with Rabbi Aaron Melman and Cantor Steven Stoehr.

Chapman accepted the position at Congregation Beth Shalom because, “This is an amazing community,” he said. “It’s both a really strong community, and a community that wants to grow and evolve and become even stronger. It’s in a place that I consider home. And the thing that probably compelled me most about this opportunity is I like being on a team and here at Beth Shalom, not only is there a really wonderful professional staff, but there’s a great clergy team and I’m already learning so much from them and feeling part of something bigger.”

“We’re absolutely thrilled to have him be a part of our extended family,” said Congregation President Dr. Bob Spector. Chapman was chosen after an exhaustive search that involved a search committee that Spector created from the synagogue’s Board of Trustees, the clergy, and even the congregation.

Chapman was the right choice because, “He has so much energy, he is so creative, he’s so well-spoken,” Spector said. “He really is a lovely human being. His family is amazing.”

They were impressed by Chapman’s “combination of his learnedness, his ability to articulate — to offer inspiring words of spirituality to us — and his general nature,” Spector explained.

Chapman grew up in Wilmette and is a New Trier High School graduate. He left the area to attend the University of North Carolina, lived abroad for a while, and then returned to Chicago to pursue a career as a theater director.

“I was on the faculty for many years of the Cherubs program, the Northwestern University’s summer high school theater program,” he said. “I worked at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater as an assistant director for a season. I worked in other Chicago theaters as a director and assistant director.”

After that, Chapman lived in Vietnam for a year and France for six months, directing theater in both of those countries. “I kind of landed in New York at the end of that period,” Chapman said. “I lived in New York from 2008 until a couple of days ago.”

While in New York, he assistant-directed shows on Broadway and all over New York. Then he decided to make his first career shift because he wasn’t enjoying directing as much as he thought he should. He began working at a Jewish foundation and discovered it was a good fit.

“I enjoyed working for a Jewish organization. I enjoyed helping causes that I cared about,” Chapman explained.

His decision to become a rabbi was “a slow process,” he said. “I had a wonderful Jewish upbringing in Wilmette. We were members of Beth Hillel which is now Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah. I had a bar mitzvah, I had really nice Jewish experiences but nothing that ever made me think about becoming a rabbi.”

When he moved to New York, Chapman had joined Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, the largest LGBTQ+ synagogue in the world. “It is an incredible community and CBST really reignited my love for Judaism,” he said.

He joined the Board of Directors of the synagogue, eventually becoming its vice president.

“I got to know the clergy there, who are some of my most important mentors and teachers, and definitely among the people who got me thinking about being a rabbi,” he said.

In the summer of 2018, Chapman began attending the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. During his second and third years of study, Chapman simultaneously served as the rabbinic intern at a Manhattan synagogue.

His fourth year at rabbinical school, Chapman simultaneously served as student Rabbi at Southwest Orlando Jewish Congregation, commuting to Florida from New York.

Chapman earned the Cyrus Adler Prize for the most outstanding student in his Rabbinical School senior class. He was ordained in May of this year.

Chapman credits his “incredibly supportive husband,” Jonathan Chapman, for being able to make this career transition. The couple has a five-year-old son.

“I feel really fortunate that I can try to serve the Jewish community and the world in this moment,” Chapman said.

A variety of events have been scheduled to welcome Rabbi Chapman, including a series of themed Services Under the Skies open to the public. On July 22, the theme will be “Show Your Team Spirit,” with people encouraged to wear apparel from their favorite team. On Aug. 5, “Feeling Groovy” will be a chance for everyone to dress in ‘60s apparel.

For details on this and other events, visit bethshalomnb.org.

