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### Rabbi Hertz: A Visionary And 'Community Conscience'

**DAVID SACHS**  
Editorial Assistant

**R**ichard C. Hertz, beloved rabbi of Temple Beth El for 46 years, died Saturday from complications of a stroke he suffered nearly two years earlier.

In his 29 years as senior rabbi and 17 years as rabbi emeritus, Rabbi Hertz left his mark on the temple and the entire community. A frequent spokesman for the Jewish community in the media, he was in the vanguard of interfaith relations and human rights. He was also a teacher of religion and Jewish studies at the University of Detroit Mercy for nearly three decades.

His most striking accomplishment may have been overseeing the building of the current Temple Beth El at Telegraph and 14 Mile roads in Bloomfield Township. The sanctuary, bright and spacious with a high, vaulted ceiling, was designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki and dedicated in 1972, when the temple moved from its building in Detroit at Woodward and Gladstone.

"Temple Beth El was the temple he built and that's where his heart is," said his wife, Renda Hertz.

Said Beth El Senior Rabbi Daniel B. Syme, "Rabbi Hertz's vision and determination gave us one of the greatest sanctuaries in the world."

Rabbi Syme spoke at Rabbi Hertz' funeral Tuesday, appropriately in that sanctuary, along with Beth El Rabbi David Castiglione and Rabbi Shelton Zimmerman, president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

Said Rabbi Syme, "In the Torah, God said to Moses, 'Build Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among thee.' Very few people have heard that command as an imperative. Rabbi Richard Hertz was such a man. And therefore how fitting it is today that we gather in this sanctuary, this temple, that was his greatest dream, and one of his finest living legacies to future generations."

Rabbi Hertz was instrumental in the planning and fund-raising for the new building, meeting several times a week for nearly two years on the project, said then-temple president Robert Carver. Mrs. Hertz recalls that the mortgage for the new building was burned at the rabbi's retirement ceremony in 1982. To have the building paid for when he stepped down "was very important to him," she said.

Said Rabbi Zimmerman, "This place represents part of the vision of his dream: pulling together of the aesthetic and religious, the spiritual and the artistic. He loved being a rabbi and he loved this place."

To Rabbi Hertz, being a rabbi meant caring for his congregants and for the community at large. He was known at the temple for his dignity and eloquence, speaking out against injustice wherever it occurred. He shared his leadership with dozens of civic and charitable organizations, spreading the word of religious understanding and racial equality.

"He had an innate dignity, which reflected his high standard of morality and his love of his people," said Rabbi Irvin S. Groner of Congregation Shaarey Zedek. "He was the voice of conscience of our community on behalf of people of all races, religions and creeds."

Rabbi Syme said, "In civil rights, or interreligious cooperation, the building of the state of Israel, everyone in this community knew the name of Rabbi Richard Hertz."

Rabbi Hertz was often a spokesman for the Jewish community in the local media and on the *Voice of America* and CNN. He hosted a local television program called *Open Doors* for many years and appeared on ABC radio's *Message of Israel*. He also wrote Torah commentaries and an occasional book review over the years for the *Jewish News*.

Richard Hertz was born in 1916 in St. Paul, Minn., and was ordained a reform rabbi in 1942 at Hebrew Union College. He earned a Ph.D. in religious education from Northwestern University in 1948. After serving 11 years at two congregations in Chicago, he became senior rabbi at Beth El in 1953, succeeding Rabbi B. Benedict Glazer, who had died suddenly nearly a year earlier.

Teaching has always been an important part of Rabbi Hertz's life.

"He was very involved with the youth of the temple," said Beth El treasurer Dennis Frank. "He guided people of my generation to the rabbinate."

Rabbi Hertz taught at the Jesuit-affiliated University of Detroit Mercy since 1970. "He taught the Holocaust, introduction to Judaism, biblical studies and modern Jewish-European history," said Gloria Albrecht, chair of the university's religious studies department. "He was quite a well-rounded scholar."

When he retired from Beth El as senior rabbi in 1982, an endowed chair in Jewish studies was established in Rabbi Hertz's honor at the university.

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Rabbi Hertz was past vice president of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, past president of the Wamplers Ministerial Association and a long-time member of the Economic Club of Detroit.

Rabbi Hertz and his wife were honored by the Histadrut Campaign of Detroit, which established the Richard and Renda Hertz Youth Center in Safed, Israel. The center was dedicated in 1995.

Rabbi Hertz's brother, Fred Hertz, was a quadriplegic as a result of polio but still became a federal judge in Chicago. Following his stroke, the rabbi drew inspiration from his brother's physical achievements, said Renda Hertz. He wanted the congregation to know that though handicapped, he could still have a life.

"He never complained," she said.

Rabbi Syme said the congregation "rallied to his support in an outpouring of caring unprecedented in my experience. Hundreds of you whose lives Dick had touched now surrounded him and Renda with love."

Mrs. Hertz said her husband's last appearance before his congregation was at Yom Kippur, blessing the congregation.

Rabbi Syme recalled, "On this pulpit, in his wheelchair and summoning every bit of his strength, he whispered, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you.' It was one of the single greatest acts of courage I had ever witnessed."

In an article he wrote for the temple bulletin during his illness, Rabbi Hertz wrote that he was overwhelmed by the support he received from the temple membership: "I now know that I've had a blessed ministry as your rabbi."

Rabbi Hertz is also survived by his daughters, Nadine Urben of West Bloomfield, Ruth Joyaux and fiancé Sam Canon; son and daughter-in-law Bradford and Stefanie Ebner of California; grandchildren Randy and Melanie Wertheimer, Jordan Wertheimer, Daniel Joyaux, Brooke Ebner, Alexa Ebner and Grant Ebner. He was the brother of the late Judge Frederick Hertz.

Interment at Beth El Memorial Park. Contributors may be made to the Rabbi Richard C. and Renda Hertz Gift of Life Fund, Temple Beth El, 7400 Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48301. □





Rabbi Richard C. Hertz

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"It was his voice, in 1959, before it was  
Israel. He also wrote Torah commen-  
`in' to talk about Soviet Jewry. The trip  
taries and an occasional book review  
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over the years for the Jewish News.  
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their fears and their anxieties and their  
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University in 1948. After serving 11  
In 1963, Rabbi Hertz was the first  
years at two congregations in Chicago,  
rabbi to be received in a private audi-  
he became senior rabbi at Beth El in  
ence by Pope Paul VI. In 1974, under  
1953, succeeding Rabbi B. Benedict  
auspices of the American Jewish  
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