

# President's Column

*by Mara S. Ruff*

At the time I joined Decalogue in 2016, I underestimated the value of belonging to such a society and its purpose. Although the traditions of my culture were instilled in me from birth and I hold my heritage close, I did not begin seeking out specific Jewish experiences until after law school. As we embark on a new bar year, I find myself reflecting on my journey, both personally and professionally, that has led me to this moment in my career. I began my legal career as a litigator in legal services, representing abused women and children, and slowly migrated to the other side, representing Jewish systems and agencies as an advocate and lobbyist, working on a variety of vital health and human service issues important to the Jewish community and equally important to underserved and underrepresented non-Jewish communities. Upon reflection, two common themes intersect, being Jewish and being a lawyer.

What does it really mean to be a Jewish lawyer and why is this so meaningful to me? Being Jewish is very personal. Only you have the authority to shape your meaning, by your own actions and mindset. Perhaps you shape your Jewishness in the most religious ways, by carrying out your faith as an observant Jew, keeping kosher, following the rules of Shabbat, and attending shul every Saturday morning. Or maybe you keep kosher at home, but only go to synagogue on the occasional Shabbat and on the High Holidays. Or maybe you do not attend synagogue at all and carry out your Judaism through tikkun olam, by repairing the world, and giving to others that need help. However you define it, being Jewish means something to you. It is a distinct, unique, and subtle difference that keeps us all rooted together, no matter how you practice or don't practice, in culture and tradition, religious or secular, and connected as a community.

Choosing to be a member of the Decalogue Society of Lawyers, one of the oldest Jewish bar associations, means something too. The dictionary defines a lawyer as "a person whose profession is to represent clients in a court of law or to advise or act for clients in other legal matters." In practice, we know that being a lawyer is so much more. Being a lawyer means many things. To some, it ignites power. For others, it empowers. As lawyers, one of the greatest gifts we have is our ability to represent a purpose, speak for the unheard, change a system, or undo a wrong.

As members of the bar, we are provided the ability to help, to do better, to be better. I chose to become a lawyer for specific reasons, to help, and although I did not choose my faith, Judaism provides me the foundation in how I live my truth, personally and professionally.

I now realize that I became a member of Decalogue because being Jewish and being a lawyer means something to me. It is not just about our faith or our legal profession by itself. We, as a society, are compelled to be part of Decalogue because of our commitment to what it means to be a lawyer, on how we define our faith, or stand proud as leaders in our own community, rooted together in unique cultures and traditions. Being Jewish and/or being a lawyer means something to you too.

I am humbled and honored to be your President, standing proud as a Jewish lawyer, leading a bar that works tirelessly towards eliminating hate, raising awareness about anti-Semitism, and eradicating injustice. Decalogue's success does not only depend on the strength and dedication of our membership, but on the long-standing and valued friendships, partnerships, and support we receive from the legal community at large, the affinity bar associations, and the judiciary.

I look forward to another hard, difficult, rewarding, work-filled year leading the efforts of a historic organization, with a vital mission grounded in Jewish values, where lawyers choose to belong, a membership with a purpose, a meaning, a home.

*Mara S. Ruff is President of the Decalogue Society of Lawyers and Vice President of Government Affairs for Sinai Health System.*