

NFTY

From: NFTY
Sent: Friday, January 25, 2013 1:00 PM
To: NFTY
Subject: Important Information about NFTY Convention Accommodations



[Website](#) | [Blog](#) | [Subscribe](#)



January 2013 | Sh'vat 5773

Dear Parents,

We look forward to welcoming your teen to our upcoming NFTY Convention in Los Angeles, from February 15-19.

NFTY Convention is the premiere conference for Jewish teens—always full of groundbreaking moments, transformative worship and terrific concerts, as well as workshops and plenary sessions that feature dynamic speakers and outstanding artists. Above all, NFTY Convention creates and promotes a powerful sense of Jewish identity and community, highlighting the responsibilities we have to ourselves and to each other. In that spirit, we want to share with you news about this year's NFTY Convention facility and how it relates to event programming. To fully understand this matter, please read this letter in its entirety.

Since the earliest days of our Movement, pursuing social justice has been a cornerstone of what it means to be a Reform Jew. Protecting the rights of workers and ensuring their dignity and well-being have long been among Reform Judaism's social justice priorities. Today, these efforts often focus on the rights of the men and women in the hotel industry, many of whom endure exceedingly difficult working conditions, including demanding shifts and backbreaking physical exertion.

In 2006, the Union for Reform Judaism became a founding member of [INMEX](#), Informed Meetings Exchange. Created by the labor movement, INMEX was designed to uncover and list hotels with pending labor disputes. As an INMEX member, the URJ made a commitment to avoid doing business with the hotels on the INMEX website. Today, this list is maintained on the [Hotel Workers Rising](#) website, but our commitment to consult the list before signing a hotel contract remains, and applies not only to the URJ, also to NFTY, our camps, and affiliates.

Unfortunately, in the process of selecting the NFTY Convention hotel for this year, we made a mistake and neglected to consult the list before contracting with a hotel. The LAX Hilton, this year's NFTY Convention hotel, has an ongoing labor dispute and is listed on the Hotel Workers Rising website. Had we known of the LAX Hilton's presence on the list at the time we signed the contract, we never would have done so.

Our first task after learning of the mistake was to see if the NFTY event could be moved. Trying to move a complex gathering of more than 1,000 attendees to a different venue, or even to several venues, a mere two months before the event, however, has proven impossible. There simply is not adequate space available elsewhere in the Los Angeles area for this type of conference.

We then addressed the question of whether to cancel or postpone the event. In close consultation with the NFTY leadership and the Reform Movement's Commission on Social Action, the URJ Oversight Committee decided not to do so. We were well aware that at the time we learned of our mistake, more than 800 people already had registered for Convention and booked travel, which in many instances included nonrefundable air fares. Further, the window of opportunity for high school students is limited. Rescheduling or postponing the event until next year would prevent numerous NFTYites from participating altogether.

In all fairness, we could not penalize participants for our error.

Going forward, we have taken steps to ensure such a mistake will not recur. Furthermore, with so many of our most engaged NFTYites together at Convention, we will have an ideal opportunity to highlight workers' rights issues and t'shuvah, including the importance of taking responsibility for our own mistakes. The NFTY leadership is working with staff from NFTY and our Religious Action Center to develop appropriate programming around the challenges hotel workers face. During the Convention, NFTY and URJ leadership will meet with the hotel management to share our concerns, and to hear their views directly.

Of course, we do not know how the local union organizers will react to our presence. In the past they have sometimes protested national conventions at this hotel, and it is possible that our conference will face a protest while we are there. We are doing everything possible—including drawing on our longstanding relationship with the national union—to avoid such a circumstance, but it remains a possibility. Whether or not protesters are present, participants will be prohibited from leaving the hotel without adult supervision. When our group does leave the hotel for off-site events, NFTY-ites will board busses in a controlled area, away from any protesters who may be present. Our staff will, of course, monitor the situation continuously throughout the Convention.

This year's NFTY study theme is *"Hashomer Achi Anochi"* - Am I My Brother's Keeper? NFTY Studies Our Responsibilities Toward Others." The lessons we have learned—and will continue to learn—from this experience will create a most fitting case study, enabling our young people to reflect on their responsibilities to ensure that all workers are treated with dignity. These lessons and participants' Convention experiences will guide NFTY and our Movement as we move forward.

We look forward to an exciting and memorable Convention! Wishing you a meaningful Shabbat.

Subie Banaszynski
NFTY Director
sbanaszynski@urj.org

Melissa Frey
NFTY Convention Director
mfrey@urj.org

© Union for Reform Judaism | North American Federation of Temple Youth
633 Third Avenue, 7th Floor | New York, NY 10017 | (212) 650-4070 | (212) 650-4064 Fax
You are receiving this message because of your affiliation with NFTY.

To opt-out or change your email subscriptions, visit www.nfty.org/email. Changing your email preferences with NFTY does not change your email preferences for the Union for Reform Judaism's other programs or services.
The URJ does not sell, market or distribute e-mail addresses (see urj.org/privacy).