



## Association of Art Museum Directors

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Recently I heard a story on National Public Radio about rabbis teaming up with writers to improve and enhance their sermons. Approximately 20 rabbis from Los Angeles and beyond participated in *Launching Up Your Holiday Sermons*, a workshop that paired them with screenwriters. The Board of Rabbis of Southern California has held the annual seminar for rabbis and rabbinical students in advance of the High Holy Days for the past decade, but this is the first year that the seminar has featured a workshop with screenwriters. With the help of these professionals the rabbis learned to tackle predictable subjects, such as the state of the economy and the Middle East, in novel ways.

Lately we have been seeing more and more of this kind of collaboration, and I find it fascinating that the religious community is leading the way. My son attended nursery school at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for two years. In that time I became familiar with the programming and wide breath of services that they offer. Over the past few years the Cathedral has fallen on harder times as less traffic walked through the doors. The Cathedral's leadership confronted this implicit challenge by revamping and expanding their programming. From the traditional Blessing of the Animals (which, if you have attended, you know is a real hoot) to the screening of *Nosferatu* during Halloween weekend. And most recently a collaboration with a variety of organizations and artists to present *The Value of Water*, a Cathedral-wide art exhibition that serves as a platform for a multi-year initiative on global climate change. The Cathedral is expanding its reach without leaving behind what they are first and foremost: the largest cathedral in the world and a place for quiet contemplation and reverence. They are using their place in the community to foster change and greater understanding, to preserve history and to help promote cross-cultural dialogue. Sound familiar?

What seems quite clear is that the leadership at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine understands that they are no less a Cathedral if they embrace art and animals, just as a rabbi is no less a spiritual leader if he or she looks to engage an audience with humor and wit. This holds true for art museums as well: museums are no less museums if they expand their reach beyond their traditional role as repositories of history. The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, no matter what it does, it cannot be anything but a place where you walk through the doors and say "wow". By presenting the best art from around the world, art museums have much the same impact. but this does not mean that they cannot and should not be more, too.

Religious organizations and art museums are often seen as insular organizations that serve specific audiences. the religiously devout and the cultural elites, respectively. Both are also trying to demonstrate that they have value for and provide opportunities to *everyone* in their community. Religious organizations have clearly made a lot of progress, and there may be lessons for the museum community to learn about community engagement and the management of an often-shifting role. Ultimately, there is much in common in how these respective segments of the nonprofit world serve and seek to engage their communities. It is just about getting people to walk through the door.

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