**Rabbi Sperling Comes Out of Retirement to Join Beth El.**

**By Onofrio Castiglia. *The Winchester Star*, July 23, 2018.**

WINCHESTER – Scott Sperling, a local rabbi active in faith-based community organizing, is out of retirement and returning to his position at the head of Beth El Congregation in Winchester.

“I’m very excited,” Sperling said on Friday. “They are the nicest group of people for whom I have ever worked.”

Beth El, made up of 85 regional Jewish households, is located at 520 Fairmont Ave. and serves the Jewish population throughout much of the Shenandoah Valley. The nearest synagogues are in Northern Virginia and Maryland.

Sperling, 68, has been a rabbi for more than 40 years. A native of Los Angeles, he came to Winchester in 2010 after six years as the director of the Mid-Atlantic Region for the Union of Reform Judaism in Washington, D.C.

“I was the functional equivalent of a bishop,” he said.

But Judaism is a non-hierarchical religion and congregations are responsible for the hiring of their own rabbis. After the economic downturn of 2008 cost him his job in D.C., Sperling said he was lucky enough to get hired by the congregation in Winchester. It was a good fit since he’s spent most of his career working in small cities, towns and rural areas.

Sperling retired from Beth El in 2016 but remained a resident of Frederick County.

His retirement “lasted less than six months” before he returned to service as an interim rabbi for a congregation in Maryland.

Rabbi Peter Grumbacher, who drove in from Wilmington, Del., has served as interim rabbi since Sperling left.

But now Sperling and Beth El have decided to resume their relationship, he said.

“They are in great shape,” Sperling said, praising Grumbacher’s work. The congregation has been growing and taking on a heightened interest in volunteersim.

Sperling’s job as rabbi will resume this week.

Sperling has also been active with the Valley Interfaith Council (VIC), a collection of local faith leaders and church members who stage demonstrations and work with local charities such as Habitat for Humanity and the Winchester Area Temporary Thermal Shelter (WATTS).

Sperling said he approaches community organizing with “seriousness and energy” and plans to continue with VIC.

“If you do something you love it really isn’t work,” Sperling said of his position as a rabbi. “It’s what I like to be.”

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