

CLOSTER, N.J. — A Closter rabbi is visiting university students to keep them connected to their Jewish faith and their communities.

David-Seth Kirshner of Temple Emanu-El located on Piermont Road is in his second year of conducting the Keshet [Connection] program which aims to keep Jewish young adults connected to their faith.

"College years are the age when many young adults form a religious identity," the rabbi said. "Ironically, they are at a place where much of the ingredients like clergy, leadership, and Jewish life are absent from their lives. We want reach these students so that they are tethered to the synagogue."



When students can't meet with Kirshner or other synagogue staff in the area, Kirshner will travel to their schools. The rabbi this year has been to University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, Syracuse and Tulane Universities.

He also utilizes web conferences to connect with the students at least once every two weeks. "All of them are really in different places," Kirshner said. "Some are graduating and ready to start their careers and their lives. Others are just dipping their toes in college or Greek life, so it is kind of vast." Topics of discussion include what they plan on doing during winter break and if they spend time at Hillel houses; discrimination, social phenomena, or political discussions; and how students feel about encountering and addressing those controversial topics.

Some students might need mentoring to guide them through interfaith relationships.

"I have known the 18-year-olds since they were 10, and I think I've officiated at all of their bar and bat mitzvahs," he said. "I've seen the level of maturity and thoughtfulness develop amongst students in the program."

Kirshner didn't have a program like Keshet when he was in school, but he believes it will help influence the students over the years.

"It's reimagining what synagogue and clergy life look like," the rabbi said of modern Judaism. "It's not your father's synagogue and not your father's Oldsmobile. It has to be more dynamic."