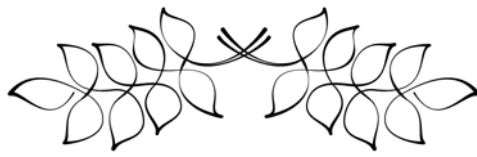


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1001 Central Avenue
Wilmette, Illinois 60091
tel: 847/ 251-2675
fax: 847/ 251-6002

www.sukkatshalom.org



CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

It has now been a year since we moved into our own building at 1001 Central Avenue in Wilmette. In this last year much has changed about our congregation, but a great deal has remained constant. First, some of the changes:

For me, as Rabbi, the building has become an extraordinary spiritual home. People enter our sanctuary and immediately feel a sense of welcome, warmth and comfort. It is an inspiring space, yet it is intimate and unpretentious. Music can fill the sanctuary and light streams

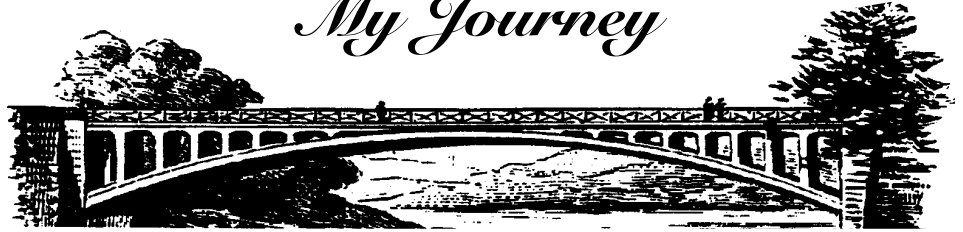
“Congregants and visitors, of whatever religious background, are moved by the sanctuary.”

in from the windows. Congregants and visitors, of whatever religious background, are moved by the sanctuary. Our children join in prayer and discussion on weekday afternoons as part of Hebrew learning. Bar and Bat Mitzvah students can now read from the Torah and stand on the bima and practice for the service they will lead.

There are other, perhaps more subtle, changes. People drop by. Congregants stick around when they drop off their children for tutoring or school. Many people come by to chat and visit. The building is often full of activities such as Lunch and Learn, Torah study or book club. We can visit with each other following Friday night services and celebrate with lunch following a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. We often have Shabbat dinner together. We have celebrated the holidays, shared Yom Kippur Break Fast and

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My Journey



What a journey mine has been on my way to becoming the sixth president of Sukkat Shalom. I grew up going to an incredible, New England-style Congregational Church in my neighborhood of Lakewood, Ohio. My mom was a Sunday school teacher. I went to Sunday school every week and still have the Bible I received then. All of my Cub Scout events were in that building, and when the grade school next door burned to the ground (yes, we all thought we would never have to go to school again), I spent second and third grade at the church while the school was rebuilt.

Now enter the love of my life, Elissa Morgante. Elissa has an enormous Jewish family that travels to every wedding, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, *bris* and so on while my family is equivalent to the Millers in the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding.” When we had children, we decided to raise them as Jews so they had a clear understanding of who they are, spiritually. We had joined a congregation and actively participated for five years. We were two years away from my oldest child Alex’s Bar Mitzvah, but our family never really connected with the Rabbi, congregation or programming. Something needed to change.

“It was particularly interesting for me to experience Jewish services in a Congregational Church.”

We met Rabbi Gordon and Judy Buckman, and joined one of the Rabbi’s “Judaism 101” discussion groups. We had an instant feeling of belonging. We knew we needed to make the shift to Sukkat Shalom. Our children’s subsequent B’nai Mitzvot were amazing life experiences for all of us.

At Alex’s Bar Mitzvah, moments before he read from the Torah, he looked at me and said, “I can’t do this!” I said, “You *can* do this. Look at me, take a deep breath and go for it.” Hannah’s Bat Mitzvah was two years later and we all cried when she thanked Alex for preceding her in all of these life events. Issy’s Bat Mitzvah was highlighted by her and Hannah’s singing to the congregation. Through these experiences and others, our family came to understand the community and spirit of Sukkat Shalom.

It was particularly interesting for me to experience Jewish services in a Congregational Church. When we were partners with First Congregational Church of Wilmette, I was a member of the building committee that explored the various options for renovating that magnificent building. Through that experience, I met so many like-minded individuals and became inspired by my connection to Sukkat Shalom. I was honored to be selected as a board member and to be involved in the acquisition, planning, fundraising and construction of our new home at 1001 Central Avenue. Through every aspect of the

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Minds and Lives Changed by Hosting Family Promise

Passover Seder. We have celebrated births and mourned deaths.

Those are some of the things that have changed. What hasn't? We have remained loyal to the culture of Sukkat Shalom. The building is simple, unadorned and egalitarian. The core value of Sukkat Shalom remains community and personal engagement with each other. I think the building has enhanced our ability to create that sense of intimate community -- whether in worship, weekly Torah study, book groups or social events. On September 29th we will inaugurate Touchpoints—our innovative program to help all of us walk through the various stages of life's journey.

We have strengthened our relationships with our faith community neighbors. We hosted our first week of Family Promise as partners

with First Presbyterian Church. We will host our friends from First Congregational Church of Wilmette on Friday night, October 25th. We will share a potluck dinner, and Reverend Stephanie Perdew Van Slyke will offer the sermon that evening. On November 10th, we are invited to join FCCW for worship, and I will deliver the sermon at their services. We have received beautiful gifts of an espalier tree from First Presbyterian and planters from the Wilmette Church of Latter-Day Saints.

There is still much to do as we continue to learn, celebrate and grow within our new home. But, to me, it is, indeed, home. The building at 1001 Central Avenue has truly become a Shelter of Peace, a true Sukkat Shalom for all of us. As we begin this New Year, let us continue to join together as a community and extended family.

Shanah Tovah. Have a sweet and blessed New Year.

Journey, cont'd

process, the overall mission and core values of the congregation were discussed and maintained. I truly believe the building captures the soul of Sukkat Shalom.

The last time I submitted a Journey article, I wrote about a trip with my father for his 75th birthday. We decided to "go for it" by returning to his World War II battlefields, and it was an incredible life experience. I lost my dad a little over a year later, which has encouraged me to follow my heart and instincts. When Jesse Peterson Hall and Andrew Werth asked me to become the next president of Sukkat Shalom, I was honored, nervous and excited. I am eager to work with our amazing staff and fellow congregants to foster this open, caring and intellectually stimulating community. I am going to "go for it" and I invite all of you to join me.

How is it possible that an entire family consisting of all ages can volunteer as a whole and make a positive impact on other people's lives? Welcome to Family Promise!

Last year, I decided to volunteer my family for that program of hosting homeless families at local houses of worship. I did so without asking any of them beforehand. I very excitedly told my family of the decision I had made on their behalf. They responded just I hoped they wouldn't -- with eye rolls and argumentative pleas. When the day came, I herded them all, husband included, into the car and locked all the doors before they had a chance to escape.

From the moment we stepped into the church building, we were transformed. The kids gravitated towards the ping-pong table, and the adults to the kitchen. Once the guest families arrived, my children, who initially were so unenthusiastic, instantaneously warmed up and mingled with the other children. Food was shared along with lots of laughter and giggles. Games were played with loads of excitement and joy.

At the end of the night, my children didn't want to leave. I had to drag them out of the church while they stuck their heels in the ground. In the car, I was able to tell them the three words that moms love to say: "I was right!" We decided on the spot to host again when Family Promise came to Sukkat Shalom.

And last month, in our own building, it finally happened. This time, I didn't have to drag and lock my family in the car. This experience, although different than the first, still left us all feeling as though we had positively affected the guest families. We met another host family that was volunteering with us and discovered that our kids were in the same Family School class. All of the children played together while the adults served food, chatted with each other and cleaned up.

A feeling of community was shared by everyone -- host and guest families, alike. The Sukkat Shalom social hall was very active with food, children's laughter and games. The kitchen was crowded with platters of food, families cleaning up after dinner and making lunches for the next day. Witnessing how Sukkat Shalom's building had become a true sanctuary was so fulfilling. It nourished our souls.

Family Promise reinforces our core values in Judaism, such as welcoming the stranger, being responsible for each other and performing *tikkum olam*. Both times that we volunteered for Family Promise, we truly enjoyed it. Without a doubt, we would volunteer again.

"A feeling of community was shared by everyone -- host and guest families, alike."

“Touchpoints” Initiative to Kick Off on Sep. 29th

Responding to strong congregational interest in Rabbi Richard Address's ideas about turning life's transitions into sacred celebrations, a steering committee has planned a kickoff event for late-September. Called "Touchpoints: A Sacred Journey," this initiative will build on Rabbi Address's presentation at a Family School "Café fine for the Brain" session last spring.

Rabbi Address will return to Sukkat Shalom for a whole congregation event on **Sunday, September 29, at 3 p.m.** He will speak on the topic of change and transition in our texts and traditions, focusing on some of the challenges and opportunities we face as we go through life. Rabbi Address has written or contributed to several books on the subject and has been instrumental in the Sacred Aging Project.

In addition, a group of congregants met over the summer to start shaping the Touchpoints initiative for Sukkat Shalom. Participants focused on four areas of interest and chose leaders to help explore how to integrate them into the life of our congregation. The topics and leaders are: Spirituality and Religion (Rabbi Gordon); Advance Planning and Discussion (Eric Parker); Caring for Others/Caring for Yourself (Anne Ryan); and Creation of Rituals/Seekers of Meaning (Rabbi Address).

Following Rabbi Address's presentation on September 29, congregants will be free to join one of the four groups for a discussion of future Sukkat Shalom programming. To further support this initiative, Judy Buckman has lined up some wonderful speakers from the Jewish Book Council who will be sharing their wisdom with us during the coming year.

Work has also begun to generate a congregational bibliography supporting the creation of new rituals and recognition for sacred events. Anyone is free to send suggestions for inclusion. A list of books and other materials will be compiled and

made available to congregants.

We are pleased and excited to begin this sacred journey as a congregation, and we welcome participation by all members of the community. This is just the beginning of an initiative that holds the promise of adding meaning to our congregation and our lives.

Please feel free to contact Marily Schonthal, Eric Parker, Beth Gomberg-Hirsch or Judy Buckman for more information about the Touchpoints initiative and how you can get involved.

“This is just the beginning of an initiative that holds the promise of adding meaning to our congregation and our lives.”

Bringing Project Based Learning to Family School

by Alissa Zuchman,
Director of Family Education

New theories and curriculums come out every day that promise to be the best and most effective way to transmit knowledge to our students. Religious education is no different. Every summer I ask myself the same question. It is not a complicated question, but it gets to the heart of what I do:

“What do I hope the students get out of their educational experiences at Sukkat Shalom?”

I have been spending time working on the latest theory in education, Project Based Learning or PBL. PBL has captivated secular educators and is now gaining steam in the religious education world. Yet, it follows the direction of an ancient Hebrew adage: Naaseh V'Neshma. (We will do and we will listen.)

PBL is an inquiry-based process for teaching and learning. Through PBL, students focus on a complex question or problem, seeking solutions through a collaborative process. Projects often are used to investigate the topics and learn valuable skills. PBL requires vision, structure and a solid understanding of the learning process.

The first step in PBL begins with the end in mind. Students who understand the meaning of what they are learning retain more information, apply the knowledge more skillfully and feel more motivated to learn.

Each session at Family School is a self-contained learning experience. PBL is a good match, since it also works on the theory that each lesson is unique and can succeed without requiring prior knowledge from the students. Having the students learn by doing is fundamental to best practices in education.

The teachers at Family School will be developing PBLs for each session and will be participating in workshops throughout the school year to help develop the projects that are best suited for each lesson. I am excited to introduce the newest theory in education and to continue to make learning at Family School the best that it can be.

Out of Chaos: Children Remember the Holocaust

Judy Straus, contributing author to the book *Out of Chaos*, was interviewed by her daughter, Lynn Denton.

So, you are a co-author of a new book.

Yes, this is an anthology of stories from 24 Holocaust survivors. We met as a group once a month for more than six years, working on our stories that ultimately made up this book.

How did this group get together?

Well, originally this was a group of "hidden children" who came together somewhat like a support group. These adults, formerly hidden children, were being told by others that their experiences in hiding weren't "authentic" Holocaust experiences – that somehow they weren't as "real" because they didn't experience the kind of suffering that others endured. Of course, pain is pain: hidden children lost parents, siblings, entire families. They lost their homelands, their languages, religions, identities, and many were never reunited with their families again. As a camp survivor myself, it is all authentic. So what started out as a support group turned into a writing group. I was asked to join at that point.

What was the make-up of the group?

There are 24 of us, and we came from Germany, Poland, Holland, France, Greece and Belgium. We all learned English as our second language, so writing in English is not always easy. At the time of the war, we were children between 2 and 20 years old. Of the group, 22 were hidden children, and two of us are camp survivors. We worked under the caring guidance of Elaine Fox, an attorney by profession, who was not a survivor but was interested in this work. Elaine kept the group going so that it functioned as a unit, and she was good at pulling out the stories that were behind the stories we were telling.

How did the group work together?

We worked well together and formed a unified, coalesced group. We were very caring and human and supportive and encouraging of each other. Almost seven years is a long time to meet and write together. We would individually write a piece and bring it to the group, where we would read it out loud, and members would offer comments, suggestions, etc. Then we would go home and revise it, and bring it back to the group. Each piece was probably revised five times.

Probably the most sensitive part of our project was the giving of constructive feedback. It was difficult to hear that the input was about our writing; many people felt that it was their story content that was being criticized. On sensitive, emotional topics like this, it's hard to separate that out. The group helped each other to tell our stories in a deeper way than we had even set out to tell. Many stories were being told for the first time. There are layers under these stories that are buried pretty deep, and the reading, writing, discussing brought us to these deeper memories and insights – a difficult and often painful process.

What is the format like?

Some contributors told their stories like a personal history, others wrote short stories or poems. There is even a dialogue between two members written like a play. I wrote my pieces as anecdotes that I remembered. There are also photos and documents. The book is divided into sections including, In the Beginning, On the Run, Hidden with Parents, Hidden with Rescuers, Hiding in Plain Sight, In the Camps, and Aftermath.

The book is intended as a teaching device for school kids 6th grade and older, but it's very readable for an adult as well. Parents could also read pieces to smaller children. There is a timeline of the events of World War II, and on the timeline we all added where our personal stories fit in. So it's personal and historical on the same page. It is interesting that when an adult tells a child story it is told in a child voice. Most of us who told personal stories did so in the manner in which we experienced them, so they often have a child-like quality to them. It's almost like you are back at that age telling the story.

Why is this book important for the writers?

We told stories and said things that hadn't been said before, and might not have ever been said, had it not been for our group and Elaine. We, the writers, are the last generation who lived through the Holocaust, and we are 75-plus years old. If we don't tell our stories now, then maybe they will never be told. The subject matter should not go away with us, undocumented. I once met Elie Wiesel, who signed one of his books for me. He wrote: "Who seeks, who remembers." This spoke to me. I felt I needed to remember and share my memories. For most of my life I didn't want to remember or share, so this is a more recent development for me.

Why is this book important for the reader?

Most books written about children in the Holocaust were written by one person and is his or her interpretation of the events. In this book, you hear the voices of the individual telling his or her own story. It feels and is more genuine.

What has been the highlight of this journey?

We just received our printed copies last week. Opening up the package was very emotional. This is a physical manifestation of our work that can reach many people. We dedicated the book to the one and one-half million children who couldn't write their stories because their lives were cut short. And if it helps in any way to tell history -- if it prevents anything like this from happening again -- then a big goal has been accomplished.

Out of Chaos can be found at amazon.com and will soon be available at bookstores and the Holocaust Museum in Skokie.

Musical Notes: Creating Community Through Song

by Adam Davis, Cantorial Soloist

I am thrilled to join Congregation Sukkat Shalom as Cantorial Soloist. It is a pleasure to work with Rabbi Gordon as we lead our community in song together on Shabbat. I have already had the great privilege to begin studying with some of the congregation's youth in preparation for their Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations this coming year. I also look forward to spending the High Holy Days with the congregation and adding to the beautiful music of our choir under the direction of Michael Querio. I hope these Days of Awe offer the chance for more introductions -- please be sure to come and say hello!

As a way of introduction, I grew up in Deerfield and I now live in Skokie. I left Chicago to earn a BFA from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. My Jewish journey began many years earlier; as a young boy, I would sing along with our congregation's Rabbi and Cantor. Our congregation was participatory when it came to communal singing, and I was one of those rare, perhaps odd, students who enjoyed going to Hebrew school and to religious services at the synagogue.

I was especially fortunate that my family created an environment where exploring our religious identity was not only encouraged, but enjoyable. For a musical child, little could have been better than for our congregation and its clergy to afford me the chance to sing and experience music in a way that connected me to something vastly larger than myself and yet deeply personal.

I was made to feel like I belonged, that I had friends at the synagogue and that I had a role to play in worship and cultural life. I performed with the choir, acted in the Purim spiel and sang along with the Cantor and congregation on Shabbat mornings whenever I could. Following my Bar Mitzvah, I was a tutor for younger students struggling with their Hebrew.

Over the years I've also learned that, through shared song and spirit, I could create that same inspiring experience for others. I hope I can help people, young and old, enjoy our shared heritage and I've found that, through music and song, I can create a sense of community for those seeking a spiritual home. This is why my work at Sukkat Shalom is so meaningful to me. I am grateful to serve our congregation in these cantorial and educational capacities -- not just because I love to sing, but because of the opportunity to inspire members of our community and help them

learn, discover and grow through the songs we sing together.

The universal language of music can bring us together regardless of our familiarity with Hebrew, background or personal beliefs. It is a way for us to share our intensely unique voices to connect with the Eternal and with one another. When we sing together, we weave anew the fabric of the welcoming tent of peace our ancestors Abraham and Sarah pitched thousands of years ago. Each voice is a beautiful, welcomed strand in the communal loom that is our spiritual home.

When we all sing prayers together, we can all recognize how blessed we are to have one another -- a spiritual community of friends that we can call home.

I look forward to singing with you over the High Holy Days and throughout the year at Sukkat Shalom. Together with you and your families, we can create a sense of warmth, comfort and community in our spiritual home.

In addition to Adam Davis, Sukkat Shalom has added two other talented individuals to our musical staff:

Alan Goodis is a nationally prominent music leader in Reform summer camps, retreats and conventions and has been a musical scholar in residence at Reform congregations throughout North America.

Alan will help plan and lead the music for our Sunday morning Family School program. He will join us for many Shabbat evening Services, particularly when they coincide with major holidays such as Sukkot, Simchat Torah, and Purim. Alan also will direct our senior youth and adult Sukkat Shalom Singers.

Adrian Durlenster is a graduate of Juilliard School of Music and a long time participant of Hava Nashira, the Reform movement's premier gathering of song leaders. We are delighted to welcome Adrian to our staff as early childhood music specialist.

We will be hearing from Alan and Adrian in future issues of the Sukkat Shalom Bulletin.

We are grateful for the lovely gifts we have received from our faith partners, which have added to the beauty of our new building.

Our friends at the Wilmette Church of Latter-Day Saints, where we celebrate the High Holy Days, provided the two planters that flank the entrance.

And our friends at the First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette supplied the lovely espalier plant in the shape of a menorah that graces the north wall overlooking our garden.

Thanks to our wonderful partners for welcoming us to the neighborhood.



(Photo by Sara Kupper)

Judy's Journey: The Challenge of Creating Community

by Judy Buckman

My journey as Executive Director of Congregation Sukkat Shalom for so many years has afforded me the privilege of speaking to many people who are looking for a synagogue to join. Most people are looking for the same things: an intimate, warm, friendly community of people like themselves; a small enough group that everyone can know everyone else. But they also want a synagogue to be large enough to have plenty of educational and social opportunities.

They ask me about the culture of the congregation, wondering if it is friendly or cliquish, and if there are members from their secular communities. What they really want to know is will they feel welcomed.

Most people's first impression about a temple depends on how they are welcomed, starting with the first call they make to the office to inquire about the synagogue and moving to attendance at events and services. I have seen that someone coming into a smaller service or event can almost feel as though they are crashing a private party. Entering a larger service or event can make a new person feel lost.

In either situation, it is incumbent upon us to make sure people feel welcomed and part of the community. That's why we stress the importance of our existing members

“... it is incumbent upon us to make sure people feel welcomed and part of the community.”

being the goodwill ambassadors at Family School, services, dinners and other events.

Judaism is about communal responsibility. I have seen many times that this sense of belonging and community can ease the isolation of modern life that we sometimes feel, being so connected to our smart-phones and computers. A welcoming Friday night service can become a place to nurture our families and selves and connect with others.

Returning to Jewish communal values by celebrating the passages of life together can enable congregants to be nurtured within the community. How wonderful it is to attend life-cycle events within the congregation and see smiling faces sharing our personal triumphs -- and having those same supportive and caring hands help us get through life's inevitable sorrows.

The challenge to all of us at Sukkat Shalom is to find opportunities to pause and be with each other; to welcome the stranger in our midst. Let us think about this as we begin a new year as a congregation and a community.

Zenner Brothers Continue to Share Interests After College

With this issue, we are starting a new feature focusing on the children of Sukkat Shalom as they graduate from college and make their way in the world. Please contact Judy Buckman about others who might be profiled in future issues.

Brothers **Elie** and **Nat Zenner** have led remarkably parallel lives. Both are graduates of Washington University in St. Louis, where Elie (08) majored in History and African Studies and Nat (10) in Psychology and Educational Studies. They both played college soccer and were captains of their teams.

Upon graduation, they both served for two years with Teach for America (TFA).

Elie taught first grade in Brooklyn, and Nat was an early childhood teacher in Humboldt Park in Chicago. After completing his service with TFA, Elie began studies at Northwestern



Elie (left) and Nat Zenner

University Law School, graduating in May, 2013. While at Northwestern, Elie focused on litigation and clinical work and was very involved in numerous public service and public interest law organizations. He will join the Chicago law firm, Jenner and Block, in November.

Upon completion of his work with TFA in 2012, Nat was hired as Illinois Schools Manager for Everfi, an educational technology company based in Washington, D.C. He is responsible for the implementation of on-line educational programs in high schools throughout the state.

For the past three years, Elie and Nat have lived together in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago. They continue to share a passion for soccer, playing regularly together on a number of club teams, and for urban policy issues, particularly in the area of education. Their parents feel very fortunate that they are such close friends and that they live so close by.



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1001 CENTRAL AVENUE
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS 60091
847/ 251-2675
www.sukkatshalom.org

Rabbi Samuel Gordon
Cantorial Soloist Adam Davis
Director of
Family Education Alissa Zuchman
Executive Director Judy Buckman
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