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Mercer Island synagogue buys church, plans winter move

Congregation Shevet Achim plans to reach families with “rich programming and a welcoming environment”

Mercer Island, Wash. --- [Congregation Shevet Achim](#), Mercer Island’s Modern Orthodox synagogue, is moving to its own building at the end of the year.

“This is exciting moment for us and Seattle’s entire Jewish community,” said Shevet Achim’s president Josh Adler. “After 18 months of hard work, we purchased a beautiful building, just blocks from our present location. The new space will enable us to reach out to young and old alike with rich programming and a welcoming environment.”

One of Mercer Island’s oldest and most prominent churches sold its property to the synagogue for \$4.5 million. The sale includes the 10,500 square foot mid-century building and approximately three acres of parking lots and wooded grounds fronting Island Crest Way in the center of the island.

“We’re preparing new classes and programs to help Jews of all observance levels enjoy the beauty of Judaism’s teachings and traditions,” said Rabbi Yechezkel Kornfeld. “We invite everyone, especially those with little or no Jewish education, to attend a free class or stop by for a Shabbat meal.”

Rabbi Kornfeld, prominent in Jewish education and outreach in the Seattle area, has taught all around the region, including three decades at Mercer Island’s Hebrew High.

Congregation Sheet Achim leased space for 20 years from the Northwest Yeshiva High School. But as it grew steadily, the congregation of 90 families, including 100 children, sought new quarters.

“We’ve felt growing pains for years,” said immediate past president Ed Epstein. “Now we’ll be able to accommodate our religious and educational needs, the needs of our children and perhaps build a mikvah in the future. With our spacious social hall, we have the ability to celebrate Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, weddings and other lifecycle events.”

A small piece of the property will be converted into three housing lots to help finance the purchase, but the vast majority of the land, and all of the physical structure, will remain. The church’s congregants worked closely with Shevet Achim so that its church, which pre-dates the founding of the City of Mercer Island, remains a house of worship.

Architectural preservationists commended the commitment to keeping the building intact. “The building is a treasure,” observed Eugenia Woo of Historic Seattle and the Mid-Century architectural preservationist group, Docomomo WEWA.

The synagogue will announce a community-wide event celebrating its new building soon.

About Congregation Shevet Achim

Congregation Shevet Achim is an Orthodox congregation for all Jews. “Shevet Achim” means “dwell together” in Hebrew. Shevet Achim blends the warmth of traditional Judaism with an acceptance of everyone. Members take pride in having one of Seattle’s most diverse congregations. Many members have returned to traditional Judaism, joining other families, retired couples and singles in a rich community life filled with prayer, study and “chesed” (acts of kindness). From Mercer Island, the geographic center of metropolitan Seattle, Congregation Shevet Achim is led by Rabbi Yechezkel Kornfeld, a Northwesterner since 1974. The congregation’s website is [ShevetAchim.com](#).

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