

# Shaarei Shamayim

Inclusive Jewish Community



## Rabbi's Welcome

By Laurie Zimmerman



As I reflect back on 20 years at Shaarei Shamayim, I realize how much this congregation has transformed my beliefs about Jewish life, identity, and community. I am lucky to be part of a congregation that is creative, flexible, and welcoming. What follows is a piece I wrote after

conversations with several of our members. I believe it reflects who we are and what we aspire to do.

### A Vision for Shaarei Shamayim

Shaarei Shamayim is a growing, open, pluralistic congregation of 200 households. We believe that Judaism is a means for bringing justice, holiness, and joy to our world, and we are building Jewish community rooted in creativity and authenticity. We are reimagining the possibilities for Jewish life, identity, and community.

We invite people of varied Jewish backgrounds to join us. We value the participation of singles, families, twenty- and thirty-somethings, and empty-nesters. We are LGBTQ and interfaith inclusive, strive to accommodate people with disabilities, and welcome Jews-by-choice and Jews of color.

We embrace community. We create space for our members and friends to deepen their Jewish lives, reconnect to their Judaism, or encounter it for the first time. We do this through our monthly havurot

(fellowship groups), Shabbat potlucks, learning opportunities, social justice work, and

## President's Welcome

By Lisi Schrimpf



When my husband and I joined CSS, leadership was the farthest thing from my mind. I did, however, like the idea of learning to lead services - which led Rabbi Laurie to invite me to join the Ritual Committee. That initial spark led to me getting involved in other

parts of the Shaarei Shamayim community and over time, the work I was doing at CSS was becoming more and more meaningful to me. When we began shelter in place in March of 2020, CSS became even more important as I turned to my faith and our community for social, emotional and spiritual support. CSS is not a building you'll find on a map but a community of people who've come together to celebrate, to mourn, to argue and to study. My hope is that by serving as president I can ensure this community can continue to be the home for others that it has been for me.

Our Reconstructionist and Renewal congregation welcomes people of all ages, abilities, sexual orientations, and styles of worship, as well as interfaith couples, Jews by choice, Jews of color, and those seeking a Judaism that meets them where they are. We are not just a place for everyone--it's precisely our diversity that gives us such a unique approach to our ancient traditions.

I welcome you to attend any of our activities including services, Torah study, Gesher, adult education, and havurot. And I'm here to help make sure that CSS's legacy, now over 30 years strong, is here for another 30 and more.

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# Shaarei Shamayim Happenings

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## Friday Night Gatherings

We join together on select Friday nights for dinner, a Shabbat service, or a discussion. Sometimes Rabbi Laurie or a guest presents on an issue and facilitates conversation about issues of interest to the community.

## Saturday Morning Services

Shabbat morning at Shaarei Shamayim consists of two components. The first is Torah study from 9:30-10:30 a.m. Rabbi Laurie and members gather to study the weekly Torah portion, discussing traditional texts and contemporary approaches to Torah. Services follow and last until 12:15 p.m., followed by a kiddush luncheon. We sing prayers, read Torah, and reflect on themes of the day.



## Children's Education

Rabbi Laurie is the director of Geshar, our children's education program. Children ages 4 through 13 meet on Sundays throughout the school year. Children in grades three through six work one-on-one with a Hebrew tutor. We provide a warm, welcoming community in a flexible and meaningful learning environment.

## Shaarei Shamayim Singing

Music is important at Shaarei Shamayim, and our members lead the singing at High Holy Day and Shabbat services. The group sings both traditional and contemporary music.



## Holiday Celebrations

Shaarei Shamayim organizes holiday celebrations throughout the year: On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we offer services punctuated by meditation and discussion. We also join together for potlucks at the beginning of Rosh Hashanah and the end of Yom Kippur.

On Sukkot we build a sukkah and gather around a campfire. We continue on Simchat Torah with singing and dancing and roll the Torah from the end to the beginning. We celebrate Chanukkah with a joyful party in the midst of winter. Purim is a time of silliness; adults and children dress up in costume, retell the Book of Esther, and sing songs. On Passover we host a member-led seder on the second night. Shaarei Shamayim participates in a community-wide Shavuot celebration as well.

## Havurot

Shaarei Shamayim has several havurot (fellowship groups). These provide an opportunity for members to form smaller communities within the congregation and to meet regularly with each other. Some current havurot include social justice, men, women, nature walks, outdoor adventures, LGBTQ, and Torah study.

# Shaarei Shamayim Happenings

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## Young Family Havurah

Our Young Family Havurah is an opportunity to create Jewish community with parents and their little ones.

Geared for parents with children ages 0-4, we gather for monthly playgroups, tot Shabbat morning services, and holiday celebrations. We also run a monthly Kesher program for children who are 2-4 years old and their parents. It's not necessary to be a member of Shaarei Shamayim to get involved.



## Bnei Mitzvah

Our bnei mitzvah program is a highlight of our congregation. Our teens prepare for a year on this rite of passage into adulthood. Bnei mitzvah celebrations are community events; members attend because they want to support the teens. The process entails learning the Torah portion, studying traditional and contemporary commentaries, practicing the service, and doing service projects within Shaarei Shamayim and in the larger community. Rabbi Laurie oversees the students' studies and works individually with them throughout the process.



## Adult Education

Shaarei Shamayim offers many adult education classes throughout the year. Past classes include Hebrew Reading, Chanting Torah, Exploring the prayer book, Judaism and Social Justice, Reconstructionism and Jewish Renewal, Meditation, Introduction to Judaism, and Celebrating Interfaith Families. Rabbi Laurie also offers monthly groups; topics change yearly. Some members are on the path of conversion, while others are looking to enrich their own sense of Jewishness. We also have an adult bnei mitzvah program.



## Life Cycles

Rabbi Laurie officiates at special occasions for members and friends of the community. She works with individuals, couples, and families to develop meaningful and creative ceremonies such as baby namings, weddings, conversions, and funerals.

## Teen Program

Our teen group is a lively bunch. They organize special programming throughout the year, and many of our teens work as teachers' assistants in our children's education program. They also volunteer for the congregation and frequently take part in leading services and chanting Torah.

# Children's Education

## Background

In 1995 a small group of parents created Bet Sefer, our children's education program. In the first year five kindergarten students gathered for a 12-week program in parents' homes. This year, we expect 60 students to enroll.

## Gesher Program

Gesher is active, engaging, and experiential. In Hebrew, *gesher* means bridge. We are connecting students to Jewish ideas, Jewish identities, and Jewish practices. We are rooting our learning in Jewish values and texts, concentrating on a range of Jewish themes, and focusing more on celebrating and living Judaism than learning about it out of context. It includes outdoor education; art, drama, music, and games; classes focused on debating Jewish issues; outings and field trips; intergenerational Shabbat services; holiday celebrations and services; and Hebrew tutoring.

Our Bnei Mitzvah program, teacher's assistant training program, and youth group provide meaningful engagement for our teens.

## Our Focus

We use these questions to guide our learning:

- How do we create meaningful Jewish communities rooted in justice and equity?
- How do we live out Jewish tradition's insistence on debating important ideas grounded in Jewish texts?
- How do we absorb the breadth of Jewish history, practice, and peoplehood while also cultivating our own particular Jewish identities?
- How can Jewish ritual enrich our lives and give expression to the range of feelings we experience?

## Hebrew Tutoring Program

Shaarei Shamayim has developed a unique approach to Hebrew learning. Each student in grades three through six works with a Hebrew tutor for half an hour a week. Coupled with our Jewish studies program, students receive individual attention from a tutor, move at their own pace, and benefit from a strong classroom community.



## Overview of the Year

**16 sessions** from 9:30-12:30 at Wingra School on the near west side

**Intergenerational Shabbat Morning Services and Holiday Celebrations** at the First Unitarian Society

**Hebrew Tutoring** weekly throughout the year

## Rabbi's Welcome *Cont. from page 1*

congregational committees. We do it by dropping off a lasagna when there's a new baby or by driving a fellow member to chemo. We find going through life with others is preferable to going it alone.

We know there are many ways to encounter holiness and deep purpose in our lives. We are secular, spiritual, religious, and none of the above. We try to create a meaningful ritual life through Shabbat gatherings, meditation, Torah study, prayer, storytelling, life cycle ceremonies, and holiday celebrations.

Celebrating young people is one of our core values. Our educational programs for children and teens foster critical thinking, self-reflection, and curiosity, helping students explore the wisdom of Jewish tradition and finding relevance in it today. We attend our community's bnei mitzvah ceremonies so we can support our young people as they journey into adulthood.

Working for social justice is another core value of ours. We are inspired by Jewish tradition to fight for a sustainable world, care for the vulnerable, and create racial and economic justice. We invite speakers to share their knowledge on current issues, partner with community organizations to amplify our voices, and get involved in local efforts to make our city, region, and world a better place for everyone.

We believe that having difficult conversations, grounded in deep listening and respect for others, is essential to creating a vibrant community. Rather than pushing controversial issues away, we study, debate, and share ideas so that we can all grow wiser.

We hope you will challenge us, inspire us, and add your unique voice to our community.

### Interested in Joining?

To find out more about becoming a member of Shaarei Shamayim, give Erin a call at **608-217-6462** or email her at **[membership@shamayim.org](mailto:membership@shamayim.org)**.

## Reconstructionism and Jewish Renewal

**Shaarei Shamayim is affiliated with Reconstructing Judaism and the Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal.**

### Reconstructionism

Reconstructionist Judaism is a progressive, contemporary approach to Jewish life which integrates a deep respect for traditional Judaism with the insights and ideas of contemporary social, intellectual and spiritual life.

Reconstructionists believe that Judaism is a civilization encompassing history and literature, art and music, land and language. Individual communities value egalitarianism, diversity, and democratic decision-making.

Reconstructionists' views of God are diverse, but they share an emphasis on godliness rather than on the supernatural. God is the power in the universe which infuses all of creation with a sense of transcendence, impelling human beings to improve the world and themselves. Reconstructionist Judaism holds that contemporary Jewish communities are involved in the current evolution of Judaism and are responsible for shaping the spiritual and cultural legacy of the Jewish people for future generations.

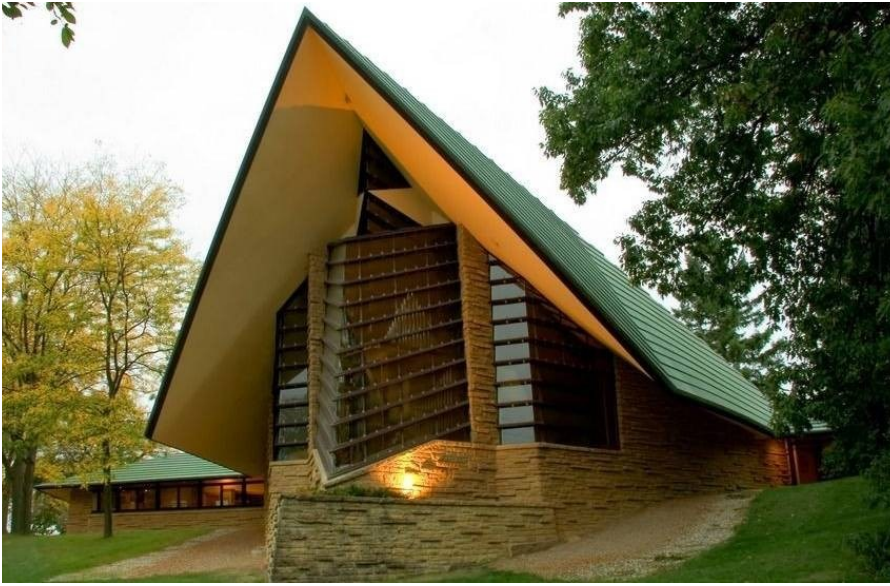
### Jewish Renewal

Jewish Renewal combines ancient and modern Jewish wisdom, integrating Judaism's prophetic and mystical traditions with a progressive, egalitarian consciousness.

Jewish Renewal creates a deeply meaningful Jewish path to connect with the Divine through meditation, prayer, music, chant, dance, study, and spiritually rooted social action. It seeks to nurture intimate, participatory, and egalitarian communities that dance and wrestle with God and assist the spiritual growth and healing of individuals, communities, whole societies, and the planet. It brings creativity, relevance, joy, and an all-embracing awareness to spiritual practice and promotes justice, freedom, responsibility, and caring for all life.

Jewish Renewal draws on the wisdom of Jewish tradition without getting stuck in it - infusing these with the insights of contemporary ecology, feminism, and participatory democracy.

# Our Space



Our main home is located at the First Unitarian Society, a stunning Frank Lloyd Wright building near Madison's UW campus and the UW/VA hospital complex. We use the Landmark Auditorium, Atrium Auditorium, and Gaebler Living Room. We hold our Shabbat services and holiday celebrations here. Our offices are also located in this space.

Our children's education program is held at Wingra School on the near west side. We have some outings at Camp Shalom and Picnic Point as well.

## Who's Who at Shaarei Shamayim

**President:** Lisi Schrimpf

**Vice President:** Stormy-Kito Justice

**Past President:** Sari Judge

**Treasurer:** Adam Streiffer

**Secretary:** Sharon Lezberg

**Membership Chair:** Erin McGrath

**Ritual Chair:** Sam Katz

**Social Action Chair:** Kimberly Wilson

**Adult Education Chair:** Open

**Children's Education Chair:** Dustin Brown

**Finance Chair:** Mike Swift

**Fundraising Chair:** Maggie Weiser and Sari Judge

**Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Chairs:** Judith Heilizer and Stormy-Kito Justice

**Members at Large:** Michael Apple, Valerie Reed Hickman, Zaccai Lewis, Jeff Marcus

**Acts of Caring Liaison:** open

**Rabbi Liaison:** Melanie Herzog

**Disability Inclusion Coordinator:** Jeff Spitzer-Resnick

**LGBT Liaison:** Zoe Werth

**Rabbi & Geshet Director:** Laurie Zimmerman

**Director of Member Engagement:** Lang Schmitt

**Office Coordinator:** Sean Graham

### Congregation Shaarei Shamayim

is Madison's Jewish Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal Community. We are a growing community of 200 households, and we welcome traditional and nontraditional families, singles, interfaith couples, Jews by choice, and LGBTQ folks from Madison and its surrounding areas. We have come together from varied Jewish backgrounds; our members' Jewish education ranges from extensive to none at all. We work to create an environment where all people feel welcome regardless of their religious, spiritual, or cultural identity. We are committed to fostering Jewish spiritual experience through prayer, meditation, study, song, social action, and friendship.

For more information please contact:

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Visit us online at  
**[www.shamayim.org](http://www.shamayim.org)**