

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue



Review of 2019

A warm, welcoming and compassionate community
for all those who wish to engage with Judaism

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue Council and Honorary Officers

Directors of the Company Limited by
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Martin Slowe

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Benita Hart

Sarah Lasher

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David Rigal

Simon van Someren

Alex Weiss

Honorary Lawyer

Daniel Sternberg

The following Council members resigned in June 2019

Russell Delew and Anthony Sefton

Rabbis

Rabbi Alexandra Wright, Senior Rabbi

Rabbi Elana Dellal

Rabbi Igor Zinkov

Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton, Scholar in Residence

Senior staff

Lysa Schwartz, Executive Director

Dr Dov Softi, Head of Rimon (to August 2019)

Rabbi Elana Dellal, Vice Principal of Rimon
(from September 2019)

Caroline Villiers, Head of LJS Nursery

Cathy Heller Jones, Director of Music

Aviva Shafritz, Community Care Co-ordinator

Registered office

28 St John's Wood Road, London, NW8 7HA

For further information or to visit the LJS,
email ljs@ljs.org or phone 020 7286 5181

Cover image: Paul Reuben

Bereavements

During 2019 we were much saddened
by the death of our Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi
Dr David J. Goldberg. We also mourn the
deaths of our past President, Willie Kessler,
and former Council members,
Peter Abrahams and Eric Blaire.

The LJS: Our Vision and Values

*'The world stands on three pillars:
Torah, worship and acts of kindness' (Avot 1:2)*

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue is an inclusive, egalitarian community of all ages, working together to explore Jewish traditions, texts and values and applying them to the challenge of living ethical lives within the context of the social, intellectual, technological and scientific realities of the twenty-first century.

We seek to sustain and develop the Jewish people's sacred task: to build a just and compassionate world that is based on our commitment and responsibility to each other as Jews, to our friends and neighbours of other faiths and cultures and to the global environment, and to enrich and deepen the uniqueness of our identity in a context of shared spirituality and creativity, intellectual challenge and meaningful relationships.

The LJS seeks to be a warm, welcoming and compassionate community for all those who wish to engage with Judaism – ***Kehillah***

The LJS cherishes meaningful, shared worship and dynamic spiritual engagement within the context of Liberal Judaism – ***Avodah***

The LJS prioritises life-long learning and the intellectual challenge of Jewish texts, ideas and practice, growing and nurturing a sense of Jewish identity for children and adults alike – ***Torah***

The LJS nurtures meaningful relationships through pastoral care and spiritual encounter and facilitates social networking – ***Gemilut Chasadim***

The LJS values all meaningful activity that is designed to repair and heal the world – ***Tikkun Olam***

The LJS celebrates and commemorates all life cycle events that help to give meaning to people's lives – ***Chayyim***

The LJS is committed to transparent and responsible governance of the synagogue and financial accountability by its trustees – ***Din v'Cheshbon***

The LJS encourages its members' contribution to the dynamic growth and development of Liberal Judaism in Europe, Israel and beyond – ***Yahadut Mitkademet***

Chairman's Report

'If I am only for myself, what am I?' (Mishnah Avot 1:14)



The LJS is a community based on a commitment to one another as Jews, and also to others of different faiths and cultures. Each year our annual review demonstrates that we are striving to meet the challenge of leading ethical lives in the twenty-first century.

We have organised this Review of 2019 under the four main headings of the synagogue's strategic plan: Spirituality, Learning, Community and Sustainability. These are underpinned by our Vision and Values, which can be found on the adjoining page.

We have had much to celebrate in 2019.

Spirituality: We are delighted that we have our rabbinic team, under the leadership of the Senior Rabbi, Alexandra Wright. In the summer of 2019, Rabbi Igor Zinkov was ordained and subsequently joined Rabbi Alexandra Wright and Rabbi Elana Dellal. We are fortunate that these people bring different interests and expertise to their rabbinic roles and complement the work each is doing.

Sadly, it was during the year that we reported on the death of our Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Dr David J. Goldberg OBE. He is much missed by both this congregation and by the broader Progressive movement.

Learning: This was a year of significant developments for education at the LJS. We broadened the range of our adult programmes by adding short courses, such as the popular *Deep Calls to Deep*, to the regular Tuesday evening Learning Circle classes.

Our Rimon Religion School was sad to see the standing down of its Head Teacher, Dr Dov Softi. We have since then been developing a rabbinic-led Rimon programme, with all three rabbis playing a part, and with Rabbi Elana Dellal in the key leadership role.

The LJS Nursery School continues to grow, building on its previous successes.

Community: The concept of community is broad, bringing responsibilities as well as enjoyment. We give support to our LJS Members through our community care programmes. To meet the complex needs of people in the twenty-first century, our Community Care Co-ordinator, Aviva Shafritz, reviews what we offer, and provides help wherever it is required.

The LJS is fortunate to have a team of volunteers offering assistance and care. We have always recognised an obligation to others outside our community and continue to do so through social action initiatives. In this review, you will find examples of our work.

Those of you who generously contribute to the High Holy Day Appeal are part of this ethos of care for others. In 2019 the High Holy Day Appeal raised an astonishing £67,215.00. As is our custom, we support an Israeli charity, an Anglo-Jewish charity, and a UK charity. We recognise our duty towards the wider Jewish community by being active members of the Board of Deputies, the voice of the British Jewish community.

Community is not just about social care. Cultural events, lectures, comedy and music, such as our amazing Jazz Evening, bring our community together in ways different from religious services.

Sustainability: It is an ongoing focus of Council to retain and increase the number of Members and Friends and to raise sufficient income to ensure our survival. Maintaining the LJS building and cemetery now and for the future is expensive. We aim also to be eco-friendly and not to harm the environment.

Council is grateful to those who support the synagogue financially in a variety of ways, but particularly we would like to acknowledge the support of the President's Patrons.

At the heart of this work are our volunteers, without whom there would be no LJS. My thanks go to all of them, to the Council, and to the rabbis and other staff for all that was achieved in 2019.

Sue Head, Chairman of Council

Spirituality

A house of prayer

'For my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.' (Isaiah 56:7)



The wedding of Anya Gold and Daniel Tobias, officiated by Rabbi Elana Dellal



The wedding of Siena Carver and Yonatan Golan, officiated by Rabbi Alexandra Wright

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue is an inclusive and egalitarian community of Members and Friends, staff and volunteers who seek to sustain and develop the Jewish people's sacred task: to build a just and compassionate world that is based on our commitment and responsibility to each other and to the global environment, and to enrich and deepen the uniqueness of our identity in a context of shared spirituality and creativity, intellectual challenge and meaningful relationships.

Spirituality, learning and connection with others lie at the heart of the LJS community. We come together for *Shabbat* and festival services, as well as for life cycle events – a baby blessing, a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, *Kabbalat Torah*, a wedding or mixed faith blessing; we share the

sad occasions of funerals, *shivas* and memorial services, as well as special anniversaries. These all offer us opportunities to express our loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish people, seek solace at difficult times in our lives, or rejoice at happy times with family and community. Drawing on our sacred heritage and infusing it with creativity and meaning for our own time help to ensure Judaism's survival for future generations.

Members are encouraged to take part in services, leading the prayers or giving sermons. Once a term, the children and young people of Rimon lead the prayers and music together with the rabbis at our *L'Dor va'Dor* intergenerational services. Guest speakers also feature regularly.



Greeting congregants

Welcoming congregants as they enter the LJS and helping them get seated and given prayer books gives *shamash* (steward) Anthony Sefton great pleasure. *'The shamashim are there to support both the Rabbis and the congregation,'* he explains, *'and it's a wonderful way to get to know Members and guests.'*

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES



L-R: Karen Newman, Jenny Newman, Jane Rayner and Ruth Kersley beside the the new stained-glass window panel.

There are regular *Koleinu* services which are more informal and interactive alternative services, often using different liturgies and focussing on the *Torah* reading with a discussion. These are held in the Rabbi John Rayner Prayer Room, named in honour of one of our former Senior Rabbis. This is a quiet and peaceful room which looks out on to the garden and which has its own Ark and stained-glass window panel designed by Ruth Kersley. A special service took place in February 2019 for the inauguration of the window panel at which Student Rabbi Lev Taylor, grandson of the late Rabbi John Rayner z”l and Jane Rayner, gave the sermon.

Services at the LJS generally use *Siddur Lev Chadash*, the prayer book edited by Rabbi Rayner, and which reflects the traditional structure of daily, *Shabbat* and festival services, whilst also introducing new material through special themes and life cycle rituals. Blessings and prayers are recited in Hebrew and English, achieving a balance so that congregants can understand the spiritual journey undertaken throughout the course of a service.

In his ‘Thought for the Week’ to mark the new year of 5780, Rabbi Igor Zinkov reflected on Rabbi Rayner’s words from a lecture he gave describing the values of Liberal Judaism.



The Ark doors surrounded by Jerusalem stone in our Sanctuary

Although these words were written over 60 years ago, they encapsulate the values of Liberal Judaism which are true today and underpin the experience of practising Judaism at the LJS:

‘Liberal Judaism values truth above tradition, freedom above authority, and sincerity above uniformity. It reverences Jewish tradition, but not in an uncritical way. It holds that it is the duty of every generation so to develop the tradition that it may always be compatible with the best contemporary thought and appropriate to the best contemporary life, or, which is another way of putting it, that it may always be intellectually acceptable, spiritually satisfying, and practically efficacious.’

Music

Music plays an essential part in our worship, and the LJS is renowned for the beauty of the music during our services. The liturgy is sung to a wide range of styles, from chants to contemporary compositions, including folk and classical songs. Our wonderful professional and members’ choirs and organists provide the music for services. The piano is used to accompany services on Friday evenings. Other instrumentalists provide music in services, particularly on *Yom Kippur* when Bruch’s *Kol Nidre* is played on the cello, and for our intergenerational *L’Dor va’Dor* services, which are led by song leaders with guitar accompaniment.



Singing in the Members’ Choir

‘Singing in this friendly choir is fun and rewarding’, says Ellen Schmidt. ‘It is a lovely way to participate in services and to make a contribution to our community. We love it when the congregation supports us by singing with us. New members are always welcome.’

Learning

At the centre of the life of the LJS lies its educational programme: the LJS Nursery for children aged 2½ - 5 years old, Rimon Religion School from 3½ to 15, and a full schedule of learning and engagement for adults, The Learning Circle.



The 2019 Kabbalat Torah students. Back L-R: Josh Cang, Leila Goldstone, Brooke Curtis-Shipman, Adam Cang
Front L-R: Tabby Penn, Niamh Eisenberg, Jason Covey, Michael Berlingieri

The LJS Nursery School

The LJS Nursery School, which opened in 2004, has an excellent reputation locally and internationally as a result of the glowing recommendations from parents, including an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating. Places are sought-after because of the very high levels of teaching experience, care and parenting support. The stimulating play-based curriculum includes Numeracy and Literacy, Music, Yoga, Hebrew, Dance, Gardening, Spanish, French, Cooking and PE. Our talented Head Teacher, Caroline Villiers, leads a team of loyal, dedicated teachers who are passionate about their work with almost 50 children from ages two and a half to five.

We have a two-year Nursery programme followed by an excellent Reception class for four-year olds. The children are very happy at the LJS, and are successful at getting into some of the best schools in the area when they leave.

Rimon Religion School

If you have walked through the halls upstairs on a *Shabbat* morning you will have seen all the wonderful things that happen at Rimon: laughter, deep conversation, Hebrew learning, art, singing, volunteer projects, and much more.

Our Rimon teachers, who love and care about every single student, are experienced role-models who are excited to share the richness of



VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

Working as a teaching assistant

Many *Kabbalat Torah* graduates choose to become teaching assistants in Rimon Religion School on *Shabbat* mornings. *'I am so grateful to have the opportunity to give back to the community in this way,'* Dalia Gelfer says, *'and it's inspiring to be able to help the children develop and make progress with their Jewish studies.'*



Dov Softi shows the lulav to Rimon children

our traditions and teachings with them. We have brought on two new teachers this year: Student Rabbi Matt Turchin brings his formal education training and his love for all things connected with Judaism to his class; Daniel Mautner, raised as a member of the LJS, has joined the staff as music specialist, every other week teaching traditional and contemporary Jewish songs to all the classes.

Perhaps the best evidence of a successful Jewish education is when a student becomes a teacher/leader. This year Becca Lawson, who received her Jewish education at the LJS, has transitioned from being an assistant to a class teacher, bringing creativity, compassion and passion to the classroom. Sarah Lasher, similarly raised at the LJS and also a past teacher of Rimon, is now the chair of the Education Committee, having taken over from Harriett Goldenberg, to whom we owe a great debt of thanks.

This year there was a change in leadership; the rabbinic team now oversees Rimon with Rabbi Elana as Vice Principal. Rabbi Elana and Education Co-ordinator, Debi Penhey, work closely with the teachers, students and families. We are grateful to continue to benefit from Dr Dov Softi, our former Head of Rimon, who brings the gifts of his creativity and wisdom as a senior teacher to the religion school each week.

The Learning Circle

The Learning Circle offers a rich and varied programme, introducing Members, Friends and visitors to lifelong learning about Judaism and Jewish cultural identity. For the beginner, Exploring Judaism provides a weekly exploration of Jewish life, history, belief and observance with time to reflect on living a Jewish life. The Learning Circle provides plenty of opportunity for Hebrew learning at all levels with experienced teachers on Tuesday evenings and *Shabbat* mornings. Discussion sessions are also on offer on Tuesday mornings as well as *Shabbat* mornings. Lunchtime gatherings on *Shabbat* have proved a popular way for the congregation to come together to listen to first-class speakers at Nosh 'n' Drosh. Two seminars on antisemitism were presented during the course of the year.



The *Deep Calls to Deep* study course.

L-R: Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton, Rabbi Alexandra Wright, Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield, Professor David Ford

In 2019 the LJS worked together with the London Society of Jews and Christians to present eight sessions based on the book edited by Rabbi Tony Bayfield, *Deep Calls To Deep: Transforming Conversations between Jews and Christians*. Each of the Jewish and Christian contributors to this book presented sessions exploring, inter alia, our respective relationships with modern western culture and democracy, an evaluation of our past, and respect between people of faith.



Staffing the Israel Abrahams Library

Sally Van Noorden, who volunteers as our librarian, describes the rich resource we have: *The LJS library has 6,000 books, old and new, covering liturgy, history, literature, biography. The books are a wonderful part of our heritage and we want you all to appreciate them.*

Community

The breath-taking commitment and dedication of our volunteers makes the Liberal Jewish Synagogue an exceptional beacon of community engagement.



The LJS fund-raising *All That Jazz* evening with Peter Werth, his Jazz Crew and vocalist Sara Dowling

The commitment of volunteers was clearly demonstrated by the *Freshers' Fair* which showcased some of the myriad events and activities going on and which mark us out as a vibrant, intergenerational community, buzzing with activity. These activities range from keeping our archive to singing in the Members' choir; from taking part in social action to looking after our extensive library; from helping in the security team to arranging flowers; from organising a walking group to running a bridge club. This volunteer work, and so much more, is undertaken with commitment and dedication by and for our Members and Friends, as well as reaching out to the wider community.

The Community Care Co-ordinating Committee (referred to as the 4Cs) meets approximately six times a year and provides an opportunity

for lead volunteers from the groups under its umbrella to work together, report on activities and plan for the future. The main groups are:

- Bereavement Support
- Family Support Group
- Keep In Touch
- Out & About Club
- Phone A Member
- Restaurant Tuesday
- Singing for the Mind
- Video and Tea

The purpose of the Family Support Group is to provide the professional team at the LJS with a sounding board of experts who will help them to support families and individuals in the congregation. It provides a 'thinking space' for the professional team to discuss situations that may be of concern to them.



Sending out our newsletter

Copies of *LJS News* are sent out monthly to members. Marie Katz tells us she isn't sure how she became the head of the volunteer newsletter stuffing team but, in her words, *'It just happened.'* Marie and her team ensure we are kept posted - quite literally!

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

The experts include the Head Teacher of the LJS Nursery, a consultant clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst, and a child and adolescent psychiatrist. It is very much a signposting/reflective group. The Keep In Touch and Phone a Member groups maintain regular contact with members via visits and phone calls. The Bereavement Support team offers befriending and ongoing support to synagogue members who have suffered a bereavement.

In 2019 Restaurant Tuesday underwent a relaunch. The monthly lunch club started working in partnership with Jewish Care who provide the food. Feedback from our guests has been excellent. The success of the relationship between the two organisations is an example of the ongoing commitment to developing partnerships in the local community. The Video and Tea group continue with their monthly sessions which are much enjoyed by participants.



Alma Magri and Betty O'Reilly at the Out and About Club Annual Dinner

The Out and About Club meets twice a month offering a chance for members, who are Westminster residents rather than necessarily members of the synagogue, to get together to socialise and be entertained.

Everyone was much saddened by the death of the Club's President, Rabbi Dr David Goldberg. We were very pleased that his position was filled later in 2019 by Charles Kessler.

The popular, and indeed oversubscribed, Singing for the Mind group for people with dementia also underwent a change in 2019 as long-term Song Leader Judith Silver stepped down after eight years. We have recruited new, talented leaders to ensure that we continue to



Restaurant Tuesday guests at the September relaunch

offer this invaluable resource, run weekly, to the wider community.

The LJS continues to run a Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families offering vital support to vulnerable families from all over the world. On Sunday afternoons once a month, up to 90 adults seeking asylum and their children are given a warm welcome. A special children's area is provided with fun activities, and everyone is offered a home-cooked meal, toiletries, nappies, shopping money, clothing, new underwear and shoes. We also signpost guests to other support services, assisting them with form-filling and letter-writing.

Volunteers in our recently formed Social Action committee have been focussing on food poverty and food sustainability, and among our charitable activities we now support Sufra, a local food bank.



Clothes for our guests at the Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families

We are profoundly grateful to the many volunteers, each one exceptional in what they offer, and who enhance the lives of everyone in our community and beyond. We are always keen to welcome new volunteers.

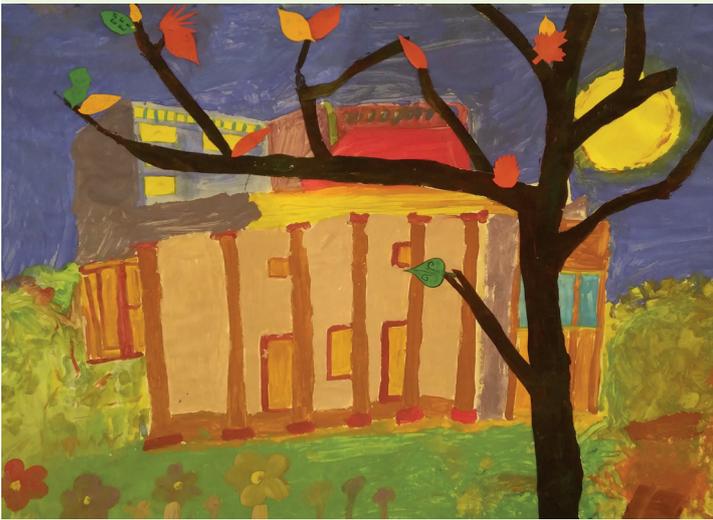


Gardening

'We hope LJS members and guests enjoy our small areas of greenery and flowers,' writes Diana Levitas, who works as a volunteer overseeing the 'gardens' of the synagogue, which include the raised beds and troughs in the front of the synagogue and the patio garden outside the Montefiore Hall.

Sustainability

Sustainability is about providing for today and planning for the future. The principles underpinning this are the nurturing of the people who make up our community and beyond, robust finances, and a commitment to environmental integrity.



Tree painting created by the children of *Rimon* with Effie Romain and Susannah Alexander

For the LJS to be sustainable, we need to think about attracting, engaging and keeping members, and providing the services and activities they want and expect. It's about having rabbis, teachers and pastoral care as needed, looking after our beautiful building, as well as the peaceful setting of our Pound Lane Cemetery in Willesden. It's also about all of us making a contribution to our community and the wider community both in terms of time and money.

Dependent as we are on membership fees, the LJS has a strict policy that no-one will be excluded if they are not in a position to pay their full subscription. We are indebted to the many members who make additional donations to support us.



The planting of a sapling at the Kew Gardens *Tu Bi'Sh'vat* attended by LJS Members Jenny and Michael Nathan

The LJS building is a very special place. The Sanctuary is a beautiful space, warm and welcoming, and within the synagogue walls are unique works of art for all to enjoy. Wonderful music is to be heard here. Our building also affords us excellent facilities for children and adults to learn, from the well-stocked library to the classrooms and multi-purpose spaces. We have an excellent and dedicated staff team, many of whom have been at the LJS for more than ten years and a few for thirty plus. Our values and vision attract a diverse congregation, many of whom volunteer their time daily, weekly and monthly to the LJS.

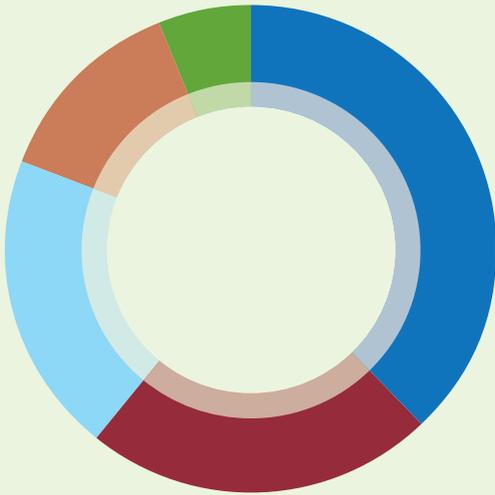


Looking after the LJS archives

Our wonderful archive collection gives us a picture of the beginning of the Liberal Movement in Britain to the present day. *'It is fascinating to view so many documents and photos, and have the opportunity to categorise, digitise and store these safely for posterity'*, says archivist, Cinde Lee.

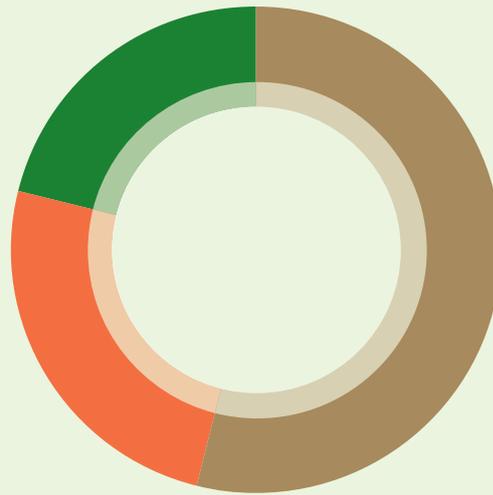
VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

Income in 2019*



- Membership fees
- Learning: LJS Nursery and Rimon
- Donations
- Cemetery
- Other activities including venue hire

How the money was spent in 2019



- Staff costs
- Charitable activities
- Administration, building, facilities & governance

* Please note that this income does not include monies that are restricted for specific use, such as the Drop-In for Asylum-Seeker Families and for the Out and About Club. Please also note that as well as much higher than usual donations, the LJS benefitted from additional income from legacies and investments. As these are one-off events, unlikely to be repeated, they have been omitted from this chart.

We are about to start our fourth year of a seven-year programme of investing in the synagogue in terms of building work and infrastructure. Every year there are fresh challenges. In 2019 we installed new boilers and washroom facilities. There are further initiatives and maintenance planned for 2020-22.

Sustainability is also about our responsibility to care for our surroundings and the earth for future generations. As we plan to be a member of the Eco-Synagogue movement, we have been introducing initiatives such as reducing our use of plastic, using paper from sustainable sources which can also be recycled (and using much less of it), as well as increasing our purchase of Fairtrade foods. Small changes, such as using glasses instead of plastic cups for *Kiddush*, demonstrate our commitment to being mindful

of all the ways, large and small, which can make a difference.

Sustainability is about everyone supporting each other and working together. It is a concept which underpins all aspects of LJS life and our role within the broader Liberal Judaism movement.



Our new professional catering kitchen with the Rational combi-oven in use for events and celebrations



Making the LJS a greener environment

The LJS is committed to becoming a more eco-friendly environment. Harriett Goldenberg tells us, *'I am working with a team to help make this happen, staff and volunteers, to implement those small changes and big changes throughout the building that will make us more eco-friendly.'*

The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, known as the LJS, was founded in 1911 and is the oldest and largest member of Liberal Judaism, a constituent member of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Becoming a Member of the LJS

We are an inclusive and diverse community and warmly welcome new Members and Friends. If you are interested in joining, please contact the membership team at membership@ljs.org or call 020 7432 1296. We have membership rates for individuals, families and young adults.

Friends of the LJS

The LJS was the first synagogue in the UK to invite non-Jewish partners and people who have identified with the Jewish community to associate themselves with us by becoming a 'Friend'. Friends are welcome in all aspects of synagogue life (excluding a vote at general meetings) and their involvement and commitment to the synagogue is encouraged and valued. The LJS is one of the few synagogues in the UK which permits non-Jewish partners to be buried next to their Jewish partners in our cemetery.



Choosing Judaism

We welcome those who are interested in exploring the option of becoming part of the Jewish community. Please contact one of the Rabbis on 020 7286 5181 or at rabbispa@ljs.org for more information.



Rabbi Alexandra Wright



Rabbi Elana Dellal



Rabbi Igor Zinkov



The Liberal Jewish Synagogue

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