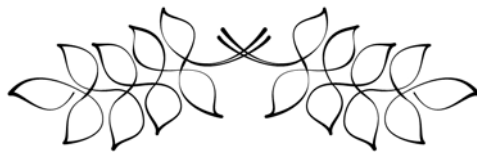


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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

Our newsletter has always featured the "journey" stories of our members. Each one of us has a story of personal growth and a search for meaning in our lives. Right now I am struck by the journey of the congregation, itself. We are about to enter a very new phase in the life of Congregation Sukkat Shalom.

For 17 years, we have been a congregation without a permanent home of our own. We have worshipped in schools and community centers. We have been fortunate to share sacred space with a number of churches. We have worked out of various office spaces and celebrated in many different venues.

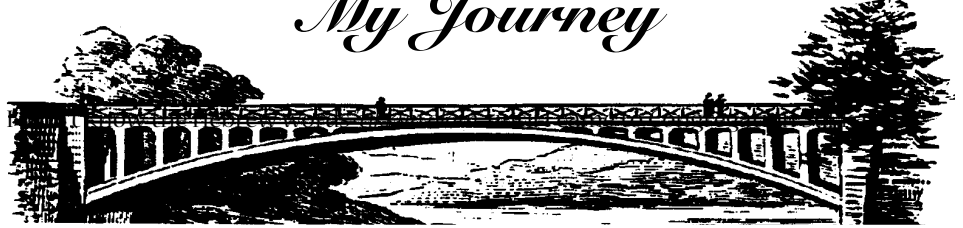
Some of that won't change. We will continue to worship at the Church of the Latter Day Saints for the High Holy Days. Sunday Family School will meet at the Community Recreation Center. During the summer, we will share Shabbat dinner and worship in Gillson Park. But now we will have our own home at 1001 Central Avenue. It will be the place we gather for Shabbat services, B'nai Mitzvah observance, celebrations and meals, weekday education, study, counseling and much more.

"We are about to enter a very new phase in the life of Congregation Sukkat Shalom."

Over the last number of months, I have watched the journey of the building itself as it has been renovated and upgraded. The architects, contractors and,

please turn to page 2

My Journey



Shalom. I grew up in the eighties. It was not a socially-conscious decade (Gordon Gekko; 'greed is good.') An important part of my journey has been seeking opportunities to help make the world a better place.

Prior to joining Sukkat Shalom, I participated in collecting *tzedakah* while growing up in a Conservative synagogue on the North Shore; volunteered in the choir as a young adult at a Renewal congregation in the city; and generally tried to be a giving person. At Sukkat Shalom, I have found many wonderful opportunities to help others, enriching my life and the life of my family in many ways.

One of the most rewarding projects we have been a part of is Family Promise. We volunteer to make dinner for -- and spend a couple hours eating with -- families in the program who are living temporarily in churches and synagogues in our area.

Initially, I was hesitant to sign up. I thought it sounded like a lot of work. My family might feel uncomfortable sitting down and having dinner with families who are struggling, and I wasn't sure how it really helps. After volunteering, I have found Family Promise to be really special.

"As a busy mom, I wasn't sure how I could fit Family Promise into my life."

As a busy mom, I wasn't sure how I could fit Family Promise into my life. But I have found that making dinner for Family Promise is relatively easy and a lot more fun than making dinner alone. We share the cooking and cleaning with another host family from Sukkat Shalom or First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette.

Most recently I made a big Caesar salad, cut up some fruit and bought some bread while the other host family made chicken and potatoes and brought dessert. In the middle of a busy week I was in the big, beautiful kitchen at First Presbyterian Church cooking and laughing. It was like making dinner with an old friend. A couple of hours go by fast and, before you can exchange recipes, it's time to go home.

Before volunteering, I had many questions such as what food to make and how to connect to the families in the program. That is where Nancy Freeman stepped in. Nancy is the Family Promise coordinator for First Presbyterian. With Nancy at the helm, the program is very organized. We are told what to do every step of the way.

Nancy makes herself available and often stays for dinner to help if you falter. Just think

please turn to page 2

From the Rabbi, cont'd

especially, our group of incredible volunteer leaders have created a magnificent sacred home with a sanctuary that will inspire and embrace.

We can celebrate together in a social hall with a kitchen that allows us to share meals together as an extended family. We can study and learn, and we can gather together in community. I truly believe that you will love this new home for Sukkat Shalom.

But this new spiritual home must not represent a turning inward by Sukkat Shalom. The new temple building needs to allow us to continue to fulfill our mission. The Book of Isaiah, chapter 56, states: "My house shall be a house of prayer for all people." That is who we are. This is a sacred community for all people.

As we have developed, I have tried to offer a more precise definition of what diversity means in practice at Sukkat Shalom. Nearly every one of our families includes members from other faith backgrounds. I see this most often at a Bar or Bat Mitzvah service. Someone within the close family circle is not a Jew by birth. It might be a parent or an aunt or uncle of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Grandparents or more distant relatives might be Catholic, Mainstream Protestants, Evangelicals, Mormon, Bahai, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or nothing at all.

But what is important to us is that anyone walking into our sanctuary for worship or seeking counseling from clergy or joining us for any reason must be seen not as an outsider or even a welcome visitor. They are part of our community. Sukkat Shalom, for that moment, must offer an authentic spiritual experience for everyone who is present.

Perhaps it was an easy message when we, ourselves, were "visitors" in other sanctuaries and sacred spaces. Now that we have our own home, this must be an opportunity for us to open our doors even wider and be a place where all feel welcome and engaged. This is a new phase of our journey, but we continue to carry the best of who we have been into the future. We are a house of prayer (and much more) for all people.

"But this new spiritual home must not represent a turning inward by Sukkat Shalom."

Journey, cont'd

of Nancy as First Presbyterian's answer to Judy Buckman. As far as connecting with the families, Nancy offers some guidelines about how to be both gracious hosts and sensitive to the guests' needs. An evening at Family Promise often finds my family playing with the children in the program while I sit around talking with their parents about how to get kids to nap and eat their vegetables!

Like any good volunteer work, it's not all fun and games. At first I wondered: am I really making a difference by cooking dinner for a couple of families? I have learned from the Family Promise website and from speaking to their executive director that, by the time a family arrives at Family Promise, they've already exhausted all of their options to keep their family together on their own.

Family Promise gives families a supportive pathway to self-sufficiency by providing day and night safe havens, nutritious meals, community, transportation and social services. And it works! Nearly 85 percent of families transition out of homelessness into housing within four months.

Family Promise is clearly making a difference for the families in the program, but I have found that Family Promise is also making a difference in mine. By giving my entire family an opportunity to provide a healthy meal and spend a couple of hours interacting with families in need, we have seen firsthand how we are doing our little part to "repair the world" and we are inspired to do more.

I'm thankful that Sukkat Shalom is committed to being a partner with First Presbyterian in support of Family Promise so that families like mine can do this kind of *tikkun olam*. I hope you'll join us in volunteering at Family Promise – particularly when we are able to host families in our new building. And I warn you – I make a mean Orange Chili Chicken with vegetables.

"Nearly 85 percent of families transition out of homelessness into housing within four months"

Special Weekend of Activities to Dedicate our New Spiritual Home

After 17 years of wandering in the desert (well, really just Wilmette), our congregational family will soon reach the Promised Land of our new home.

Congregational Church of Wilmette and Reverend Sarah Butter of the First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette.

We hope that you have circled October 12-14 on your calendar for an exciting and meaningful weekend of activities to dedicate our new building at 1001 Central Avenue. The celebration will reflect the many facets of Congregation Sukkat Shalom, including worship, song, study, and joining with friends from the larger faith community.

The weekend will begin with a special **Shabbat service on Friday, October 12 at 7:30 p.m.** Rabbi Gordon will lead us in prayer and speak "Of Sacred Time and Space." Cantor Kaufman will lead us in "Songs of Joy," joined by the Sukkat Shalom Choir under the direction of Michael Querio. Special guests will include our neighbors and friends, Reverend Stephanie Perdedew VanSlyke of the First



This is the sanctuary, viewed from the back of the room towards the bimah. Note the two new picture windows on either side of the bimah, bringing in natural light.



These beautiful wooden doors open into the sanctuary from the foyer. Offices for Rabbi Gordon and Judy Buckman are on either side, along with new bookshelves.

Saturday morning will begin with Torah study at 9 a.m., followed by a light breakfast. **At 7 p.m., we will join in a celebratory evening** featuring hors d'oeuvres, libations and entertainment. The wonderful singing group Acts of Kindness Cabaret will perform a show called "A Little Help from My Friends."

Benefits from the evening celebration will be donated to Family Promise, an organization that Sukkat Shalom has been supporting and working with for several years. Family Promise helps homeless families

please turn the page

New Building Provides New Opportunities for Learning

by Alissa Zuchman,
Director of Family Education

Summer is the perfect time to reflect and evaluate. Everything is just a bit slower and quieter. When you are in the midst of a busy and challenging school year, it is sometimes difficult to see clearly what changes need to be made.

Last year was my first as director of Family Education at Sukkat Shalom. I was able to observe, learn and, when necessary, tweak our educational programming. It was important for me to really understand the unique culture of our community. I was able to talk with many parents and children to learn about your religious backgrounds and what you expect from your spiritual home.

With the new year of Family School approaching, I can assure you that there are some exciting new adventures ahead. In particular, our new building allows for a multitude of educational programs that will have the whole family working on projects together.

For the next Family School year, we have created four occasions to join together in our new sacred space. On these special days we will study, worship, sing and, of course, nosh. Please mark your calendars with the following dates and times:

Sukkot: September 30th
from 10 a.m. to Noon

Tu Bishvat: January 27th
from 10 a.m. to Noon

Purim: February 24th
from 10 a.m. to Noon

Passover: March 17th
from 10 a.m. to Noon

I am looking forward to seeing you for the first day of Family School on Sunday, September 9th at 10 a.m. at the Wilmette Community Center. Please feel free to email me at alissaz0921@gmail.com with any questions or concerns.

Special Dedication Weekend, cont'd

with temporary housing and meals. Tickets for the evening will be \$50 per person in support of Family Promise.

Sunday morning at 10 a.m. we will welcome our member families to our new home. Families will receive a "passport" which they will use to actively explore all the "nooks and crannies" of our new building. Stops will include planting bulbs in our new garden, making a blanket for Project Linus and creating a mosaic. There will be opportunities to meet other families and, of course, have a snack!

We hope to see you at the various events that will make up our Dedication Weekend. More information will be mailed within the next few weeks.

Our days of wandering Wilmette are almost over. Come and see that there's no place like home.

Congregant's Eagle Scout Project Provides Sukkah for New Building's Garden



Cantor's Corner: "Working Out" With...God

by Cantor Jason Kaufman

One year ago, I decided to live a healthier life.

Though I think it is essential to state that living a healthier lifestyle is not necessarily synonymous with weight loss, for me it was. I was significantly overweight. I felt that God had a different plan for the life that I was living and that my weight was becoming an everyday obstacle for me to overcome. I needed to make a change. Losing weight is challenging enough without doing it publicly. When I first started, I had a strict policy that I would not discuss this journey with anyone -- and make no mistake, it is a journey. I didn't feel comfortable sharing this part of my life and I lacked the vocabulary to discuss it in a way that I thought would benefit anyone.

Eventually, the choice of privacy was no longer mine to make. Once I lost about 15 pounds, my weight-loss became quite noticeable. By the time I lost 60, people were telling me that I was unrecognizable. Sometimes this pleased me, but other times I felt overwhelmed and judged by their well-intentioned comments. The fact that I was struggling to live a healthier life so publicly gave permission for many to share their own personal health struggles with me. Slowly, I began to share my struggle with others. As I became more open with my journey, many became more open with theirs.

"A synagogue is a community that should welcome our struggles, not cause us to hide them in shame."

No longer did I duck the familiar faces that I would see at the weekly Weight Watchers meetings that I attended. Instead, I began to look forward to these times as an authentic extension of the synagogue community. We applauded each other's successes, nurtured our disappointments and supported each other in a way that I believe is unique to a community of faith. This made me wonder what lessons can be taken from these meetings and brought into the larger synagogue community. I have always felt that synagogue is where one should bring our most authentic selves. A synagogue is a community that should welcome our struggles, not cause us to hide them in shame.

From the most serious of eating disorders to the "yo-yo dieter" to the Bat and Bar Mitzvah student who casually makes a derogatory comment about their physical appearance, it is clear to me that there is not a person in this world who is free of dealing with body-image issues. How can we care for our spiritual health without being equally focused on our physical wellbeing? How can we promote physical health without narrowly focusing on weight loss and athleticism? Most important, where is God in this conversation? I believe that Judaism, at its core, is about bringing intentionality to our lives. By bringing purpose into an act that may initially be perceived as mundane, we transform the ordinary into the holy.

We do this each time we say Hamotzi or Birkat Hamazon (the blessings before and after meals). Should we also create a prayer before we begin to exercise, pausing to acknowledge that taking ownership of our physical health exists in our partnership with God and honors the notion that we are made in God's image? With a modern mindset, we debate whether or not certain foods should be considered kosher -- not solely due to their ingredients, but also the manner in which the food is prepared. In making that determination, should we not also consider their nutritional content or portion size? In the past, meals and coffee shops were the location of choice for my meetings with congregants outside of the synagogue office. I spent much of my time being sedentary, surrounded by food. Now, I choose walking or running on the lakefront path for important conversations. Perhaps more synagogue programming across the country should focus on health and wellbeing, whether in the form of text study, prayer, exercise or nutrition classes. I've been on a journey discovering that physical health is an integral and essential part of one's spiritual health. The next step on this path is conversation. Let's go on a walk with each other. Let's share nutritional tips with each other. There is much to be explored, discussed, learned and taught. I hope you'll join me on this journey.

"I believe that Judaism, at its core, is about bringing intentionality to our lives."

Searching for Support and Comfort? We Are Here for You

When tragedy strikes, to whom can you turn? Our faith community is here to offer support.

Your first call may go to Rabbi Gordon, Cantor Kaufman or Judy Buckman. They are always available to assist you in whatever your needs might be. The Hineinu (We Are Here) Committee is also available to support you during *shiva* and mourning. Judy Buckman will contact the committee to let them know of your needs.

For your information, Sukkat Shalom has established a funeral plan with Chicago Jewish Funerals (CJF). While congregants are free to use any funeral home they wish, our plan with CJF is intended to help simplify the process of making funeral arrangements and to provide additional comfort during a challenging time. If you would like further information, you can contact David Jacobson, our CJF liaison, at www.cjfinfo.com or (847) 229-8822.

In your time of need, we hope that you will turn to your Sukkat Shalom family for support. It's what a faith community is all about.

**New-Family
Welcoming Program**

Would you like to join in welcoming new families into our congregation? Now is your chance! We are looking for a few families who are interested in helping out with our Family School Welcoming program.

This is a great family project that does not involve a lot of time but does so much to help make our new congregants feel comfortable during those first few sessions of Family School. We are looking for families with children in grades Pre-K through 4th grade. For more information, or to sign up, please contact the congregational office at sukkatshalom@att.net.



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**Sukkat Shalom
Ice Cream Social
Aug. 26th**

Please join us as we welcome our newest families into our congregation and Family School. All are welcome as we gather in the front of our new home and enjoy a cool treat with both current and new members of Sukkat Shalom.

Date: Sunday, August 26

Time: 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Location: In front of our new home,
1001 Central Avenue, Wilmette.

(In case of inclement weather,
we will meet at the Community Church of Wilmette located at 1020 Forest Avenue, Wilmette.)

Please RSVP by Wednesday, August 22, to
sukkatshalom@att.net