

SHERITH ISRAEL NEWS

JANUARY-APRIL, 2017



IN GREAT SHAPE BUT NO LONGER IN THE PINK: The dome gets new waterproofing and is restored to its original gray color to match the rest of Sherith Israel's Colusa sandstone building.

Research leads CSI board to update dues structure

NEW DUES PLAN TO BE CLEARER AND FAIRER

Congregation Sherith Israel didn't always have dues. When our congregational predecessors moved into their new California Street sanctuary in 1905, they sold seats—the rights to use specific seats for the coming year—to raise funds to run the synagogue. Selling synagogue seats was a common practice during the early 20th century, much like selling season tickets for sports teams or theater subscriptions today. Our sanctuary is the size it is—1,300 seats—because synagogue leaders then wanted to ensure that the congregation would have the revenue it needed to endure.

Now, 112 years later, as our new clergy team begins to create our future, our congregational leadership wants to make sure we have the funds to thrive in the 21st century. That requires a change from the “fair-share” dues adopted mid-century to a more transparent plan.

The search for a new dues structure began in 2012. Valerie Jahan, then president of the congregation, saw the need

to raise revenue. Dues were not stretching far enough. As conceived years ago, the fair-share dues system encouraged congregants to make an annual commitment of two percent of their income. “But most people weren't committing two percent of their income to dues,” notes Valerie. As she and then-executive director **Amy Mallor** reviewed the situation, they discovered that congregants in apparently similar financial circumstances were often paying wildly different amounts. As Valerie points out, “Our fair-share system was no longer fair.”

Current CSI president **Evan Kletter** echoes that concern. He notes, “When our members' contributions get out of balance, it undercuts the support Sherith Israel needs to hire excellent clergy, maintain our programming, run our religious school and keep up our sanctuary and school buildings. It throws the burden onto other congregants who routinely—and generously—pay more. We are grateful to those families who enable Judaism to thrive at Sherith Israel.”

[Dues plan continues, page 14](#)

Major matching gift lifts campaign at year's end

RETROFIT NEARS COMPLETION AS FINAL FUNDRAISING CONTINUES

Nine months of construction is about to give birth to a retrofitted Sherith Israel building able to withstand a mighty earthquake. We are also working towards completion of our Seismic Retrofit Campaign to provide matching fiscal stability.

As of publication (January 2017), 80–85 percent of our second-phase seismic retrofit construction is complete, including buttresses to support the north wall. The remaining work will be concluded by the end of winter. Work being finished now

[Retrofit continues, page 10](#)

INSIDE:

A Moment with Rabbi Jessica Graf	2
4 Questions for Cantor David Frommer	3
Outdoor Judaism	4
Saturdays at CSI	5
Adult Programs	6
Early Childhood	8
Religious School	9
Fall photos	10-11
Profile: Charley Stern	12
News Nosh	13
Passages	15
Tikkun Olam Corner	16

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**Cantors Diego and Inés visit CSI
FRI. and SAT., FEB. 3 and 4**

**Michael Krasny and Jewish Humor
SAT., MARCH 4, 7 pm**



**ONLINE REGISTRATION
available at
www.sherithisrael.org**



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Member of the Union for
Reform Judaism since 1903

CLERGY

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Senior Rabbi

Julie Saxe-Taller

Rabbi

David Frommer

Cantor

EMERITUS CLERGY

Lawrence Raphael *Rabbi Emeritus*

Martin Weiner *Rabbi Emeritus*

Martin Feldman *Cantor Emeritus*

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SHERITH ISRAEL NEWS

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A MOMENT WITH

RABBI JESSICA GRAF



"PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT" AT THIS MOMENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Several years ago, I participated in an American Jewish World Service rabbinic leadership trip to Ghana. We carried heavy bricks and built a school founded by a man who had escaped from slavery. I learned an important phrase: "Productive discomfort." Living in a village with no running water and sanitation allowed for some productive evaluation of myself and the complexities of the world. The term made perfect sense to me in West Africa. Now, it applies to my life in America.

In these weeks following the most surprising and uncomfortable election in modern American history, I've found myself referring to "productive discomfort." Having inaugurated our 45th president, America is in a state of turmoil. Regardless of who got your vote, one thing seems clear: The next four years will bring some fundamental changes to our society. We can only speculate about the future. What will our country look like as new policies and leaders take shape?

In this time of huge unknowns, anxiety abounds. How can we turn our discomfort into "productive discomfort?" We now have a chance to carefully evaluate who we are and what we believe. We have an opportunity to redouble our efforts to uphold our most deeply held values.

With each election, we are reminded not only of our privilege to vote, but also our right and responsibility to

engage in our democracy. As Jews and Americans, we value freedom. Now, more than ever, it is our responsibility to help shape policy at all levels. Now is the time to engage—with government, with neighbors and with the Jewish community. We must work hard to ensure that the values of our tradition remain at the core of American life. I pray that we will look back four years from now and see that the discomfort of the unknown inspired us to speak up for justice, to stand up for one another and to raise up our values.

On Tuesday, November 8, I was particularly proud to walk into Sherith Israel—a polling place. I stopped to appreciate the greatness of our country: People representing all religions, races and sexual orientations had come together in a synagogue to cast their secular vote. That ordinary scene was quite extraordinary.

At its very best, our country is "one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all." Congregation Sherith Israel is committed to doing whatever is necessary to help support that America. With courage, vigilance and an unwavering commitment to the pursuit of justice, we can turn feelings of discomfort into "productive discomfort." As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously said, "In a free society, some are guilty but all are responsible." Let's all take responsibility for what happens next. ■

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

"Why then have you flouted the command of the LORD and done what displeases Him?" — 2 Samuel 2:9

In the famous biblical story, King David sees the beautiful Bathsheba bathing on her roof, sends for her and has sex with her (producing Solomon). David then orders her husband, the soldier Uriah the Hittite, to the front lines where he is killed. Nathan, the

court prophet, upbraids David. He relates the word of God. Calamity will rise against David—God's beloved—from within his own house. Indeed, it does. Speaking truth to power is an ancient value. ■

4

Questions for CANTOR DAVID FROMMER

Sherith Israel has a long, rich musical tradition. We asked Cantor David Frommer to talk about the role of music in Jewish worship and to describe his musical goals at Sherith Israel.

Q: Tell us about the role music has played in Judaism historically.

A: Music has been an integral part of Jewish worship for as long as Judaism has existed. Exodus recounts how music celebrated our first moments as a free nation, after our escape from Pharaoh's armies at the Sea of Reeds. Moses and Miriam sang songs in praise of God; Miriam led the women in dancing accompanied by drums. Psalm 150, which we often sing on Shabbat mornings, lists the musical instruments used in Jewish communities at least 3,000 years ago. The Bible also describes the choirs of Levites whose singing enhanced worship at the Temple. Still, we have almost no idea what the music actually sounded like. Our closest approximation is the chanting of Torah, according to the cantillation (trope) markings that accompany its text. The cantillation systems of Jewish communities from the Middle East are probably a closer representation of what ancient Jewish music sounded like.

Q: Why do Reform congregations seem to encourage more varied musical practices than Orthodox and Conservative synagogues?

A: The biggest difference between music in Reform Judaism and traditional Judaism is that the latter prohibits the use of instruments on Shabbat and festivals. This ban dates to Talmudic debates 1,500 years ago. Reform Judaism's decision to bring instruments back to worship services has allowed for a faster pace of musical experimentation and variation than in traditional synagogues. Interestingly, this has created its own set of challenges, as the last three generations of Reform Jews have respectively embraced the organ, the piano and the guitar as their accompaniment of choice. The next generation might eschew all three in favor of the drum. Traditional synagogues struggle with a pace of musical change that can seem too slow, while Reform synagogues struggle with a pace of musical change that may seem too fast.

Q: What directions would you like to take music here at Sherith Israel?

A: Sherith Israel is blessed with a history of musical appreciation, a community that values music, and a congregational core that actively participates in worship.

My goal is less to change our music than to grow it. We currently average about fifty people on Friday night and have about ten people in our volunteer choir, Koleynu. I'd like to see those numbers double. Our challenge is to balance tradition and innovation in a way that welcomes as many different generations as possible. So far, we've gotten lots of positive feedback on both High Holiday services, which offered a more traditional sound, and Shabbat services, which offers a more contemporary sound. We'll continue to fine-tune our Shabbat music to offer experiences that reflect mainstream Reform Jewish worship, as well as melodies and liturgy from the larger Jewish world. I'd also like to grow the presence of Jewish music in our homes by educating our community about Jewish music that can accompany their life-cycle events, and the highs and lows of everyday life, such as lullabies and healing songs.

Q: How can congregants become more involved in the synagogue's worship and music?

A: A great start is our Musical Shabbat on the first Friday of each month. These services will differ from other Friday nights at Sherith Israel in two key ways: our musical accompaniment will be augmented by congregants who enjoy playing instruments, and our prayers will be augmented by congregants singing melodies and harmonies that we practice in Koleynu. Our congregants are generally excited to sing in services, but I've noticed a resistance to joining Koleynu that I think is based on a preconceived idea that choral singing is both difficult and formal. While that's more accurate for the High Holidays, I intend Koleynu's participation in Musical Shabbat to be easy and informal. Koleynu will add ruach (spirit) to the songs we're already singing and enhance them with simple and beautiful harmonies—something anyone is capable of learning.

Koleynu will rehearse twice a month beginning in January, on the second Sunday morning and the second Tuesday evening. But singers need only attend one rehearsal each month. In addition, we hope many congregants will take advantage of my adult education classes on chanting Torah, which I'll teach on Sunday mornings this spring. Torah chanting is one of the most exciting ways to participate in services. We want to encourage everyone to add this skill to their Jewish toolkit. ■

AVODAH/WORSHIP

Outdoor Judaism

HACHUTZAH—HEADING OUT

What do Tashlich, Sukkot, Tu B'Shvat, and Lag B'Omer have in common? They are frequently overlooked Jewish observances, but this year we are going to celebrate them by taking them outside to reconnect them with their roots in nature.

Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller has put together a cycle of outdoor Jewish experiences under the name **Hachutzah**, which means *heading out*. "Each gathering will incorporate the chance to enjoy the season, use our senses, engage our surroundings and encounter Jewish texts and traditions," explains Rabbi Julie. She reminds us that the Jewish calendar incorporates both the annual procession of the seasons and the monthly cycles of the moon. "Our holidays developed in the reality of the lives of our ancestors, who actually harvested produce on harvest holidays."

TU B'SHVAT NIGHT HIKE IN SUTRO FOREST

Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller and
Julia Plevin

Saturday, Feb. 11, 5–7:30 pm

**Meet at Stanyan and 17th Streets,
San Francisco**

The trailhead starts with a wooden staircase about two houses above the intersection. If you drive, please allow enough time to park.

Wear waterproof shoes and bring flashlights. The hike will be moderate and slow-paced, but parts of the trail are steep. Snacks and everything needed for a magical evening will be provided. **RSVP: Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720 x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org.**

HACHUTZAH SHABBAT: OUTDOOR SERVICE AND PICNIC AT THE ALBANY BULB

Saturday, April 8

**9:30 am: Carpools leave from CSI
for Albany—RSVP to get a ride**

**10:30 am–1 pm: Shabbat at the
Albany Bulb**

Celebrate spring in a beautiful spot with a fabulous view of the city. We'll sing, read Torah and enjoy a gorgeous walk for people of all ages and abilities. CSI provides main dishes for lunch. Please bring side dishes and salads to share, picnic blankets and waterproof shoes.

See Google Maps for directions to the Albany Bulb. Contact Nia Taylor, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org, if you can drive or need a ride.

LAG B'OMER BONFIRE Saturday, May 13, 7:30 pm Location TBA

Lag B'Omer is the 33rd day between Passover and Shavuot. Traditionally we count the days between the two holidays, known as the Omer, in anticipation of a good harvest and receiving the Torah at Sinai. We will sing, tell stories and connect with Jewish history and mysticism over a bonfire.

Bring warm layers, portable chairs or picnic blankets, and sticks for roasting marshmallows. **RSVP: Online or Natalie Weizman 415-346-1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org. ■**



Hachutzah!

החוצה

Join us and take home
a Hachutzah souvenir.

SHABBAT SERVICES

FRIDAY EVENINGS

6 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat service

7:15 pm: Kiddush and oneg

Join us for services to welcome Shabbat and exit your week in peace.

MUSICAL SHABBAT

First Friday of each month

6 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat service

**7:15 pm: Kiddush followed by
catered Shabbat dinner**

Join Rabbi Jessica Graf, Cantor David Frommer, music director Jonathan Dimmock, our Koleynu choir and visiting musicians as we fill our dome with music.

✓ **Catered Shabbat dinner: \$18 for adult members; \$36 for adult nonmembers; \$12 for children 6–13; free for preschoolers under 6. Registration required for dinner: Online or Nia Taylor 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.**

FAMILY SHABBAT

Second Friday of the month

6 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat service

**7:15 pm: Kiddush, congregational
vegetarian dinner and potluck dessert**

Enjoy a lively family Shabbat with Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller, Cantor David Frommer and Lior Ben-Hur.

✓ **Registration for complimentary dinner: Online or Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org. Potluck desserts welcome.**

SATURDAY MORNINGS

9:15 am: Torah study

Enjoy bagels, lox, coffee, tea and lively discussions.

**10:30 am: Shabbat morning
services**

Intimate and informal, services include chanting or reading from our Torah scrolls.

WELCOME BACK ARGENTINE CANTORS DIEGO RUBINSZTEIN AND INÉS KAPUSTIANSKY

Friday, Feb. 3

6 pm: Cantors Diego and Inés join Cantor David Frommer for Musical Shabbat

7:30 pm: Kiddush and Shabbat dinner

The festive evening continues with dinner catered by Town's End Restaurant and Bakery. **\$18 for adult members; \$36 for adult nonmembers; \$12 for children 6–13; free for children 5 and under. Menu includes Kosher chicken plus vegetarian options. Registration required for dinner: Nia Taylor 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.**

Saturday, Feb. 4

10:30 am: Join us for an inspiring, creative Shabbat morning musical prayer experience with Diego, Inés and Cantor David.

Saturday evening, Feb. 4

7:30 pm: Our favorite South American cantors present an international Jewish music concert. **\$18 for members; \$36 for nonmembers. Buy tickets in advance at www.sherithisrael.org.**

✓ **Friday, Feb. 3 and
Saturday, Feb. 4**

SATURDAY MORNINGS AT CSI

Like most American Reform congregations, Sherith Israel's worship centers on Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat services. "We'd like to create a more dynamic Shabbat morning experience," comments Rabbi Jessica Graf. "I'd like to see more opportunities for people to engage with study and engage with each other."

Currently, Saturday-morning Torah Study, led by our rabbis and cantor, draws about 25 students weekly—newcomers and veterans alike. "People who haven't come before are more than welcome to join in," invites Rabbi Jessica. "Please come and add your voice to the discussion. It's a stimulating way to start the day."

During this first year of working together, our clergy team wants to function as a start-up—albeit a 165-year-old start-up. "We want to be nimble and creative so we can blend the tradition we honor with new ideas like food justice and tak-

ing our worship outdoors. A major goal," she adds, "is to build community. It's all about relationships."

One big step in that dream is the new Shabbat Mishpachah for our early childhood families. "We want to experiment with a family Shabbat experience where people can enjoy both the community and the spiritual aspects of Shabbat."

NEW—SHABBAT MISHPACHAH
Saturday, Feb. 25 (during Shabbat Chai)
11 am: Family-friendly worship
11:45 am: Lunch
Newman Hall
\$18 per family, preregistration required

Mishpachah means family. What better way to celebrate Shabbat than by joining Cantor David Frommer, Rabbi Jessica Graf and other families with children under five for a creative, fun, musical service for kids and adults. Everyone is welcome!

✓ *Registration: Online or Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org.*

SHABBAT CHAI—for Everyone
Saturdays, Feb. 25 and May 20
9:15–10:30 am: Class time for youth and adults
10:30 am: Services in the sanctuary for everyone
12:15 pm: Potluck lunch in the chapel

All are invited—including adults without children—when Religious School moves to Shabbat morning four times a year. This morning of experiential learning weaves together class time for students, classes for adults (including Torah Study, yoga or art) and Shabbat services for all. Our student readers will chant Torah. A special Shabbat guest from KlezCalifornia will introduce everyone to Yiddish language, culture and klezmer music. It's all followed by a potluck lunch in the chapel. ■

SPECIAL WINTER-SPRING OBSERVANCES

TU B'SHVAT SEDER AND FAMILY SHABBAT

Friday, Feb. 10

6 pm Services

7 pm Kiddush, Tu B'Shvat Seder and vegetarian dinner

During the Temple period, Tu B'Shvat was like tax day—the day fruit trees were counted for tithing. Once the Temple no longer collected those offerings, Tu B'Shvat was dormant until the Kabbalists began celebrating the symbolic significance of the tree in Judaism with a Seder ritual glorifying fruit, nuts and the role of trees in Jewish thought and our lives. Join Rabbi Julie, Cantor David Frommer and congregant Ruth Auerbach for a fun evening.

✓ A vegetarian dinner will be provided with donations from the Oneg Fund; please bring a potluck dessert to share. *Registration: Online or Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org.*

PURIM 2017

Sunday, March 12

9–9:30 Breakfast

9:30 T'filah, Megillah and Shpiel

Followed by carnival fun in Shushan by the Bay

Calling all kings and queens, Vashtis, Esthers, Mordecais and Hamans! You are invited to don costumes, listen to our stories, shake your graggers (noisemakers), make masks and play carnival games. "Evil Haman tried to destroy the Jews but he didn't succeed thanks to the courage of our heroes, Esther and Mordechai," says Rabbi Jessica Graf. Our carnival in Shushan by the Bay is brought to you by teens, parents, teachers and Religious School students, coordinated by assistant principal Natalie Weizman.

This year's carnival is a fundraiser for the youth group trip to Los Angeles.

PASSOVER SECOND-NIGHT COMMUNITY SEDER

Tuesday, April 11, 5 pm

Mark your calendars for our annual family-friendly second-night Seder as we once again tell the Passover story of the Israelites' journey from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

The community second-night seder is the annual fundraiser for Hamotzi and Chicken Soupers. The food, prepared skillfully by volunteers, highlights the delicious dedication and vision of these two tzedakah programs that have prepared a quarter of a million meals since their founding.

✓ *Seder reservations: Adults, \$36; post-b'nai mitzvah students, \$18; children, \$10; children under 5, free; \$360 reserves a table for 10. Online or Nia Taylor 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.*

YIZKOR

Saturday, April 15

10:30 am during Shabbat services

Yizkor means "we remember," and is observed four times a year, including during Passover. We'll remember our loved ones by sharing stories and memories.

YOM HASHOAH

Friday, April 21, 6 pm

Yom HaShoah is Holocaust Remembrance Day. Please join us for a service that includes special readings that commemorate the Shoah and honor our survivors.

YOM HAATZMAUT

Friday, April 28, 6 pm

Yom HaAtzmaut is Israeli Independence Day. We'll celebrate Israel's 69th birthday with a service that includes special readings and honors the complexities of this day.

ADULT PROGRAMS



ONLINE REGISTRATION
available at
www.sherithisrael.org

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL: BEFORE THERE WAS YOUTUBE THERE WAS TALMUD

Sundays, Jan. 8, 22 and Feb. 5
11 am–12:15 pm
Rabbi Jessica Graf

Did you know that the Talmud's lessons include a discussion on how long one should spend on the toilet and whether an animal can be used for a wall of a sukkah? Join Rabbi Graf in the chapel for a lively look at our not-so-untouchable instruction manual for life. No Talmud experience necessary.

Information: Rabbi Jessica Graf, 415.346.1720, x18, or rabbigraf@sherithisrael.org.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CONVERSION

Maurice Kamins
Third Tuesday of the month
6:30–8 pm
Feb. 21, March 21 and April 18

Join seekers and individuals preparing for conversion in informal discussions of the personal and practical issues relating to conversion. Jews by choice are encouraged to attend to share their experiences. Partners, spouses and friends welcome.

Information: Nia Taylor, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.

JEWISH BOOK CLUB Mondays, 7 pm

Feb. 27: *The Seven Good Years* by Etgar Keret. Discussion Leader: Cathy Taylor. Israeli short-story writer Keret offers a nonfiction book detailing the seven years between the birth of his son following a terrorist attack and the death of his father, a Holocaust survivor.

March 27: *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* by David I. Kertzer. Discussion leader: Blanch Kahn. Historian Kertzer details the June 1858 kidnapping of a Jewish boy in Bologna, Italy. Because a household servant had secretly "baptized" Edgardo, he was considered a Catholic by the Church and taken from his family by officers of the Inquisition to a special monastery where his conversion would be completed.

April 24: *Moonglow* by Michael Chabon. Discussion leader: Helaine Weinstein. Jewish LearningWorks selected *Moon-glow* for its One Bay One Book program. Pulitzer Prize-winning and local Bay Area author Chabon delivers a novel of truth and lies, family legends, and existential adventure—and the forces that work to destroy us. It is a tale of madness, of war and adventure, of sex and desire and ordinary love and of existential doubt that travels from the Jewish slums of prewar South Philly to the invasion of Germany, a Florida retirement village and New York's Wallkill Prison.

Information: Nancy Sheftel-Gomes, 415.346.1720, x28, or nsgomes@sherithisrael.org.

INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM Saturdays, Feb. 4–May 20

Sherith Israel clergy
9:15–10:15: *Chevrah Torah* (Torah Study)
10:30–Noon: *Shabbat morning worship*
12:15–2 pm: *Lunch and Learn*

Whether you're Jewish and want to deepen your understanding or want to explore Judaism, here's your opportunity. Learn more about the roots, meaning and evolution of Judaism by studying Torah, and experiencing worship and rituals.

✓ Registration: Online or Nia Taylor, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org. Fee: \$360.

PRIME TIME CLUB

For congregants 65 and up
Fridays, Noon–2 pm
(complimentary lunch included)
Feb. 10, March 4, April 14
Guests and topics tbd

Todah rabbah—many thanks—to the Max and Marilyn Singer Foundation for its continuing support of the Prime Time lunch series.

✓ Registration: Online or Nia Taylor, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.

MIDRASH, MOVIES, AND MEANING

Rabbi Martin Weiner
Tuesdays, March 7, 14 and 28
7–8:30 p.m.

Enjoy study sessions with Rabbi Emeritus Martin Weiner on his favorite topic, Midrash and movies. Discussion will link exciting texts from the Midrash (collections of rabbinic stories) to dramatic scenes from classic Hollywood films. Popcorn included!

✓ Registration: Online or Nia Taylor, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org. Fee: \$18.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ISRAEL Sundays, April 30 and May 14 10 am–noon

The Jewish Community Relations Council offers thoughts and discussion about settlements, occupation and internal Israeli issues.



Thursday
Feb. 2
6:30–8:30 pm

MAGALIM — Circles of Jewish Life, Adults 20s–40s

Robyn Sue Fisher: *The Entrepreneur Behind Smitten Ice Cream*

Join Rabbi Jessica Graf to meet Robyn and delve into the secret of personalized ice cream. Samples? Of course!

✓ Registration: Online or Rabbi Jessica Graf, 415.346.1720, x18, or rabbigraf@sherithisrael.org.

Author—and congregant—shares jokes and wisdom March 4

MICHAEL KRASNY DIGS INTO JEWISH HUMOR

What does Jewish humor tell us about Jews now and in generations past? If you're Michael Krasny, host of KQED-FM Radio's "Forum," author, professor of literature at SF State University and Sherith Israel congregant, a lot!

Michael will speak at Sherith Israel on Saturday, March 4 at 7 pm. He'll regale us with wit and wisdom from his new book, *Let There Be Laughter: A Treasury of Great Jewish Humor and What It All Means*.

A native of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Michael has been telling Jewish jokes since his bar mitzvah. It's been said he knows more of them than anyone on the planet. He certainly states his case in his enlightening and hilarious book that collects the best of Jewish humor passed down from generation to generation and explains the cultural expressions and anxieties behind the laughs.

"What's Jewish Alzheimer's?" "You forget everything but the grudges."

In *Let There Be Laughter*, Michael delves deeply into the themes, topics and form of Jewish humor: chauvinism undercut by irony and self-mockery, the fear of losing cultural identity through assimilation, the importance of vocal inflection in joke-telling, and calls to communal memory, including the use of Yiddish.

A lot of Jewish humor comes out of suffering, Michael pointed out to Scott Simon on National Public Radio's "Weekend Edition Saturday." As Jews became more prosperous and secular, as they became more assimilated, the nature of Jewish humor changed. "And it changed to the point where you see almost the alternative of suffering."

American humor has been greatly influenced by Jewish humor, Michael says. "You think about all of the extraordinary number of Jewish stand-up comics that have been dominant in terms of American comedy, you think of shows like 'Seinfeld.' And it almost stands to reason that American humor would, in some ways, take on so much of the nu-



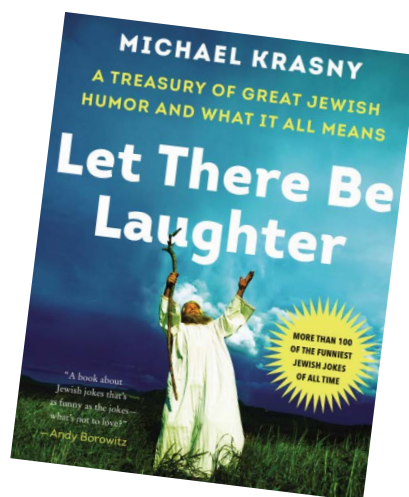
LET THERE BE LAUGHTER

Michael Krasny
Sat., March 4, 7 pm
Reception follows

ances and coloration of Jewish humor. You take a Woody Allen and Mel Brooks and Sid Caesar and so forth. That's the American locus, often, for humor."

At a time when many Americans see troubling uncertainty in the future, Jewish humor reminds us of our priorities.

"You must be so proud. Your daughter is the President of the United States!" "Yes. But her brother is a doctor!" ■



ONGOING PROGRAMS

CARING COMMUNITY

Assists members in times of need and joy. *Nia Taylor*, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.

SATURDAY TORAH STUDY

Saturdays, 9:15-10:15 am

Studies weekly Torah portion.
Bagels and lox.

TUESDAY EVENING TORAH STUDY

Rabbi Jessica Graf or
Cantor David Frommer

2nd and 4th Tuesdays—Rabbi Graf's study

6:30-7 pm: Schmoozing & light noshes
7-8 pm: Study

HAMOTZI & CHICKEN SOUPERS

HaMotzi: Sundays, 9:30 am-12:30 pm

Chicken Soupers:

One Sunday a month, Noon-4 pm
Feb. 5, March 5, and April 2

HaMotzi volunteers prepare 100 meals for two shelters in San Francisco each week. Chicken Souper volunteers prepare meals for clients of Jewish Family and Children's Services each month. Volunteers are needed to shop, pick up donations, cook and deliver. *Nancy Sheftel-Gomes*, 415.346.1720, x28, or nsgomes@sherithisrael.org.

ONGOING BEGINNING HEBREW FOR ADULTS

Sundays, 9:45-10:45 am
Hilda Isaacson

Fee: \$50 per semester, includes books; scholarships available. *Nancy Sheftel-Gomes*, 415.346.1720, x28, or nsgomes@sherithisrael.org.

KOLEYNU CONGREGATIONAL CHOIR

Sundays: Feb. 12, April 9, May 14
Tuesdays: Feb. 14, March 14, and May 9
Cantor David Frommer
Sings at holidays and selected Shabbat services. *Cantor David Frommer* 415.346.1720, x 19, or dfrommer@sherithisrael.org.

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Greet visitors at our front desk, answer phones or help with office tasks. *Nia Taylor*, 415.346.1720, x17, or ntaylor@sherithisrael.org.

TALMUD TORAH/EDUCATION

early childhood

ECE PROGRAMS

WEEKLY PLAYGROUPS

Mondays and Fridays
10:30 am–Noon
Infants to 4-year-olds

Get your playgroup groove on with JAMAROO Kids at Sherith Israel. Offering music, movement, stories and playtime in our large indoor space. We are an inclusive community and all families and nannies are welcome!

NEW! On Fridays, from 12–12:15 pm, welcome Shabbat with Cantor David Frommer leading songs and blessings.

All classes are drop in, no preregistration required. \$12 for cash; \$14 with a credit card. Information: jamarookids.com.

FAMILY SHABBAT

2nd Friday of the month, 6 pm
Feb. 10, March 10 and April 7

Welcome Shabbat with other families and the congregation at a service with Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller, Cantor David Frommer and Lior Ben-Hur. A delicious catered vegetarian dinner follows services.

✓ *Registration for complimentary dinner: Online or Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org. Potluck desserts welcome.*

NEW—SHABBAT MISHPACHAH

Saturday, Feb. 25 (during Shabbat Chai)

11 am: Family-friendly worship

11:45 am: Lunch

Newman Hall

\$18 per family, preregistration required

Mishpachah means family. What better way to celebrate Shabbat than by joining Cantor David Frommer, Rabbi Jessica Graf and other young families with children under five for a creative, fun, musical service for kids and adults. Everyone is welcome! Bring new or gently used children's books to donate to the Jewish Coalition for Literacy.

✓ *Lunch: \$18/family, preregistration required. Online or Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org.*

PURIM IN SHUSHAN BY THE BAY

ECE Carnival

Sunday, March 12, 10:30 am

Bring your little ones in costume so they can eat hamentashen, play Purim games, cheer on Mordechai and Esther, and boo Haman. Enjoy a fun-filled morning for all.

PASSOVER HAVDALAH

PAJAMA PARTY

Saturday, April 15, 4:30–6 pm

Bring your little ones in their PJs for music and Passover fun with Rabbi Jessica Graf and Cantor David Frommer.

✓ *\$18 per family for members; \$36 for nonmembers. Registration: Online or Natalie Weizman 415.346.1720, x27, or nweizman@sherithisrael.org.*

SUPER SOCCER STARS AT CSI

Winter session for kids 2 to 3:

Tuesdays, Jan. 17–March 21

10:05–10:45 am

Winter session for kids 12 to 24 months old:

Tuesdays, Jan. 17–March 21

10:50–11:30 am

Super Soccer Stars teach soccer skills in a fun, noncompetitive, educational environment. Their approach uses soccer to nurture, build self-confidence and develop teamwork in every class.

Fee: 11 sessions for \$200. Learn more about SuperSoccer Stars, 415.233.8277 or at la.supersoccerstars.com

Call 415.775.2211 to schedule a tour of the Marin Day School Jewish classrooms.



ENTHUSIASTICALLY JEWISH:

Natalie Weizman, a Jewish studies major at San Francisco State University working on her MA in Jewish education at Hebrew Union College, is CSI's new assistant principal. She is eager to bring her ruach (spirit) to her new job keeping the Religious School on track while coordinating CSI's revamped youth group (see page 9).

religious school

Student leadership spurs many activities

YOUTH GROUP BACK AT SHERITH ISRAEL

When an inspiring teacher and excited students work together, fun times happen. Religious School assistant principal **Natalie Weizman** loved her synagogue youth group in Santa Cruz. **William Geist**, a 12th grader and other high school and middle school students enjoy getting together. They've now established a formal youth group at Sherith Israel.

Principal and interim executive director **Nancy Sheftel-Gomes** included leading the youth group in the job description for assistant principal for which Natalie was hired. "Jewish education is taking a much more informal route in many ways," Nancy explains. A youth group helps students bond, since they come from so many secular schools. "The connections our students make translate both into friendships and a more active, engaged approach to their Jewish studies at Sherith Israel."

Natalie and fifteen students met last September to formalize the group and elect officers: president, **William Geist**; programming VP, **Asher Etlin**; social action VP, **Elizabeth Flaherman**; religious and cultural VP, **Abraham Baldonado**; membership VP, **Adam Schwartz**; communications VP, **Shoshanna Alessi**; financial VP, **Joshua Kerzhner**. They divided the youth group into three components: Sherith Israel Camp (SIC), grades 2-4; Sherith Israel Middle Schoolers (SIMS), grades 5-7; and Sherith Israel Temple Youth (SITY), grades 8-12. The three groups enjoy separate activities and sometimes come together.

"Of course, Natalie plays a major role in all this," Nancy adds. "But the older students have taken ownership and provided real leadership by planning and staffing events. This creates a wonderful learning and social environment."

The youth group has enjoyed several activities. They include bowling (grades 2-4) and rock climbing (grades 5-7). SITY (grades 8-12) planned last autumn's Sukkot party and overnights at Sherith Israel with kids from Marin's Congregation Rodef Shalom. During an elective day, grades 2-5 enjoyed extra time with religious school art and music specialists

Ana Dillman and Lior Ben-Hur.

Grades 2-7 plan to soar on the trampolines in the Presidio's House of Air. Two more elective days this winter and spring will offer a Purim carnival, social justice fair, two additional overnights, including one for seventh graders, and an all-school overnight at year's end.

Grades 8-12 plan a trip to Los Angeles at the end of March. Students will stay in the historically Jewish Fairfax neighborhood, where they'll celebrate Shabbat. They'll also meet an LA youth group and steep themselves in Jewish learning with visits to the Museum of Tolerance, the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and the Skirball Cultural Center. They'll also visit the Getty Center and, at eighth-grader **Emmy Etlin's** suggestion, Harry Potter World.

In July, CSI teens will join teens from Calvary Presbyterian Church for a Heifer International trip to Perryville, Arkansas. They'll learn about agricultural changes that can end hunger and poverty for many people around the world. CSI participated in a similar trip in 2014.

"There's a lot of energy in this group," says Nancy. Adds Natalie, "Our students are doing great things, getting to know each other better, sharing wonderful experiences and taking on leadership responsibilities to grow as individuals and set an example for younger kids." ■



YES, LEARNING CAN BE FUN: Teacher **Lior Ben-Hur** adds a musical perspective to Religious School where students have brought back the youth group. As young people build relationships, they strengthen their bond with Judaism.

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL SCHEDULE

SUNDAYS

Includes T'filah and Hebrew

Preschool to Grade 8
9:15 am-12:30 pm

High School
Grades 9-12
9:45-10:45 am

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL OFFICE

415.346.1720, x28, or
nsgomes@sherithisrael.org.

TALKING ABOUT ISRAEL

Sundays—dates below

The Jewish Community Relations Council offers thoughts and discussion about settlements, occupation and internal Israeli issues.

High school (grades 9-12)
March 19, 26; April 23, 30
9:45-10:45 am

Religious school parents
March 19, 9:45-11 am

All congregants
Apr. 30 and May 14, 10 am-Noon



INSTALLING OUR NEW CLERGY: The congregation gathered at Kabbalat Shabbat services on Friday night, September 16, for the installation of **Senior Rabbi Jessica Graf** and **Cantor David Frommer**. **Rabbi Emeritus Martin Weiner**, **Cantor Emeritus Martin Feldman** and **Rabbi Emeritus Larry Raphael** welcomed and blessed our new rabbi and cantor as the High Holidays drew near.

[RETROFIT, from page 1](#)

includes roofing and waterproofing the dome—critical considerations.

Craig Etlin, board vice president and one of the congregation's leaders spearheading the project, reports that our budget allowed for a full roof replacement rather than patching.

"Waterproofing and repainting the dome was quite a challenge," says Craig, because heavily scaffolding the roof to gain access to the dome would have been prohibitively expensive. Fortunately, **Dan Thomas** of Bay Area painting contractor **D. Zelinsky & Sons** found a solution using cables and baskets to access the dome and meet Cal/OSHA safety standards, eliminating the need for costly scaffolding.

Before employing Zelinsky, CSI member **Charley Stern**, a general contractor and CSI's project manager for the retrofit, went to Washington to see the company's work on the U.S. Capitol Dome. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see that dome up close—cast iron assembled in the middle of the nineteenth century. Five hours of checking out that work proved that Zelinsky could handle our much smaller dome."

The roof will also sport solar panels. **Van Hart**, a member of the building and grounds committee who is spearheading this part of the project, expects installation of the solar panels to last from February to April. "Integrating the installation of solar panels into our construction schedule as we finish the roof makes great sense," says Van. The project will pay for itself in four-and-a-half to seven years, after which Sherith Israel will save as much as \$15,000 to \$18,000 annually on electricity costs. "We'll be helping the synagogue go greener, too," Van points out.

Important work is being done inside, as well. To meet Ameri-

cans with Disabilities Act requirements, we now have a unisex ADA-compliant restroom in part of what was the executive director's office. And Bart Hall, which has been off limits for several months while it served as the access point for work on the foundation, will once again be available to the congregation. The room will be carpeted because the hardwood floor was in poor condition. The carpeting should also improve sound quality in the multipurpose meeting and function room.

The heat is on! Three new forced-air furnaces now serve the ground floor, which is divided into three zones. The sanctuary enjoys heat as well, since we brought the boiler back online.

Other improvements include new wheelchair-accessible seating in the balcony. The entry office—often the first glimpse people have of our congregation—is also being spruced up.

Ellen Schumm, a former board member and member of the building and grounds committee who has been involved in CSI's retrofit since its inception, cites the commitment of an incredibly well functioning design and construction team. "ELS Architecture and Urban Design, engineers **Wiss Janney Elstner Associates** and our problem-solving contractor, **Plant Construction Company**, have made this structure, which had 'good bones' to begin with, truly stable." Ellen, an architect at UCSF, also praises the work of the retrofit construction committee, our executive directors and our clergy for keeping the project moving.

Ellen is most impressed with the seamless blending of the retrofit design within the architecture, itself a brilliant design conceived over a century ago. "It's easy to do a seismic retrofit if you change the look and nature of a building, but all our

[Retrofit continues, page 11](#)



FALL HOLIDAYS: On Sukkot we made “local” lulavim out of Northern California plants. That same rainy Sunday, we joined Women Wage Peace for a march across the Golden Gate Bridge in solidarity with women in Israel marching for peace. And on Simchat Torah, we unfurled the Torah so we could finish reading Deuteronomy in time to begin again with Genesis.

[Retrofit continued from page 10](#)

enhancements and reinforcements are squirreled away in the building’s nooks and crannies.” To leave the building, particularly the sanctuary, essentially “untouched,” required innovative thinking and materials, most notably the nitinol tension ties in the attic. Nitinol, a nickel-titanium alloy with super-elastic properties, will help restrain the walls from falling outward in a major quake.

Meanwhile, the Seismic Retrofit Campaign kicked into high gear with the announcement of a major matching grant. New York-based philanthropist **Denise Littlefield Sobel** originally committed \$100,000 to the campaign if we could raise \$50,000 before December 31. Our members’ response was so generous that we raised \$131,350 in new gifts and pledges by the end of December. Denise was so impressed with our effort that she agreed to increase her matching grant to \$263,700. The \$395,050 that we raised in December made it one of the most successful months in the entire campaign.

Denise, who comes to services at Sherith Israel when she is in San Francisco, decided to support the campaign after attending Hard Hat Shabbat 2.0 last April, when we celebrated the beginning of the second phase of construction. After

touring the construction site in November with Craig Etlin and campaign co-chair **David Newman**, she committed to her matching gift.

“That someone who lives across the country would support us so generously validates what we’re doing, what Sherith Israel is all about,” says David. “We’re preserving a home for the Jewish community long into the future.”

Sherith Israel still has about \$2 million to raise. To complete the campaign, says co-chair **Lynn Sedway**, “we’re going back to foundations that have contributed already and some with which we’re still in conversation.” **Rabbi Jessica Graf** and **Cantor David Frommer** are playing active roles.

Lynn points out that Sherith Israel has vastly exceeded expectations. “Our members came through, and so has the community. We’ll be turning our synagogue over to the next generation quake-secure and debt-free.” ■

For more information about supporting our Seismic Retrofit Campaign, please contact David Newman at davidmnewman@earthlink.net or 415.665.7447, or Lynn Sedway at lsedway@sedway.com or 415.515.5321.

TODAH RABBAH

Our profound thanks to **Denise Littlefield Sobel** for her generous gift to the Seismic Retrofit Campaign and to the congregants whose gifts and pledges in December helped us make the match:

Ken and Lynn Baron
Al and Ardis Breslauer
Jim and Claire Davis
Bruce Fisher and Marlene Litvak
Michael and Valerie Flaherman
Michael and Jane Miller
Diane Green
Jerry Hurwitz and Susan Borkin
Bill Kedem and Laurel Rest
Helen and Leon Luey
Steve and Laura Olson
Jeff Ross and Janice Platt
Lynn and Paul Sedway
Elizabeth Shwiff
Allen Weinberg

CSI CONGREGATION SHERITH ISRAEL

people

CSI's eyes and ears on the seismic retrofit

PROFILE: CHARLEY STERN

When Sherith Israel completes its seismic retrofit later this winter, it will be time for Charley Stern to remove his hard-hat. Charley will rightfully be proud of the role he played in strengthening our historic, 112-year-old sanctuary building.

Charley is Sherith Israel's representative on the seismic retrofit, a role that requires him to be a liaison between congregational leaders and the project contractors, architects, and engineers. Since April 2016, the start of the retrofit's second phase, Charley has been on the construction site regularly, acting as the temple's eyes and ears for a sensitive restoration that demands careful, steady hands.

"The longevity and durability of our building is important to me," Charley says. "This congregation has been here for 165 years; it's a special place."

Charley, a general contractor with a long background in restoration and remodeling, is a perfect fit to monitor the retrofit. He was closely involved with the remodeling of Newman Hall in the late 1990s. He also served on Sherith Israel's board of trustees in the 1980s, the buildings and grounds committee, and on the Hills of Eternity cemetery board.

Charley's ties to Sherith Israel date back more than 35 years. He was raised in San Francisco in a secular Jewish family that didn't belong to a synagogue. After an extended period of travel and adventure in the late 1970s, Charley returned to San Francisco and decided he wanted to be active in the city's Jewish life. Says Charley: "I realized that in our flexible soci-

ety, a person can join any community."

In the early 1980s, Sherith Israel's then-associate rabbi **John Rosove** was successfully involving young adults in synagogue life. Here Charley encountered a group of like-minded, civically, culturally, and spiritually engaged peers. He helped form SIMCHA—Sherith Israel Modern Community of Adults. Originally a way for Jewish singles to meet, SIMCHA grew into a network of men and women in their 20s and 30s—singles, married, married with children. These friends celebrated Passover and other holidays together, held informal dinners, went on retreats and offered support in good times and bad.

Charley became increasingly committed to Sherith Israel during those years. One Friday night after Shabbat services, he met **Deborah Weinstein**, who would later become his wife. Deborah, who passed away in 1994, had a unique connection to Sherith Israel. Her father **Jacob Weinstein** had been Sherith Israel's senior rabbi from 1930 to 1932. Progressive and outspoken, Rabbi Weinstein was forced to resign after supporting a dockworkers' strike. He later led a congregation in Chicago and became one of the nation's foremost leaders of Reform Judaism.

Nowadays, when Charley is kibitzing with contractors or communicating construction updates to the temple leadership, important lifecycle events that took place under

the sanctuary dome—among them his two marriages, his daughter Mira's bat mitzvah, services with his son Noah, Deborah's funeral—remain close to his heart.

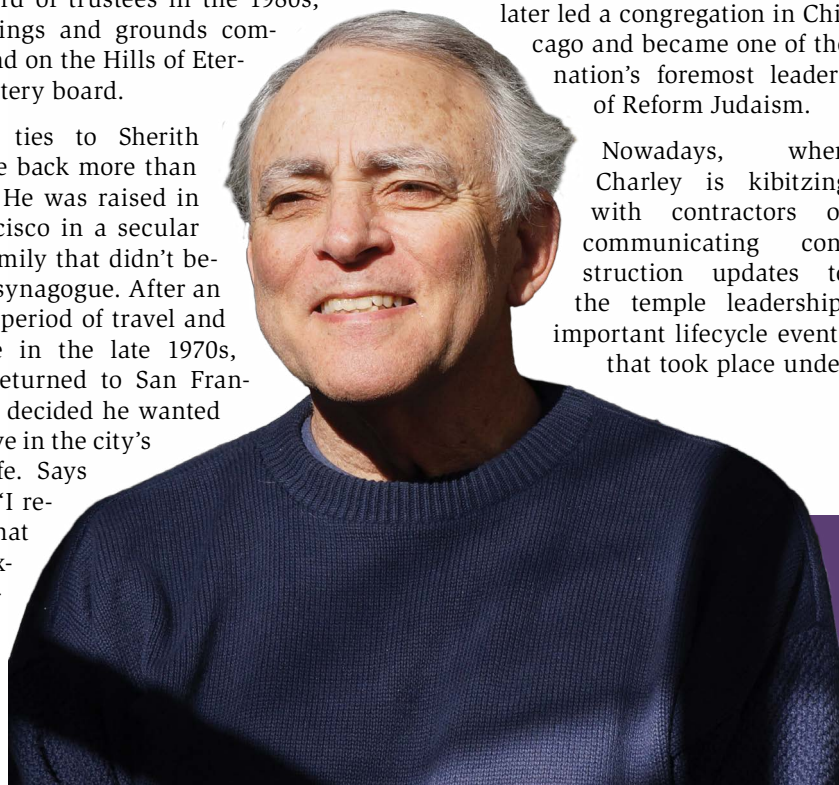
The sanctuary, Charley says, "is open, warm, available; I feel fortunate to be part of it." Charley's respect and reverence for this space is especially evident when visitors come to view the sanctuary. If he's on site and has time, Charley shows them around. Recently he toured a family from Eastern Europe. When the mother of the family was led under the ornate dome, Charley recalls, "Her jaw dropped and tears started to roll down her face."

Charley understands. Sherith Israel's sanctuary, he observes, "makes a statement. It has visibility. It hasn't been surpassed by taller buildings around it. For me, it's a reminder of my connection."

Another emotional reminder of Charley's Sherith Israel connection came not long ago when he was clearing out the synagogue's boiler room in preparation for installing the new heating system. Sitting undisturbed on a shelf next to some cleaning supplies was a scrapbook chronicling the early years of SIMCHA. The discovery released a flood of memories and underscored Charley's desire for today's young San Francisco Jews to feel a similar sense of the belonging and well being that Sherith Israel brought him and his family, then and now.

"I would hope that at some point, younger people will see that their deeper needs haven't been met by electronics," Charley says. "Sherith Israel can be their anchor, their spiritual space. It's a warm group of people who come to be congregants here." ■

A CONTRACTOR AND A MENSCH: Charley Stern monitored our contractors as the second phase of the seismic retrofit moved forward. A highlight of the job was touring the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. to learn more about waterproofing a grand dome.



Sherith Israel in the news: **Rabbi Jessica Graf**, a smiling new mom with baby **Zachary**, graced the cover of *j. the Jewish news weekly*, August 26 issue. The article, “You’ve come a long way, rabbi,” celebrating 40 years of women in the rabbinate, featured both Rabbi Jessica and **Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller**. We couldn’t be prouder ...

Just a week later on September 2, the *j.’s* cover story, “Time-tripping through San Francisco’s Jewish story,” highlighted congregational VP and seismic retrofit maven, **Craig Etlin**, on the history of our sanctuary and the status of our seismic retrofit ...

In early October, our neighborhood paper, the *New Fillmore*, ran a “Locals” column by **Rabbi Jessica Graf** titled “There’s a New Sherith in Town.” You can find out more about how she went from being a kid in the neighborhood buying gummy worms at Gino’s to becoming our 10th senior rabbi, at newfillmore.com/2016/10/01/theres-a-new-sherith-in-town/ ...

Rabbi Emeritus Larry Raphael taught a stimulating class on Jewish stories at CSI this fall, beginning with the songs of Leonard Cohen. He has been teaching at the Fromm Institute, as well as at the Unitarian Universalist Church and Lehrhaus Judaica. He is also a board member of the SF Interfaith Council and twice a month heads to Tahoe Vista to lead Shabbat services for the Tahoe Hebrew Congregation ...

Architect **Arnie Lerner**, a specialist in historic preservation known around Sherith Israel for his work as part of the retrofit team, got his start as a VISTA volunteer architect in Chicago in the late ‘60s. The work he and others did with VISTA is profiled in the recently published book, *When Architecture Meets Activism*, complete with Arnie, fresh out of Kansas U, on the cover ...

Music director and organist **Jonathan Dimmock** is in demand. In addition to his wonderful work at Sherith Israel, Jonathan is artist-in-residence at First Presbyterian Church in Oakland. His annual holiday gift to the Bay Area, a free performance of Olivier Messiaen’s organ suite *La Nativité du Seigneur*, was highlighted in a full-page article in the *SF Chronicle’s* Sunday Datebook. Throughout 2017 Jonathan will be playing monthly organ concerts on the renowned Skinner organ at the Legion of Honor. Find dates and times at legionofhonor.famsf.org/organ-concerts-0 ...

If you are looking for something to binge-watch this winter, cozy up with Netflix’s “Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events.” Kudos to author **Daniel Handler** ...

Kudos also to **Sheila Gordon**, who received the 2016 Champions of Hope Award from the National Kidney Foundation. Under Sheila’s leadership as the foundation’s development director, the San Francisco Authors Luncheon grew into the foundation’s signature event, raising nearly \$10 million over 28 years to support kidney health in the Bay Area and beyond ...

Mimi Gauss is kvelling. Her son **Ari**, executive director of North Carolina Hillel, which serves 15 campuses across the state, was honored with the Richard Joel Exemplar of Excellence award by Hillel International. Ari got his start in Jewish community work right here at Sherith Israel as president of SITY, our youth group ...

Barry Sacks is one of the featured speakers at JCCSF’s Art of Financial Well-Being lecture and film series. His talk, *Reversing the Conventional Wisdom: Using Housing Wealth to Supplement Retirement Income*, takes place at 1 pm, February 1. Call 415.292.1200 to register ...

Joseph Amster of Time Machine Tours led a walk in early January commemorating the 137th yearzeit of his alter ego Emperor Norton. At 10 am on February 19, Joseph will lead Emperor Norton’s Fantastic Tour That Never Ends, following his regular route and including *all* the stories he knows about Union Square, the St. Francis Hotel, Maiden Lane, Lotta’s Fountain and more. Information at emperornortontour.com or 415.644.8513 ...

New year, new jobs. After many years at Farella, Braun & Martel, attorney **Jonathan Lemberg** was named partner at Osborn | McDerby, LLP. His practice focuses on mergers, acquisitions and corporate finance ...

Judie Wexler, provost at the California Institute of Integral Studies, has also taken on the job of interim president. “It is exciting to lead a university that is so innovative and that has been so important in educating psychologists and acupuncturists in the Bay Area,” says Judie about her new responsibilities ...

Lillian Jahan was named to a clinical research coordinator position in the department of surgery at UCSF. And **Alix Spivack** is proud to note that she earned a California teaching credential. Yasher koach to all ...

Congratulations to two congregants stepping out of the rat race. After 40 years of work, 21 as manager of community and volunteer services at St. Francis Memorial Hospital, **JoBeth Walt** retired last November. **David Newman** will leave his position as senior attorney at the Federal Trade Commission at the beginning of March. David is looking forward to spending more time volunteering at CSI and JCRC. ■

By the News Nosh, aka Ellen Newman.

Please send bits and bites of gossip to ellennewman@earthlink.net. Be sure to put “News Nosh” in the subject line.

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NANCY SHEFTTEL-GOMES



LOTS OF CHANGE, LOTS OF CONTINUITY

In 2001, my husband and I did a major remodel on our home while living there with our daughter, granddaughter and two dogs. We were constantly shifting from project to project and moving things around. It wasn't always convenient, but we had a vision for our home. Keeping things going through Sherith Israel's seismic retrofit has seemed much like that remodel.

We played musical offices. When **Rabbi Jessica Graf** returned from maternity leave, she moved into the senior rabbi's office. **Cantor David Frommer** began moving into Rabbi Jessica's old office.

The executive director's office was emptied and reconfigured to include an ADA restroom. An idea struck us. Once the carpet was laid and the paint dried, we realized that this bright, sunny room would make an ideal small meeting room. Our ED will go elsewhere.

We'll make more changes, including a facelift to the front office and recep-

tion area, the hub of the daily life at our synagogue. We'll also upgrade Bart Hall, which has been out of commission since it began serving as the staging ground for our seismic retrofit construction.

And while you won't *see* it, you're now hearing our new phone system. We went back to wiring because digital wasn't working for us. We started last summer. Not that it was easy when you're working in a 112 year-old building with sub-contractors everywhere.

Some tasks have been deceptive. In mid-summer, 1,000 sets of High Holiday machzors arrived. We were overjoyed, and the congregation loved using them. But, as in most old San Francisco buildings, we had precious little storage space. So, we emptied our storage space behind the sanctuary, removing over 2,000 books, which we'll bury in our cemetery. In the process, we discovered interesting documents, photos and one old rabbinic robe. Fortunately, we were able to ship 500 of the draft machzors we

used for several years to three other congregations that were happy to give them a good home.

And in June, when I took on my new post, we began transitioning to an outside accounting firm. We also integrated a new database system with our web site and congregant accounts. *We'd love to walk you through how to access your account online. Just call or email to make an appointment.* The accounting office? That's now our records room.

With all those changes, one critical thing remains the same. Over the past six months, I've talked with most of our congregants. It's obvious that they—that *you*—love Sherith Israel and take great pride in our spiritually beautiful sanctuary. That's why we've accepted all the dislocations involved with our seismic retrofit. Our board of trustees, clergy, staff and congregants all share a vision of a Sherith Israel well-suited to the needs of San Francisco's Jews today and tomorrow. ■

DUES PLAN, [from page 1](#)

To address the problem of unequal and inadequate dues, the board of trustees looked to the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) for guidance based on its work with synagogues around the country. In 2013 Valerie and Amy attended a national URJ community-of-practice program on Reimagining Financial Support for a 21st-Century Congregation. They learned that many synagogues, particularly mid-sized congregations, were turning to a voluntary dues structure.

"Voluntary dues was appealing," says Valerie. CSI seemed part-way there with a fair-share system that had gradually slipped into a voluntary system. But further review revealed that initiating a voluntary system could be tricky. "After talking to the clergy and the executive director, who routinely talk to potential members, we learned that people want to know what they should pay."

At that point, the board sent the question of a new dues structure to the member-

ship committee. The goal was to initiate a dues plan that is not only more clear, transparent and fair than our current system, but also brings in more revenue.

The committee, under the leadership of **Gale Gottlieb**, read widely about best practices for reimagining support for modern synagogues. Committee members reached out to synagogues in other metro areas and to congregations around the Bay Area, including Rodef Shalom, Kol Shofar and Emanu-El. "Most congregations we talked to were facing the same issues we're facing, especially if they are in large cities," says Gale. "Each congregation has gone through trials and errors. Some have even returned to dues plans they previously discarded."

"It's a brave step to realize that the fair-share dues system does not meet our needs," says **Nancy Sheftel-Gomes**, interim executive director. "We have a spare budget, but we have big needs to be able to support our community."

The new plan includes a tiered commitment based on congregants' ages and family status. "The board is still finalizing details of the level of commitment we need," explains Valerie, who is succeeding Gale as chair of the membership committee. She adds, "Given that members must be in good standing prior to the High Holidays, under the new plan dues will need to be paid in full by August 31 in order for people to receive their tickets." The membership committee is also looking into dual and associate memberships to accommodate members' needs.

The new dues structure, in line with the membership commitments of our neighboring synagogues, is being rolled out gradually beginning with new members who joined in 2016. It will be fully implemented for all members in 2018. Nancy comments: "As I talk to new members I've been pleasantly surprised. I've gotten very little resistance or concern when I mention the new dues commitment."

[Dues plan continues, page 15](#)

PASSAGES

A hearty mazel tov to each of our families celebrating the following simchas:

2017 BAR/BAT MITZVAHS

Sebastian Souza, son of Pam Parker Souza & Charles Souza, Feb. 18
 Jacob Spiegel, son of Rona Spiegel & Paul Spiegel, March 11
 Max Klivans, son of Peter Klivans & Kate Steinheimer, March 18
 William Freedman, son of Sophie & Doug Freedman, March 25
 Sylvia Benjamin, daughter of Jenny & Jeremy Benjamin, April 1
 David Milberg, son of Beatriz Davila-Cornejo & Lindsey Milberg, April 22
 Ryan Macomber, daughter of Michelle Levenson & Todd Macomber, May 13
 Ruby Recht-Appel, daughter of Sydney Recht & Robert Appel, Aug. 26
 Nora Herndon-Lazerwith, daughter of Holly Herndon & Scott Lazerwith, Sept. 9
 Ian Grossman, son of Charlotte Mosher & Stu Grossman, Sept. 16
 Noah Linder, son of Chris & Dan Linder, Oct. 7
 Alana David, daughter of Tiffany Loewenberg & Todd David, Nov. 11
 Ella Greenspan Barrett, daughter of Louise Greenspan & Ben Barrett, Dec. 16

Jacob Shapiro, son of Xander Shapiro, Dec. 23

NEW MEMBERS

Andrea Barton-Elson, Devon & Ira Strolovitch
 Sabrina, Stephen & Asher Bluestein
 Jason Blum
 Anne, James & Oliver Frame
 Rachel Greenblatt
 Suzanne Hamstra
 Julianna Jaynes
 Shani & Blake Kaplan
 L. Daniela Kirshenbaum & Norman Goldwyn
 Michael, Katrina & Maddy Krantz
 Susan Romer & Donald Ungar
 Leonardo, Juliana & Martina Salgado
 Susan Shavin
 Jeffrey Silber
 Fred Sperber & Tina Greenbaum
 Rebecca & Kyle Weatherholtz

NEW BABIES

Ella Damyan, daughter of Martin & Melanie Damyan
 Benjamin Lurie, son of Steven Lurie & Erin Gordon

May the memory of the righteous be for a blessing.

Amo L. Etlin, mother of Craig Etlin, mother-in-law of Leslie Gordon and grandmother of Asher & Emily Etlin
 Renate Wasserman Harlan, mother of Steven Wasserman and mother-in-law of Sharon Wasserman
 Irving Olson, father of Stephen Olson and father-in-law of Laura Olson
 Gerrie M. Pincus, mother of Nancy Davis Pincus and mother-in-law of Arnie Davis
 Shirley Targoff, mother of Claire Davis and mother-in-law of Jim Davis
 Herb Weiss, father of Alison Bostrom



She's forthright when she talks to potential new members and lets them know that they will also be invited to participate in the Annual Fund and Seismic Retrofit Campaign. As Nancy sees it, congregants' dues commitment is all about what is essential to support our unique San Francisco synagogue.

Nancy also reminds everyone that, as always, no one will be turned away from membership based on their ability to pay dues. "Whatever our dues structure, everyone is welcome. We are a community, not a country club," she emphasizes. "

Sherith Israel can ensure membership for all who seek it because the congregation has a hefty number of "champions." These members pay more than their share of the costs of operating the synagogue to support our programs and activities, and enable others to find their Jewish homes here.

"Becoming a member of our synagogue community is about the privilege to build for the future," comments **Rabbi Jessica Graf**, our senior rabbi. She believes that synagogues offer a unique opportunity to engage with people of all ages who are looking for meaning in their lives. "We are all asking the same questions," Rabbi Graf says. "Doing that with people who have the potential to be lifelong friends is a gift. I am very grateful to our members and donors who have made a commitment to support Sherith Israel."

MONTHLY PLAN EASES PAYMENTS One way to help with Sherith Israel's cash flow and your own is to sign up for monthly automatic online dues payments, either as credit card charges or electronic fund transfers. *To set up a monthly payment plan, contact Nia Taylor, 415.346.1720, x17.*

The board projects that the new dues structure will bring in more revenue, but not the full amount needed to operate at the level we would like. "Our current staffing is really lean and needs to be expanded to be able to serve our members in the best way possible," notes Valerie. In addition to dues, Sherith Israel's funding comes from our Annual Fund and mitzvah gifts, as well as from facility rentals, particularly to Marin Day Schools. Other funds come from specific program grants.

Lynn Sedway, a past president of the congregation who sits on the membership committee, adds, "We are committed to maintaining a quality synagogue for our congregants and our community. With the continued support of our generous donors, this shift in our dues structure will allow us to keep providing the warm community, spirited worship, energetic leadership, opportunities for social justice, our excellent Religious School and adult learning programs."

May it be so. ■



There are many ways to repair the world. Here's what's happening in social action and community building at Sherith Israel and beyond.

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Our social action committee is regrouping under the leadership of **Stacy Passman**. "We are participating in a two-year program with the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) on how to make social justice the center of practice for our synagogue," notes Stacy. CSI social-action leadership is also participating in monthly webinars and having monthly coaching sessions with **Rabbi Jessica Kirschner** of Reform California. **The committee, which meets quarterly, will hold its first meeting of the year at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, February 7.**

Information: Stacy Passman, spassman@gmail.com, or 415.613.6872.

CHESED COMMITTEE

Under the direction of **Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller** and a team of dedicated congregants, the Caring Committee has blossomed into the Chesed Committee.

"The idea is to act like an extended spiritual family, reaching out to and coordinating support for members in both times of need and celebration," explains **Janet Parker**. The core group has expanded to about a dozen people, including **Kathryn Amenta, Ardis Breslauer, Nancy Brunn, Helen Luey, Ron Laupheimer, Alan Mervis, Fred Nervo, Janet Parker, Shira Shore, Helaine Weinstein** and **Karen Zelmar**. **Natalie Weizman**, assistant principal of the Religious School, will act as liaison to school families. "We hope to engage the entire congregation in giving and receiving support," adds Janet.

Core committee members will rotate monthly as the "point person," coordinating assistance as requests come in. The point person will reach out to the community to provide the requested help, which might be rides to Shabbat services, shopping when someone is ill or bringing dinner to a family with a new baby.

Rabbi Julie believes that our congregation is full of people who will show up to help each other. "The key to becoming a community where care flows naturally and joyfully is a belief that your simchas and needs are my joys and challenges," she says.

If you have a need or would like to help, contact: Chesed@sherithisrael.org, or leave a message at 415.346.1720.

JEWISH COALITION FOR LITERACY

Sherith Israel's JCL tutors, **Sy Aal, Jobyna Dellar, Philip Frost, Tamara Galanter, Jane Ginsburg, Bruce Highman, David Levin, Evelyn Manies, Janet Parker** and **Debra Sokolsky**, are working hard to eliminate childhood illiteracy one book and one child at a time. Inspired by the Jewish value of social justice, JCL works in schools

with large numbers of English-learner students. CSI hosted one of JCL's winter training sessions on January 18.

If you missed the training but are interested in helping children learn to read, contact Janet Parker, jparkersf@gmail.com or 415.282.1495.

ELECTION SUCCESS FOR PROP 57

This fall, Sherith Israel's social action focus was Proposition 57, which takes significant steps toward reforming California's criminal justice system. The act, supported by **Governor Jerry Brown**, authorizes parole consideration for people with nonviolent convictions, encourages wider use of rehabilitation and education, and ensures that more teenagers are tried as juveniles.

Congregants **Karen** and **Elise Alschuler**, **Teresa Brown** and **Stacy Passman**, along with **Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller**, lobbied legislators in Sacramento as part of a coalition of Reform synagogues and interfaith congregations. In addition, CSI-ers, including **Karen** and **Elise Alschuler**, **Kathryn Amenta**, **Daniel Berman**, the **Flaherman family**, **Chris Linder**, **Erik Migdail**, **Bill** and **Shira Shore**, and three religious school students—**Henry Flaherman**, **Noah Linder** and **Ayelet Passman-LaPushin**—cavassed in the Western Addition on behalf of the initiative.

"Reform California played a key role in the passage of Proposition 57," says **Rabbi Jessica Kirschner**. More than 30 Reform congregations and thousands of individual congregants participated in the campaign.

INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Working with Faith in Action, Sherith Israel has begun a new relationship with St. Paul of the Shipwreck Catholic church in Bayview-Hunter's Point. As **Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller** explains, the church has a mass in English for its mostly black population and a separate mass in Spanish for its Latino population. The two groups rarely meet each other. After the November election, they invited everyone to an evening meeting, complete with translation. It was very powerful for all who came, and they decided to meet weekly until the inauguration. Through connections Rabbi Julie has built up over the years, a small group of CSI members were invited to join the conversations.

"We're Jews, and we're also concerned about what the election means," says Rabbi Julie. "This is just the beginning of a wonderful relationship with a congregation that's very different from ours. Our goal is to pursue the relationship and see what we can do together."

Sherith Israel has invited members of St. Paul of the Shipwreck to join us for services and dinner on February 17. Everyone is encouraged to welcome our guests. *Information: Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller, 415.346.1720, x25, or rabbijst@sherithisrael.org.*

DONATIONS

Includes donations from August 1 to December 31, 2016

Todah rabbah — Thank you all for your generous support of Congregation Sherith Israel.

ADULT EDUCATION FUND

Susan Borkin & Jerry Hurwitz

ANNUAL FUND (Through Dec. 15, 2016)

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Karen & William Alschuler

Gregory Alterman

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Shoshana Asher in honor of Tasia Melvin Bartell's Birthday and in memory of Tony Bartell

Hal & Dorothy Auerbach

Patricia Axelrod

The Kenneth S. Baron Family in honor of the marriage of Michael J. Baron & Kayla Rasmussen

Tasia Melvin Bartell

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Lisa Erdberg & Dennis Gibbons in honor of the new clergy team!

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Ira Fateman & JoBeth Walt in honor of Jo Beth's retirement

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Candace Heisler

Bruce & Justine Highman

Joshua & Cassandra Hoffman

Mikiko Huang & Marshall Stoller in honor of Ron & Lynn Laupheimer, who inspire us with their many mitzvahs

Nancy Igdaloff & Monica Levin

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 Howard & Judie Wexler
 Joseph & Susan Wise Miller
 Sheldon & Rhoda Wolfe
 Mitchell & Supriya Wunsh in honor of the 3rd grade at CSI Sunday School
 Vladimir & Julia Zagatsky
 Karen Zelmar
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 Lucas & Katie Zier
 Alan & Monica Zimmerman

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LABE LOUNGE FUND

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MITZVAH FUND

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 Barbara Austin in memory of the Austin & Figone Families
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 Isaack Beygel & Etya Tsipenyuk in memory of Neyama Beygel
 Susan Borkin & Jerry Hurwitz in honor of Nia Taylor

Penny Boyes in memory of Ben Howell
 Vera & Felix Braynin in memory of Irina Borokhovich
 James Coughlin & Joan Libman in honor of Susan Borkin's Bat Mitzvah
 Mimi Dohan
 Richard Felton in memory of Anezka Felton
 Arthur & Marilee Fenn in memory of Ted Fenn & Marty Misrack
 David & Leslie Fleishman
 Stephen Garber in memory of Evelyn Garber
 Mimi & Art Gauss in memory of Dale Katz
 Sima Grabovsky
 Sherrie & Anthony Groshong in memory of Charlotte & David Stern
 and Ana Azimow
 Marcia Gruskin
 James Hurwitz in memory of Ida Goodman & Samuel Hurwitz
 Valerie & Thierry Jahan in honor of Gale Gottlieb's birthday
 Yakov Kagan
 Richard & Marilyn Kandel
 Frances Katz in memory of Irving Katz
 Theodore & Janet Kelter in memory of Gloria Kelter
 Pamela Kille in honor of Susan Borkin on the occasion of your long
 anticipated Bat Mitzvah
 Barbara Kirsch in honor of Susan Borkin's Bat Mitzvah
 Susan Kolb in memory of Gertrude Key
 Arlene & Steve Krieger in memory of Gertrude Epp
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 Alan Mirviss, Diane Fellman & Family in memory of William Harmon &
 Rose Mirviss
 Gary E. Moss & Mary Pat Hough in memory of Louis Moss
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 Dolores Okun in memory of Dvorsha Khaet & Nina Okun
 Gerry & Judith Pelzner in memory of Sandra Baron
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 Sima Shandrovskaaya in memory of Khaya Faynberg
 Leonard & Elayne Shapiro in honor of Gale Gottlieb's birthday and her
 enormous contribution to the work of Sherith Israel
 Audrey & Bob Sockolov in memory of Jennie Sockolov
 Richard Soroko in memory of Bernard Soroko
 David & Mary Sperber in memory of Edward Merkle and Reuben Sperber
 Ann & Duane Stevenson in honor of Susan Borkin's Bat Mitzvah
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 Helaine Weinstein & Maurice Kamins in honor of Susan Borkin's
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 The Kenneth S. Baron Family in memory of William Baron
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Jacalyn Kornblatt in memory of Jean Kornblatt and in honor of Nancy Sheftel-Gomes

Agnes Rothblatt & Family in memory of Irving Olson

RABBI RAPHAEL'S DISCRETIONARY FUND

Tasia Melvin Bartell in memory of Renee H. Jacobson

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Mikiko Huang & Marshall Stoller in honor of Rabbi Raphael's retirement and many years of service

James Hurwitz in memory of Morris Goodman

Jay & Ellie Shukert in memory of Helen Shukert

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Hal & Dorothy Auerbach in memory of Amo Etlin

Patricia Axelrod & Jill Dyal in memory of Carl Hoffman, Judge Albert Axelrod & Alan Axelrod (a loving husband and father)

Ken & Lynn Baron

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Warren & Lindsay Braunig

Al & Ardis Breslauer

James Coughlin & Joan Libman in memory of Amo Etlin & Irving Olson

Claire & Jim Davis

Norm Dito & Steve Weiner in honor of the installation of Rabbi Jessica Graf & Cantor David Frommer

Once again, Sherith Israel's HaMotzi volunteers spent the Christmas holiday shopping, cooking and serving meals for the San Francisco Interfaith Council's winter men's shelter at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Many thanks to everyone who helped!

Captains

Bradley Graham

John Dellar

Julie Driscoll

Cooks and deliverers

Zach, Daniella &

Benjamin Abrams

Al & Ardis Breslauer

Ava Burton

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Heather Cowan

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Gabe Linder

Tiffany Loewenberg & Ilana

& Noah David

Sydney Recht, Bob Appel, & Ruby,

Gabe & Eli Recht-Appel & friends

Rabbi Julie & Sam Saxe-Taller

Jean Schore

Ken & Mica Scofield

Bill & Shira Shore & children &

grandchildren

Pam Souza

Sharon, Steve & Josh Wasserman

Danielle White

Jean Wright

Shiela Yturri, Mark Siegal & sons,

uncle & grandmother

David Zalob

Karen Zelmar

Special thanks to Calvary Presbyterian Church, Bob Appel, David Levin and Ruth Auerbach, and Joanie Silverstein for providing turkeys.

Robert Epstein

Craig Etlin & Leslie Gordon

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Dana Fox & Paul Langlie in memory of Amo Etlin

Philip & Velia Frost

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Joyce Yonce in memory of Amo Etlin

Karen Zelmar

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Lowell & Janice Sucherman in memory of our deceased parents, Hal Tarnoff & Sally Oldham's Dad



SHERITH ISRAEL

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Member of the Union for Reform Judaism since 1903

EIGHT DAYS OF CHANUKAH: Sherith Israel celebrated the Festival of Lights with dreidel and game parties, ice skating, a visit to **Cantor David Frommer's** home, movie night, tzedakah opportunities, an ECE party and a grand candle-lighting just before Shabbat.



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