

SHERITH ISRAEL NEWS

JANUARY-APRIL 2020



ELDERING AT CSI: Congregants have come to **Rabbi Jessica Graf** with ideas for new programs for our community of older adults. **Lee Pollak** and **Jim Davis** (left and center) facilitate Bringing Meaning to Life's Transitions. **Gale Gottlieb** leads the memoir writing group.

Eldering at Sherith Israel

NEW GROUPS FOCUS ON AGING WISELY

The Sherith Israel library was so full that extra chairs needed to be brought in. The group ranged in age from mid-60s to 93. Participants expressed concerns about health, energy and vitality. Some were newly retired and just beginning to think about the next stage of their lives. Others felt they were transitioning into a second post-retirement phase. At least three people in this group of “elders” have parents, giving a new perspective to the idea of a sandwich generation. And others expressed sadness because they are not likely to become grandparents.

In just one session, members of the group touched on many concerns that bubble up in the transition to retirement and beyond.

In the same way that being a teen was recognized as a new stage of life for the post-war generation and “adulthood” is becoming an accepted part of life for 20-somethings, our longer, healthier lives are creating a new life stage for older adults. Eldering, anyone?

Aging Wisely continues, page 4

Training with Jewish Studio Project and Shalom Bayit

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ENRICHES STUDIO TEACHERS' APPROACHES

Good isn't good enough when it comes to providing youngsters with a sound Jewish education. Sherith Israel recognizes the challenges of teaching children involved in multiple activities in a strongly secular environment. So Studio teachers from pre-K through high school up their game by engaging in professional development sessions. This year, they've learned from two outstanding organizations—Jewish Studio Project and Shalom Bayit.

Jewish Studio Project (JSP) is a new model of learning and connection: an urban art studio, house of Jewish learning and spiritual community. JSP seeks to activate the creative potential in each person and utilizes creative arts and Jewish learning practices to build tools for expanding empathy, cultivating curiosity and navigating the uncertainty of our world.

Studio leader **Rabbi Abby Phelps** first encountered JSP while pursuing her own professional development at Jewish LearningWorks. She was immediately impressed by the JSP team's ability to make artistic expression feel accessible to those not already artistically inclined. “JSP has a ‘no comment’ rule,” Rabbi Phelps explains, “meaning that participants are not allowed to comment on each other's artwork, or even on their own. This frees participants to really dive into the creative process and explore new ideas and modes of expression. It's a technique we're now trying out at Studio @ Sherith Israel.”

Rabbi Phelps also appreciates JSP's creative approach to rooting their work in Jewish texts and values. For example, JSP takes *Pirkei Avot's* famous instruction regarding the Torah—“Turn it and

Professional Development continues, page 6

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

PURIM CARNIVAL

SUNDAY, March 8, 10 am-1 pm

MARTIN WEINER LECTURE WITH JOHN ROSE

FRIDAY, March 13, 7:30-9 pm

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SHERITH ISRAEL

2266 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94115

T: 415.346.1720
F: 415.673.9439

www.sherithisrael.org

Member of the Union for
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CLERGY

Jessica Zimmerman Graf
Senior Rabbi
Abby Phelps
Rabbi Educator
David Frommer
Cantor

EMERITUS CLERGY

Lawrence Raphael (z"l) *Rabbi Emeritus*
Martin Weiner *Rabbi Emeritus*
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A MOMENT WITH RABBI JESSICA GRAF

URJ BIENNIAL: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BY LEARNING TO LISTEN

I just returned from the Union for Reform Judaism’s Biennial, and I want to share some things with you. Five thousand Reform Jews gathered to learn about our movement, our synagogues and the world around us. Small study sessions and huge plenaries included topics like #metoo, race and Judaism, gender and Jewish identity, antisemitism and many other issues at the intersection of our American and Jewish lives. We were introduced to ideas, opportunities and challenges facing Reform Judaism. And, I attended—along with Lindsay Braunig and Steve and Laura Olson—the largest Shabbat dinner I’ve ever seen. Some 300+ tables were set for 5,000 dinner guests!

Two sessions were highlights for me. The first was a small group presentation where *New York Times* journalist Jodi Kantor (whom I first met in college) talked about the work she and Megan Twohey did to break the Harvey Weinstein story. The second was a special invitation-only discussion for innovative synagogues.

Jodi shared two important lessons with the fascinated audience: first, the unwavering belief that giving people a chance to tell their stories matters—a lot; and second, that this belief came from listening to Holocaust survivors share their experiences. Though Jodi talked about the riveting details of the Weinstein investigation, her real message was the power of individuals to change the world. She mentioned that her grandmother is a

Holocaust survivor and that her upbringing actually prepared her to break the Weinstein story. The stories she heard from her parents and grandparents, the value of asking questions and investigating the past, the belief that individuals matter and that painful stories need to be told—all led her to become an investigative journalist.

I was glad to attend this session at the beginning of the Biennial because it framed the other events for me. Throughout the other sessions, I was thinking about the power we have to impact each other’s lives. With that in mind, I attended the session on synagogue innovation.

CSI was invited to participate in an interesting discussion with leaders from other creative congregations. Representatives of some of the Reform movement’s most vibrant synagogues were assigned to tables and asked to consider some shifts in thinking about synagogue life. My group focused on a changed definition of leadership: How do we define leadership and how can we harness it? How can a new model of synagogue leadership empower people to share their passions and expertise? How can we build a stronger network of “raving fans”—people who love being part of our sacred community and tell others about the meaning that it brings to their everyday lives?

The conversation turned to “small groups within the synagogue”—not exactly chavurot, though those are good

A Moment With, continues, page 7

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

*“Thus the total of Jacob’s household who came to Egypt was seventy persons.”
— Genesis 46:27*

At a time of famine, Joseph, viceroy in Egypt, summons his father Jacob to join him. Jacob, his eleven other sons, daughter Dinah and grandchildren settle in the region of Goshen. The family of Hebrews amounts to all of seventy souls—immigrant shepherds surrounded by a great civilization of which they know little.

Yet two centuries later, a new Pharaoh declares, “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.” His attempts to destroy Jacob’s descendants sets in motion the Exodus, receiving the Ten Commandments at Sinai and the impetus for a small people to alter history. ■

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Questions for CANTOR DAVID FROMMER

Cantor Frommer announced he'll be leaving Sherith Israel to seek a position on the East Coast to be closer to his extended family. We asked him for his thoughts on three-and-a-half years at CSI.

Q: You formerly served as cantor at Congregation Shomrei Torah in Santa Rosa. What challenges presented themselves at Sherith Israel?

A: I thought teaching the congregation to sing would be a challenge. To me, the imposing majesty of the sanctuary implied worship based on a performing cantor and passive congregation. During the opening song at my first service, I realized that the opposite was true. CSI's congregational voice was more comfortable and confident than mine! We'd be a perfect match. I also knew that CSI hadn't had a cantor for several years. I wanted to restore an excitement about having an expert in Jewish music, who could experiment while continuing the synagogue's traditions.

Here I must thank **Rabbi Jessica Graf**. She has continually encouraged both my musical and non-musical initiatives. She often downplays her musical input, but she has a keen ear for how melodies shape sacred moments. When we started in 2016, we agreed to unify the musical styles of our different Friday night services so our melodies would welcome people of all ages and backgrounds. We were aided by the wonderful talents of **Jonathan Dimmock** and the indomitable spirit of our volunteer choir, Koleynu. I've been unconditionally supported by our clergy, staff and congregation.

Q: You taught Torah Study infrequently elsewhere, then regularly here. What impresses you about your sessions at CSI?

A: When I started, Rabbi Graf was on maternity leave. I found myself in the deep end of the Torah Study pool, alternating every week with **Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller**. The Torah Study group was highly dedicated, and I was concerned they'd be skeptical about a cantor leading them, but they welcomed me with open arms. Fortunately, a colleague introduced me to the online Torah study resources of **Rabbi David Fohrman**, a renowned Orthodox scholar. Rabbi Graf and I were somewhat nervous about my teaching so much material from a rabbi with ties to Aish HaTorah, which encourages an Orthodox lifestyle, but I learned that, selected thoughtfully, his material has much to teach Reform Jews. The Torah Study group wholeheartedly agreed. Torah study has been one of my most rewarding experiences at CSI. I've learned even more than I've taught.

Q: Did being an Army National Guard chaplain impact your congregational duties?

A: I joined the New York Army National Guard as a chaplain in 2008 while I was a student at Hebrew Union College in New York. In 2012, I deployed to Kuwait with a month in Kabul, Afghanistan. The first time I led services there, nobody sang. I wasn't sure why, but I stopped and said, "We're going to have to work this out, because I'm not going to sing by myself the next nine months." We began with one *niggun*—a wordless melody. Over time, we added more and more Hebrew. By the end of my tour, we were singing the full Kabbalat Shabbat service together. If you approach a congregation reasonably, you can make demands and they'll respond—whether at an army base in Kuwait or a Reform synagogue in San Francisco. I would never have had the confidence to demand more singing at CSI without that formative experience.

Q: What are some other highlights of your tenure here?

A: We've really grown our High Holiday music program, adding a second organist, more instrumentalists and additional professional singers to Koleynu. One Yom Kippur, we experimented with an electric cello, the next with an oud. Giving two High Holiday sermons has been a real honor, since most cantors aren't afforded that opportunity. I also enjoyed recording *Nashuva*, our High Holiday CD, so congregants could get more familiar with songs we wanted to introduce. Hearing 1,200 congregants singing those melodies on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was the ultimate thrill. People did their homework!

Our b.mitzvah—bar, bat, b'nai get confusing—services have also evolved. Rabbi Graf and I get so much gratification when out-of-town family and friends—not all Jewish—tell us how much they enjoyed the music. And almost all our students learn the actual cantillation, reading the trope to sing and not just memorizing from a recording. Our sixth-grade family retreats, where musically inclined parents accompanied our worship, also stand out because they reflect everything we do to make Sherith Israel inclusive and welcoming.

Also, I feel fortunate to have supported our rabbi and past presidents in bringing the Seismic Retrofit Campaign to a successful conclusion. It was one of the most extraordinary accomplishments of any American synagogue, and I was honored to have played a small part. ■

AGING WISELY, from page 1

“These years are like a new privilege, giving people the opportunity to volunteer, to travel, to reflect after having amassed work and life experience,” comments **Rabbi Jessica Graf**. “Today people in their 50s and 60s are young; folks at 70 are middle-aged; and people are productive in their 80s and beyond.”

Bringing an attitude of creative productivity to the congregation, several members came to Rabbi Graf with ideas for programs to address elderhood. “With so many ideas percolating at once, it was a clear indication that we needed to talk about this and support people during this stage of life,” notes Rabbi Graf.

Bringing Meaning To Life's Transitions

“We’re talking about living a full, rich life,” says **Dr. Jim Davis**, who co-leads the six-session Bringing Meaning to Life’s Transitions group with social worker **Lee Pollak**. As an internist and rheumatologist, Jim helped patients through life transitions. “The longer I worked, the more my practice morphed into taking care of people in their retirement years,” says Jim, who retired two years ago. “It became a part of my practice that I thoroughly enjoyed.”

Lee is a founder of the Grief and Growing camp weekend and has worked in the Jewish community for many years helping people deal with the loss of loved ones. She and Jim brought the idea of collaborating on this program, which addresses the challenges and opportunities of aging, ageism, grief and healing, to Rabbi Graf.

“It’s wonderful to bring people together to talk about transitions and to bring meaning and spirituality to this time of life,” explains Jim. “People have the benefit of sharing wisdom with each other.” In addition to the group’s conversations, Jim and Lee have invited speakers like **Rabbi Sheldon Marder**, rabbi at the Campus for Jewish Living (formerly the Jewish Home), **Chuck Roppel**, a former priest who worked extensively on life

transitions, **Cantor David Frommer** and **Shira Shore**.

Although now scheduled for six sessions, Jim and Lee would like to see the group continue as a salon or chavurah, perhaps monthly, so people can bond and share this part of life with each other.

Wise Aging

The Wise Aging program was also brought to Rabbi Graf’s attention by a congregant, this time social worker Velia Frost. Beginning in February, Velia and **Debbie Freed** will co-lead the six-session introductory group. Debbie, an organizational consultant and Jewish family-life educator, helped **Rabbi Martin Weiner** coordinate confirmation services at Sherith Israel for many years. Seasoned facilitators, Debbie and Velia undertook special training to present the program at Sherith Israel.

Developed by **Rabbi Rachel Cowan** and **Linda Thal** for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality in New York, the Wise Aging program offers a supportive and sacred place for those 60 and older to share aging’s challenges and opportunities. This comprehensive program has been presented at more than 500 synagogues nationwide. It incorporates contemplative listening, journaling, mindful meditation, Jewish text study and poetry to deepen the inner and outer journeys of participants.

“Some of the subjects we cover include living with loss and finding light, forgiveness and reconciliation, and cultivating nourishing relationships,” explains Velia. “The program looks at all this through a Jewish lens. For example, in exploring forgiveness, we might talk about what it took for Joseph to forgive his brothers so we can come to terms with past events in our own lives.”

Debbie was drawn to the Wise Aging program because it helps people know themselves and what matters. “It’s really about the ‘River of Life,’ the passage of life and time,” she says. “We can look at who we are and who we have always been and appreciate the fullness of ourselves as we continue to grow and evolve.”

Aging Wisely continues, page 5



AGING WISELY: Life coach and former priest **Chuck Roppel** shares his wisdom on turning 80. Other guest speakers include **Rabbi Sheldon Marder**, **Cantor David Frommer** and **Shira Shore**.

Upcoming sessions

BRINGING MEANING TO LIFE’S TRANSITIONS continues

**Wednesdays, Jan. 22 and Feb. 5
4–5:30 pm**

Contact: Lee Pollak, leepollak@gmail.com or Jim Davis, davisjmd47@gmail.com.

WISE AGING begins

**Tuesdays, Feb. 11 and 18; March 3, 10, 17 and 31
3–5 pm**

Contact: **Debbie Freed**, freedassoc@aol.com.

MEMOIR WRITING

The first session finished up in December. *If you are interested in a possible continuation, contact Gale Gottlieb, galegott@aol.com.*



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH GORDON GLADSTONE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TAKING SHERITH TO ISRAEL

Rabbi Jessica Graf and I are organizing a trip to Israel next fall. The logical question might be, what makes this trip different from all other trips? On this trip, we won't be tourists.

Living in San Francisco we observe tourists up close. Shivering in their souvenir fleece, they shop, eat and sightsee at the predictable spots. Meanwhile the locals happily enjoy a completely different landscape of food, commerce and destinations. As true as this is for San Francisco, it is an order of magnitude more so in Israel. In my training as an Israeli tour guide I learned where people expected to go, but I often kept my own

alternative itinerary for my friends and family of places people *should* go. Far from the crowds, it reflected a more accurate portrait of the place I had fallen in love with.

The trip we are planning is based around a simple idea: where would we want to go? How can we show you a place that defies easy definition and can't be summed up in a fancy website? Using food, wine and art as entry points, we are planning to visit places that aren't considered tourist destinations, hear from people who are unlikely to be in the English press, and eat what Israelis eat (hint, it's not falafel). We're not

going to Masada, or Tsfat. We will tour the graffiti in Tel Aviv and Beit Lechem (Bethlehem), visit small-scale wine and beer producers, shop local food halls, tour the weird afterlife of the Tel Aviv central bus terminal and see contemporary art that isn't in the gift shop at the airport.

Whether you have never been to Israel, or you've been ten times, this will be a trip to remember. Departure will be after the fall holidays and returning ten days later. Final prices and dates will be announced this winter. ■

AGING WISELY, from page 4

Wise Aging is an intimate program encouraging people to be reflective and more fully present in their lives. The leaders are planning on a group of no more than 14 people. "We are starting with an introductory six sessions, but it can become an ongoing group for this challenging, yet joyful and potentially liberating stage of life," adds Debbie.

Both Velia and Debbie recommend the book *Wise Aging: Living with Joy, Resilience, & Spirit*, by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Linda Thal, for people who join the group and others who want to explore this life stage on their own.

Memoir Writing

CSI board member Gale Gottlieb came to Rabbi Graf with yet another idea: memoir writing. "At a certain point in your life, you think about the past, and you think about how you got here," comments Gale. "There is value and joy in taking the time to put these things down on paper."

The memoir writing group began meeting every other week last fall and may continue in February. "It's not so much a writing class—and class is even the wrong word," says Gale. "It's more of a get-together." Participants write short pieces capturing a slice of their lives, perhaps marriage, friendship, growing up or young adventures. They might write about a birthday party, a first job or even regrets. Since participants are about the same age, they respond to each other's memories, such as milk being delivered in a bottle. Millennials, ask your grandparents!

Beyond writing memories and stories for oneself and one's family, Gale sees camaraderie and pleasure in sharing them with a group of like-minded people. "There's a trust and an intimacy in a memoir group that is not part of our regular social lives."

Participant **Margaret Scheinman** wanted to tell her kids the story of her life. "I focused on funny things, but things that are important for my children to know about," she says. "People



A GROWING COHORT: Bora Lazar and Joanne Farkas

listen intently to the group's comments about eldering, a new life stage. Seniors comprise 30% of Sherith Israel's membership, tracking just a bit ahead of San Francisco's population stats.

have told incredible stories, and other people's stories have evoked memories that I've buried. This is a valuable experience for anyone who wants to explore their lives."

Rabbi Graf sums up the rationale for increasing the synagogue's offerings for the new "elderling" generation. "In *Pirkei Avot*, it says: At 40 one achieves understanding, at 50 one is prepared to give wise counsel, at 60 one is given the deference of seniority, at 70 one is considered a sage, 80 is the age of heroic strength. Eighteen hundred years ago, no one imagined living beyond 80," she reminds us. "It is up to us to identify the attributes that come at 90, 100 and beyond." ■

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, from page 1

turn it, for everything is in it”—and broadens its meaning, encouraging participants to continually ask, “What else could this be?” as they consider their own artwork and the world around them. Rabbi Phelps encourages Studio teachers and students to do the same. “At Studio, we seek to foster curiosity, kindness and Jewish identity in our students,” she notes. “JSP shares these core values and has wisdom to offer about how to realize them.”

At the first professional development session in October, Studio teachers were introduced to JSP’s philosophy by making a giant mural and discussing the process of creating it. Each participant took a piece home. According to CSI youth program manager **Natalie Weizman**, “This was our first time exploring being creative together. We learned valuable lessons about letting students and ourselves be visionaries and create without someone else imposing boundaries.”

Adds Rabbi Phelps, “I’ve learned from JSP that if you’re grappling with something difficult, a good question is, ‘Have you made art about this yet?’ With art, you deal not only with the intellect but also with emotions. We’re called Studio because we want to be a creative space where students can process what’s going on in their lives.”

Chloe Erdan, who teaches Pre-K, says, “Professional development at Studio provides the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that extend far beyond the classroom. I also hope to be of service to my students on their journey to becoming part of the greater Jewish community.”

A December session with JSP helped teachers take a deep dive into the value of *anavah*, humility. “Our children should

develop humility in a healthy way,” says Rabbi Phelps, “to understand that the world is greater than any of us and that we need to make space for other people and new ideas.” Humility leads to empathy, she points out, so learning about *anavah* is critical for teachers as well as for students.

Shalom Bayit, which promotes the right—especially of women and children—to peace, safety and sanctuary in one’s own home, schools and workplaces, presented a learning session for Studio teachers last October. They discussed establishing appropriate boundaries and best practices for classroom management, maximizing Studio as a safe space for all. “Much of what we talked about relates to communicating more clearly and empathetically to engage students and avoid misunderstandings,” says Rabbi Phelps, who hopes to bring Shalom Bayit back at least once next year.

In early January, Teens at Studio (7th and 8th graders) will participate in Love Shouldn’t Hurt, a Shalom Bayit program that aims to help young people recognize abusive behavior and teach them the skills to build respectful relationships. Rabbi Phelps plans to make this program available to CSI’s high schoolers later this spring.

Rabbi Phelps also plans to continue harnessing the rich Jewish educational resources of the Bay Area to support Studio teachers and make Studio the most vibrant and welcoming place it can be. “Studio offers an outstanding opportunity for our children to enrich their Judaism and explore their place in the Jewish world,” says Rabbi Phelps. “Regular professional development helps Sherith Israel’s teachers grow that experience.” ■



CREATIVE TOGETHER: Professional development for Studio teachers working with the Jewish Studio Project combines creative arts with Jewish learning. **Chloe Erdan** (above left) engages the pre-K class with yoga stretches. **Lea Loeb**, (below left) leads the fourth- and fifth-graders in a Chanukah mitzvah project.



A MOMENT WITH RABBI JESSICA GRAF, from page 2

examples. The idea was first presented to synagogue leaders many years ago by Rabbi Larry Hoffman and Dr. Ron Wolfson of Synagogue 2000/3000. The idea of allowing organic groups to spring up—people with shared needs or interests—came from a series of visits to Saddleback Church about 20 years ago. The evangelical megachurch’s founder, Pastor Rick Warren, encouraged small groups to form organically in his 50,000-person church community. He encouraged people to meet and talk about issues of importance to them and provided the materials they wanted to study or share ideas together. He took an enormous community of people and allowed everyone to feel a part of a small and intimate group that traveled through life together. He spoke about his work to delegations of Jewish leaders from Synagogue 2000/3000. I had the privilege to tour his megachurch once and to engage in discussion about his vision.

Now, 20 years later, the idea of small group-based synagogue life was being discussed again. The conversation affirmed that an important goal of sacred community is to build relationships among people who share the same core values. As Amy Asin, vice president of strengthening congregations for the URJ, said to me, the purposes of engaging in a synagogue are “*tikkun ha-olam* and *tikkun ha-nefesh*”—repairing our world and repairing our own souls. Those goals become more attainable in partnership with others.

I was energized by the conversations that took place in the hallways throughout the convention and in taxis as people headed home. I returned with a renewed commitment to deepening relationships among people at Sherith Israel and creating opportunities for all of us to investigate our complicated world through a Jewish lens. ■

Pilot program brings together parents of pre-school-age kids

CHAVURAH CIRCLES OF FRIENDSHIP MOVING FORWARD

In a world of fast-paced and often bewildering change, people look for the comfort of community and friendship.

In that light, says Sherith Israel president **Lindsay Braunig**, “a chavurah—a circle of friendship—offers natural connections with people at the same stage of life or with common interests.” A chavurah, Lindsay emphasizes, serves as a support structure offering more than the hit-or-miss of casual groups. “There’s no better way to build relationships.”

In the last issue of *Sherith Israel News*, Lindsay stated that Sherith Israel was exploring a new approach to chavurot. After speaking with lay leaders and congregants, she’s planning a pilot program for families with young children. “In December, we emailed member families with children from newborn to four. They received information on what a chavurah is—we’re calling them Circles—and the opportunity to fill out a survey as to whether they wanted to join a pilot Circle.”

A CSI chavurah subcommittee, including **Christina Jefferson, Maacah Marah, Valerie Jahan, Jeni Clancy** and Lindsay, has been reaching out to respondents to gather more information and figure out next steps. When the Circles are formed,

the subcommittee will stay in contact with their leaders, keep members informed about Sherith Littles events and help them build community.

In tandem, the membership committee, spearheaded by Christina Jefferson, is surveying congregants in existing shared-interest programs such as synagogue committees, our book club, and HaMotzi, trying to understand what brought our members to Sherith Israel, what they value most and what they would like Sherith Israel to add to its offerings. The membership committee will likely then conduct some in-person focus groups later in the year. Those surveys and conversations will inform the membership committee’s approach to Circles.

Lindsay points out that a chavurah provides advantages over casual friendship groups. “Sherith Israel’s Circles will have structure and guidance from the synagogue. The goal will be for each Circle to meet at least every other month, and hopefully these Circles will last for many years.” She also emphasizes that members of the Circles will be linked by their affiliation with Sherith Israel. “Because the backbone of the Circles structure is Sherith Israel, participants will be

linked for as long as they maintain their participation at Sherith Israel. This will enrich their everyday Jewish life—making Circle members more comfortable attending services or synagogue events since they can attend with friends. Chavurot can also enhance lifecycle events as members can support and be supported by their Circle communities.”

In December Lindsay attended the Union for Reform Judaism’s 2019 Biennial in Chicago, which offered workshops on small groups. Lindsay reports, “Small groups like Sherith Israel’s Circles are top of mind for synagogue leaders around the country because they offer such a powerful way of building meaningful community. The URJ has put together tremendous resources to support small groups, and synagogues that have been on the forefront of the rise of small groups are generously sharing their wisdom and experiences.”

The chavurah subcommittee plans to do a larger rollout of Circles for the entire congregation around the High Holidays next year. In the meantime, congregants interested in exploring a chavurah—and who have a few other interested participants—can email Lindsay at president@sherithisrael.org. ■

SHABBAT SERVICES

FRIDAY EVENINGS

6 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat
7:15 pm: Kiddush and oneg
Join us to welcome Shabbat.

LATE MINYAN WITH CANTOR DAVID FROMMER

Fridays, monthly, 7:30 pm
Jan. 31, Feb. 28, March 27, April 17
Song and prayer in the round beneath our majestic dome.
Information: Cantor Frommer, dfrommer@sherithisrael.org or 415.346.1720, x19.

SATURDAY MORNINGS

9:15 am: Torah Study with bagels and lox, coffee and tea.

10:30 am: *Sh'ma Koleynu* lay-led Shabbat morning service.

Noon: Kiddush lunch, twice a month; see *Under the Dome* emails for dates.

SPECIAL SHABBAT

Donor Wall Dedication and Concert

Friday, Feb. 21, 6 pm

Join us as we dedicate our new donor wall and celebrate one more time the generosity and vision of everyone who made our Seismic Retrofit Campaign such an earthshaking success.

TORONTO'S BEYOND THE PALE Plus COMMUNITY DINNER

Friday, Feb. 21, 7:30-9 pm
Enjoy distinctive Eurofolk fusion music inspired by Klezmer and Balkan sounds, and influenced by jazz, classical, bluegrass and reggae. For more than two decades, Beyond the Pale has been one of Canada's most innovative acoustic ensembles thanks to stellar musicianship and inventive songcraft.

✓ *Tickets: general admission and dinner, \$36; students, including dinner, \$24; children 5-12, including dinner, \$18; kids under 5, free; concert only (public), \$12; concert only (Sherith Israel members), free.*



WHAT'S HAPPENING

Purim and Passover

SHABBAT PURIM

Friday, March 6, 6 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat and Purim celebration with Cantor Jamie Marx and Rabbi Jessica Graf. Jamie Marx's *I Guess That's Why They Call It A Spiel: Lion King Edition* tells the story of Esther, Haman, Vashti, Ahashverosh and Mordechai with parodies of songs from *The Lion King* together with five of Elton John's biggest hits. This family-friendly spiel will keep you laughing with non-stop jokes as it brings our sacred scripture to life. *Free. All are welcome.*

PURIM CARNIVAL

Sunday, March 8, 10 am-1 pm
10-11 am: Sherith Littles Children 5 and under with their families
11 am-1 pm: Sherith Israel Temple Youth and friends of all ages
Shake your groggers and strut your inner Mordechai or Esther at our annual Purim festivities. Enjoy games, music, food, storytelling and a magic show. Carnival tickets may be exchanged for games and food. Suggested purchase of 50 carnival tickets for \$20 per family. Tickets available at the door for 50 cents each. All funds will support Sherith Israel youth programs.

✓ *Sherith Littles: Register for free online at sherithisrael.org.*

SECOND-NIGHT PASSOVER SEDER

Thursday, April 9, 5 pm
Celebrate freedom at our festive musical family Seder led by Rabbi Jessica Graf and Cantor David Frommer. Proceeds benefit our Chicken Soupers and HaMotzi programs, feeding homebound seniors, those in need of healing, and inhabitants of local shelters. Volunteers cater our delicious traditional meal.

✓ *Children under 5, free; 5-12 years, \$20; ages 13 and up, \$50. Table sponsor: \$613. Reservations: programs@sherithisrael.org.*

Adult

SHTISEL UNCOVERED: THE NEW HAREDIM

Wednesday, Jan. 29, 7 pm
Join us for a conversation with Yehonatan Indursky, creator of the critically acclaimed Netflix drama *Shtisel*, and Prina Pfeuffer, a path-breaking haredi social activist, for a discussion on the major political and social changes taking place within Israel and the possibilities for radical inclusion in Israeli art and politics.

✓ *Presented by New Israel Fund and Sherith Israel. Tickets: \$18. Register at nif.org/shtisel-new-haredim/.*

TU B'SHVAT BOTANICAL TOUR

Sunday, Feb. 9, 2 pm
San Francisco Botanical Garden
Golden Gate Park
1199 9th Ave., San Francisco

Join us for a Jewish celebration of nature with Rabbi Jessica Graf and a horticultural tour of the gardens with fellow congregants and friends. *Snacks provided. Free for San Francisco residents.*

A NEW LOOK AT 1948

Talk by Benny Morris
Thursday, Feb. 20, 7-8:30 pm
Benny Morris looks at recent research to update his 2009 book, *1948: a History of the First Arab-Israeli War*. He examines the war aims of the new Israeli state, the Palestinians and the Arab states to explain the resulting refugee problems and the explosive balance of forces. One of Israel's leading and most controversial historians and public intellectuals, Benny was born in Israel in 1948. He was educated at Hebrew University (BA) and Cambridge University (Ph.D.) and served in the IDF. He wrote for *The Jerusalem Post*, and was a professor of Middle East history at Ben-Gurion University.

✓ *\$10. Register at sherithisrael.org.*

RABBI MARTIN WEINER ANNUAL LECTURE

Why Israel [and its Future] Matters
Rabbi John Rosove

Friday, March 13, 7:30-9 pm
Rabbi Rosove, former associate rabbi at Sherith Israel, is the author of *Why Israel [and its Future] Matters: Letters of a Liberal Rabbi to his Children and the Millennial Generation*. Rabbi emeritus of Temple Israel of Hollywood, he is a national co-chair of the Rabbinic and Cantorial Cabinet of J Street and immediate past national chairman of the Association of Reform Zionists of America. He also serves on the URJ's new Israel and Reform Zionism Committee.

✓ *General admission and dinner: \$24; students \$18; children 5-12, \$12; kids under 5, free. Presentation only, free.*

PICKLES, PRETZELS AND PILSNEERS

Chef Philip Gelb
Thursday, April 16, 7:30 pm
Be part of the young-adult social event of the season as we bake freshly leavened dough following the conclusion of Passover. Guests will participate in pretzel-making with chef Gelb and make new friends during a fermented feast featuring the finest craft lagers and homemade pickles.

✓ *21+. Free! Register at sherithisrael.org.*

Ongoing

MAH JONGG

Thursdays, 6:30–8:30 pm

Join fellow congregants and other mah jongg enthusiasts for weekly drop-in games. *Information: Erin Gordon, eringordonsf@gmail.com.*

JEWISH BOOK CLUB

Mondays, 7 pm

Participants present books (paperback only) with a Jewish theme, author or historical setting. *Information: Julie House at juliehousesf@gmail.com.*

Jan. 27: *A German Life* by Bernd Wollschlaeger; discussion facilitated by Nancy Sheftel-Gomes.

Feb. 24: *Dinner at the Center of the Earth* by Nathan Englander; discussion facilitated by Mimi Gauss.

March 23: *On Division* by Goldie Goldberg, the 2019–20 selection of One Bay One Book; discussion facilitated by Helaine Weinstein.

April 27: *The Lost Girls of Paris* by Pam Jenoff; discussion facilitated by Cathy Taylor

May 18: *Catch-67: The Left, the Right, and the Legacy of the Six-Day War* by Micah Goodman and Eylon Levy; discussion facilitated by Tanya Berezin.

ADULT INTERMEDIATE HEBREW

Sundays, 1–2 pm

Hebrew for the advanced beginner, focusing on reading and deeply understanding prayers from the siddur. *Information: Noa Levy, noalevy8@gmail.com.*

HAMOTZI & CHICKEN SOUPERS

HaMotzi: Sundays, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Chicken Soupers: Sundays, noon–4 pm, Feb. 2, March 1, April 5, May 3

HaMotzi volunteers prepare meals for two shelters in San Francisco each week. Chicken Soupers volunteers cook and deliver meals each month for clients of JFCS. *Contact Nancy Sheftel Gomes, hamotzi@sherithisrael.org.*

SHIVA LAB:

A “HOW-TO” EXPERIENCE

Tuesdays, 6:30–8:30 pm

Jan. 14, 21 and 28

Learn more about how to lead, host and support a shiva with Rabbis Jon Sommer, Elliot Kukla, Eric Weiss and Natan Fenner of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center. Meeting at a private home, you'll gain a deeper understanding and the confidence to support mourners at this important time. Registrants are required to attend all three sessions. Register at sherithisrael.org. *More Information: Rabbi Jessica Graf, rabbigraf@sherithisrael.org.*

Older Adult

PRIME TIME CLUB

Monthly lunch and learn

Second Fridays, noon–2 pm

Feb. 14, March 13, April 10 and May 8

✓ \$10 for lunch; presentation only, free.

Feb. 14: Jake Marmer—Jazz Talmud & The Poetry of the Jewish Experience.

Poet, performer, educator and poetry critic for *Tablet* magazine, Jake will read poems inspired by classic and modern Jewish texts, rituals, and tropes. Born on the steppes of Ukraine, Jake considers himself a New Yorker though he lives in the Bay Area.

March 13: Ellie Shapiro—Music and the Holocaust.

Music often was a source of comfort, inspiration, solidarity and resistance. The Nazis also weaponized it as propaganda and incorporated it into their apparatus of terror. Ellie's multimedia presentation pays special attention to composers whose lives were cut short. She is the former director of the Jewish Music Festival and received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in 2018.

BRINGING MEANING TO LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

Lee Pollak, LCSW, and James Davis, MD

Wednesdays, Jan. 8 and 22, Feb. 5

4–5:30 pm

Jim Davis and Lee Pollak lead group discussions related to the transitions in life during “elderhood.” Participants discuss the challenges and opportunities of aging, ageism, grief, healing and religious rituals. *Contact Lee Pollak, leelpollak@gmail.com, or Jim Davis, davisjmd47@gmail.com.*

WISE AGING

Velia Frost, LCSW, and

Debbie Freed, MA, MS

Tuesdays, Feb. 11 and 18; March 3, 10, 17 and 31, 3–5 pm

Developed by the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, Wise Aging offers a sacred and supportive place for those 60 and older to share the challenges and opportunities of aging. Presented at more than 500 synagogues nationwide, the program incorporates contemplative listening, journaling, mindful meditation, Jewish text study and poetry.

✓ *Registration: Debbie Freed, freedassoc@aol.com.*

Youth Education & Programs

YOM HASHOAH SEDER

Sunday, April 19, 7 pm

The congregation is invited to a Yom HaShoah seder experience and meal, organized and led by our SITY youth group. Join our teens as the next generation bears witness to the Holocaust with the wider Sherith Israel community as their guests.

✓ *Tickets: \$10. Dinner included.*

CONFIRMATION

Friday, May 29, 6 pm

6 pm: During Kabbalat Shabbat

7:15 pm: Festive oneg

Join our confirmation class to welcome Shabbat and hear confirmands speak about what Judaism means to them.

Sherith Littles:

Programs for families

with children 5 and under

✓ PURIM CARNIVAL

Sunday, March 9, 10–11 am

For the first hour of the event, preschoolers and families with children 5 and under will have the run of the Purim carnival.

PARK MEETUP

Saturdays, March 28 and May 9

10:30 am–12:30 pm

Lafayette Park Playground

Cantor David Frommer leads a creative, fun musical Shabbat service for children under 5, their families and friends. It includes plush Torah toys and reading from the Torah. Snacks provided.

✓ = REGISTRATION REQUIRED

1. **ONLINE** www.sherithisrael.org/programs
2. **EMAIL** programs@sherithisrael.org
3. **PHONE** 415.346.1720

Save the Date

2020 | **ANNUAL MEETING** and dinner!

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 6 PM

The Board of Trustees invites you to the 2020 Annual Meeting of Congregation Sherith Israel. You must be a member in good standing to vote at the meeting.

✓ *Free. Dinner provided. Register at sherithisrael.org*

Passing on Jewish values

PROFILE: STACY PASSMAN AND DAN LAPUSHIN

The magnificent stained-glass windows bookending the eastern and western walls of Sherith Israel’s historic sanctuary reflect our two identities—Jewish and Californian. The Israelites receive the Ten Commandments not at the foot of Mt. Sinai, but at the gateway to Yosemite National Park—a vision of the Golden State as a new Promised Land.

The eastern window quotes the Prophet Isaiah: “Feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless.” It marks Sherith Israel as a spiritual center for *t’filah*, prayer, and for *tikkun olam*, repairing a torn world through social action and social justice.

Stacy Passman, a business analyst, and Dan LaPushin, vice president for customer success at Fortella, embrace these Sherith Israel values with a heartfelt, vocal *hineini!*—“Here I am!” Along with daughter Ayelet, 13, and 11-year-old twin sons Gil and Ronen, Stacy and Dan’s deep involvement with Sherith Israel expresses their love for Judaism and commitment to comfort the afflicted. “We have our values on the window,” Stacy says. “A lot of people join Sherith Israel because of social action, a central tenet of the synagogue.”

Stacy’s involvement with Sherith Israel started as a search for social connec-

tions when she brought then 5-month-old Ayelet to Rabbi Julie Saxe-Taller’s group for new mothers. Today Stacy is a member of CSI’s Board of Trustees and co-chair with Karen Alschuler of our Social Action Committee. Under their guidance, Sherith Israel has brought immigration rights to the forefront of the congregation’s conscience.

As the committee’s liaison to the board, Stacy advocated that Sherith Israel become a sanctuary congregation, which the board approved in 2018. CSI was San Francisco’s first sanctuary synagogue, connecting us to a nationwide network taking action on immigration reform and immigrant rights.

“We’re making the statement that we also were once immigrants, and that we believe in a diverse country,” Stacy says. “It’s become a crime to come into the country poor. The same things they used to keep Jews out, they’re still using to keep people out.”

Becoming a sanctuary congregation fits Sherith Israel’s moral and spiritual commitment to welcome the stranger without regard to faith, color or background. For many congregants that means appearing at the detention hearings of immigrants they don’t even know to offer support and bear witness. “The power we have is to be in court with people on their behalf,” Stacy says. “Judges make very different decisions when people are present for a person.”

The social action committee has assembled a broad portfolio of activities. Dedicated volunteers tutor public school children in reading. We partner with Faith in Action Bay Area to promote civic engagement on social justice matters. The committee and some CSI Studio students are passionate advocates for affordable senior housing. The committee also coordinates with Rabbi Saxe-Taller, now Northern California organizer for the California Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, on social and political issues affecting California. These are all examples of Sherith Israel responding with a resounding “*hineini*” to join efforts to improve communities and serve the common good.

For Stacy and Dan, a personal “*hineini*” moment came last year. The father of a girl in Ayelet’s Studio class suffered a stroke three weeks before the student’s bat mitzvah. Parents and children mobilized to have the bat mitzvah take place as planned. Stacy collected donations, another parent organized a potluck, another decorated. The Studio class did everything necessary—and then some—to allow a young girl the honor and privilege of becoming a bat mitzvah.

Recalling that experience, Stacy thinks back to Ayelet’s bat mitzvah late last year. Afterwards, Dan’s boss told him, “You’ve done an amazing job of transmitting your love of Judaism to your kids.”

Perhaps he knew how meaningful that comment would be for Stacy and Dan. “I grew up with a strong sense of Judaism and wanting to be Jewish, and I wanted to pass that on to our kids,” Stacy says. Stacy and Dan, like many other Sherith Israel parents, have discovered that the Sherith Israel community provides a welcoming place to make that happen. ■



HINEINI: Stacy Passman and Dan LaPushin say, “*hineini*”—here I am—to passing on Jewish values to their children, Ayelet, Gil and Ronen, and to their commitment to social action.

A hearty thank you to the **Sherith Israel volunteers** who cooked, delivered and served delicious homestyle meals to 100 men at the San Francisco Interfaith Shelter at St. Mary's Cathedral on December 24–26. Congregants baked 1200 cookies, enough for all three days of the shelter and the first HaMotzi /Chicken Soupers session of 2020. Many thanks to **Ben Abrams, Caroline Abrams, Zach Abrams, Estuardo Arevalo, Ruth Auerbach, Jennifer Berkowitz, Marilyn Berlin, Norm Brand, Ardis Breslauer, Al Breslauer, Heather Cowan, Jaime Cowan, Julie Driscoll, Lisa Erdberg, the Etlin-Gordon family, Ira Fateman, Stephanie Galinson, Dennis Gibbons, Brad Graham, Samantha Graham, Jeri Hart, Christina Jefferson, Laurie Josloff, Cece Kaufman, Dahlia Kelly, Carol Kingsley, Monique Koller, Chris Linder, Noah Linder, Mary Montella, Ellen Newman, Daniel Parker, Janet Parker, Wendy Parker, Jason Pyszkowski, Terrie Raphael, the Recht-Appel family, Rona Spiegel, Michaela Shaw, Nancy Sheftel-Gomes, Merti Walker, JoBeth Walt, Julia Weston and Karen Zelmar...**

Rabbi Jessica Graf offered a prayer for justice on behalf of the Jewish community during the Interfaith Prayer Service at The Third Baptist Church in honor of the inauguration of **Mayor London Breed**. **Eric Safire** also attended this historic San Francisco event...

Mazel tov to former CSI education director **Nancy Sheftel-Gomes**, who was awarded the 2020 Social Justice Scholarship from the USF Graduate School of Education. Nancy, who coordinates Chicken Soupers and HaMotzi throughout the year, is in a human rights education MA program at USF. The scholarship recognizes students who are transformative change agents. Nancy, with her passion for tikkun olam in teaching and in life, certainly fits the bill. Yasher koach...

Sherith Israel was represented at the URJ Biennial in Chicago by **Rabbi Jessica Zimmerman Graf, Cantor David Frommer**, executive director **Gordon Gladstone**, development and membership manager **Nia Taylor**, congregational president **Lindsay Braunig**, and **Steve** and **Laura Olson**. Nia also attended the Programming and Engagement Professionals of Reform Judaism conference for synagogue staff who focus on membership and outreach...

Steve and **Laura Olson**, longtime supporters of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, were asked to lead *Motzi* at the World Union's gala in recognition of their work fostering progressive Judaism around the world. The busy Olsons also attended the Jewish National Fund's conference in Washington, D.C. While east they visited with cantorial student **Suzanne Chaya Hamstra**, who often helped out with Shabbat services during her time at CSI...

Also at the URJ Biennial, **Gordon Gladstone** was installed as a member of the board of the National Association for Temple Administration, which offers educational opportunities for synagogue administrators. Gordon also chairs the Bay Area Temple Administrators group...

Rebecca Shore, daughter of past CSI president **Bill Shore** and **Nancy Flaxman**, was just appointed to the URJ-RAC Commission on Social Action. Rebecca, who attended religious school with **Rabbi Jessica Graf**, is co-president of East End Temple in Manhattan. Like father, like daughter...

Congrats to **Tiffany Loewenberg**, recently appointed executive director of the Randall Museum Friends, the support group for the popular natural history and science museum. She is responsible for fundraising, advocacy and working with the museum board and SF Recreation and Park staff. Tiffany is thrilled to work for a place that nurtures her kids'—and all kids'—curiosity.

Congratulations also go to **Neal Sapper**. Neal, a jazz buff active in CSI's social action committee and in veterans issues, created the jazz marketing, promotion and consulting firm New World 'n' Jazz in 1992. At the most recent Jazzweek Jazz Summit in San Jose, Neal was awarded the Duke Dubois Humanitarian award, recognizing a lifetime of contributions to jazz and the jazz community. It's no surprise that this is just the latest of many awards Neal has won from his professional community...

Jonathan Dimmock has a new CD, *Anders Paulsson & Jonathan Dimmock in Concert (Live)*. Jonathan and soprano sax player **Anders Paulsson** recorded the live album last August during a concert in Sofia Church in Stockholm. It includes compositions or arrangements by Paulsson, Bay Area composer **David Conte**, the late American organist **Harry Huff**, and **Arvo Pärt**. Arizona composer **Judith Cloud** contributed a world premiere of her *What Would Nina Simone Say?* to the album. Released in 246 countries and territories worldwide, the album is on all major digital platforms. Definitely worth checking out...

In more musical news, **Cantor David Frommer** and his son **Aaron** attended the SF Lamplighters production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* to cheer on longtime CSI member and Koleynu volunteer **Chris Focht**. Joining them were CSI members **Janet, Daniel and Wendy Parker, Lynn and Paul Sedway, Hal and Dorothy Auerbach**, and **Katie and Everly Zier**.

And congratulations to **Laynie Atzena**, whose story "Betty Crocker's Unwritten Rules" was just selected for the anthology *Flash Nonfiction Food*, coming out from Woodhall Press. Yasher koach. ■

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.



CSI EXPANDS COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL ACTION

Sherith Israel's growing social-action portfolio reads like a modern version of the Prophets: welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless.

While our core effort is fulfilling our commitment as a sanctuary congregation, members of our social action community are increasingly involved in other issues, such as affordable housing. Meanwhile, our HaMotzi and Chicken Soupers, Chesed, literacy and mental health programs continue to provide vital support to our congregants and the broader community.

One key to the growth of CSI's social action profile, according to social action committee co-chair **Karen Alschuler**, has been building partnerships with other faith-based and social-justice organizations. She points to our work with organizations working on immigration (Faith in Action, the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity and Freedom for Immigrants). We also work with the Religious Action Center on state and federal legislation, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society on refugees and Faith in Action on senior housing.

More than 80 congregants are on the social action email list. "We can always use more leaders and volunteers," Karen adds. *For more information, contact Karen at kalschuler@gmail.com, or co-chair Stacy Passman at spassman@gmail.com.*

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Our sanctuary congregation efforts to support the rights of immigrants and

asylum seekers have expanded exponentially. Over a three-month period in late-2019, Sherith Israel members attended more than a dozen hearings and participated in several demonstrations at ICE headquarters.

One was the November 22 asylum hearing for Abedjwe (Amina) Ouro Bangna. Amina fled Togo, in West Africa, three years ago. She made her way to South America, then through Central America until she reached the United States border, where she applied for asylum. She was detained in a facility where no one spoke either French or her native Kotokoli. Sherith Israel became involved in her case when **Leslie Rabine**, who has worked extensively in French-speaking West Africa, volunteered to help her.

At her asylum hearing, Amina was able to tell her story for the first time. Speaking in Kotokoli through a court-appointed translator, she described the threats, violence and danger she endured from early childhood until she fled. The next hearing, in January, will include expert testimony on conditions in Togo. After her court appearance, Amina joined us at Shabbat services, where she was able to thank the CSI members who accompanied her, as well as the Sherith Israel community for its support.

Stephen Garber, a retired attorney, attended several hearings and rallies. He says that supporting immigrants has helped him develop a "feeling of empathy for people who are struggling to come to this country." He adds, "We were in a similar position in the 1930s." Attending hearings "humanizes the im-

migration issue, which can otherwise be theoretical."

Steve is considering returning to active status as an attorney to become more involved in immigration work.

TRIPS TO THE BORDER

This spring, two groups of Sherith Israel congregants will travel to Tucson to see first-hand the conditions at the Arizona-Mexico border. The five-day trips include classroom work and time spent in the field, including on the Mexican side, meeting with immigrants and asylum seekers, and performing life-saving tasks like leaving caches of water in the desert.

The programs will be conducted by Borderlinks, which has facilitated such programs for more than 30 years. **Rabbi Jessica Graf** will lead the first group in March, executive director **Gordon Gladstone** the second in late April. Rabbi Graf is "particularly excited about our upcoming trips to the border—opportunities to learn more about the immigration crisis in a hands-on way."

HOUSING

On December 4, Karen Alschuler, Mimi Gauss, Evelyn Manies, Janet Parker and Bill Shore joined Faith in Action and other groups at City Hall. They delivered a letter urging San Francisco Mayor London Breed to address the senior housing crisis more aggressively. Although Mayor Breed did not meet with the group then, she has agreed to meet with them in January and consider the proposal. ■



ASYLUM HEARING SUPPORT: Ten members of Sherith Israel's social action committee were at Amina Ouro Bangna's asylum hearing on November 22: **Karen Alschuler, Steve Garber, Mimi Gauss, Mikiko Huang, Janet Parker, Evy Posamentier, Leslie and Merle Rabine, Bill Shore and Rhoda Wolfe.**



HAMOTZI AND CHICKEN SOUPERS:

Our programs providing meals for homeless shelters and homebound individuals continue to do amazing work. Long-time HaMotzi volunteer **JoBeth Walt** (left) prepares a salad, while HaMotzi captain **Julie Driscoll** preps vegetables. Every Sunday, the Newman Hall kitchen is alive with the sounds of slicing, dicing, chopping and stir-frying as crews of volunteers work their culinary magic. New volunteers are always welcome to shop, pick up food donations, cook and deliver. *For more information, contact hamotzi@sherithisrael.org.*

Building from strength

CONTINUITY IS KEY GOAL OF CANTORIAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

The newly formed cantorial search committee will be looking for someone who can build on what Rabbi Jessica Graf and Cantor David Frommer have created. According to CSI vice president **Craig Etlin**, who chairs the committee, that means continuing the joyous feeling of our services, led by a cantor who really wants the congregation to sing.

At its first meeting in November, the committee discussed process and spent a lot of time talking about what they love about Cantor Frommer. “We had to deal with a sense of loss,” Craig acknowledged. Then the committee members turned to the details of the search.

The committee agreed that congregants value a cantor who wants them to sing and pray together, not be a performer. Working with b. mitzvah students is critical, as is replicating the chemistry that Cantor Frommer has with Rabbi Graf.

Craig points out that the committee recognized that Cantor Frommer did a variety of things well, such as leading Torah Study and giving drashes.

In pulling together the search committee, Craig and CSI president Lindsay Braunig looked for a broad cross-section of congregants who interact with the cantor. This includes parents with children, members of Koleynu, Torah Study regulars, people who attend services regularly and board members. Board secretary **Erik Migdail** will serve as vice-chair; the other members are **Ruth Auerbach, Rebecca Bayrer, Randy Kahn, Jacalyn Kornblatt, Maacah Marah, Alan Mirviss, Nancy Sheftel-Gomes** and **Dan Weiss**. Rabbi Graf and Lindsay Braunig are ex officio members of the committee.

Sherith Israel has already entered the recruiting process dictated by the Ameri-

can Conference of Cantors. It began with completing a ten-page questionnaire about the congregation. Erik Migdail took the lead on preparing the responses with the help of Rabbi Graf, Lindsay and Craig. Cantors already employed were eligible to apply last fall, while cantors who graduate from Hebrew Union College this June became eligible to apply in January.

Sherith Israel is entering the search process “from a position of strength,” says Craig, who led our seismic retrofit and knows something about getting difficult things done. He adds, “We are not only building on everything that David and Jessica have done, but also on what we have all done as a congregation over the past 20 years.” ■

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

NEW BABIES

Noah Bluestein, child of Sabrina (Zimmerman) & Stephen Bluestein
Tobias Lurie, child of Erin Gordon & Steven Lurie

B. MITZVAH

Henry Flaherman, child of Valerie & Michael Flaherman, January 11
Jacob Barrett, child of Louise Greenspan & Ben Barrett, April 4
Zachary Kamil, child of Jun Yamashiro & David Kamil, June 13
Gabe Linder, child of Christine & Dan Linder, June 13

WEDDINGS

Lauren Allerhand & Sean Dodge, September 22
Goldie Schupak & Edward Gorbis, October 18

NEW & RETURNING MEMBERS

Hagar Ben-Eliezer
Leonard Berniker
Jeremy Blatteis
Jessica Erickson & Adam Pauls
Gregg Ficks
Joan & Stephen Fierberg
Holly Fitzsimmons & Jeremy Packman
Tracy Freedman & Nick Robins

Enid & Ron Goodman
Allison Green
Lillian Jahan
Vicky Keston and children,
Benjamin and Liliana
Lisa Mandelstein
Harper Matheson & Robert Schiff
and child, Roxanne
Jessica & Brandon Mills and child, Maya
Beth Mlynarczyk
Barbara Morgenthau & Hanmin Lee and
children, Martha and Taemoh
Kim Nalley & Michael Lewis and children,
Lydia and Kalley
Sarah Pelzner
Marci Ryan
Diana Severinsky & Dmitry Naberezhnev
and child, Daniel
Susan Shapiro
Trisha & Greg Sherman and children,
Riley and Mia
Eric & Lydia Weiss and children,
Adam and Abigail
David & Cynthia Zimmerman

CHOOSING JUDAISM

Ingrid Apter
Andrew Arruda
Sean Dodge
Kimberlee Sorem

May the memory of the righteous be for a blessing.

Paul Epp, brother of Arlene Krieger and brother-in-law of Steve Krieger
Lenci Farkas, mother of Gabriel Farkas and mother-in-law of Joanne Yawitz Farkas
Ari McGuire, son of Carole DeNola & Joseph McGuire
Stanton (Tony) Orser, husband of Janet Frankel
Leonard Weinberg, brother of Allen Weinberg



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6TH-GRADE STUDIO RETREAT AN ADVENTURE FOR ALL: When the 6th-graders and their families reached the Point Bonita YMCA in Sausalito for their November retreat, the first thing everyone did after getting settled was to say Shabbat blessings over candles, challah and wine. At dinner, the class declared their own table, leaving parents and younger siblings to create their own community. At the campfire marshmallows were rationed. It seems a fox stole one of the bags before everyone got to the firepit. To top off the evening, the group got an early glimpse of the Leonid meteor shower, which peaked the next night. "It was magical," reported youth program manager **Natalie Weizman**. Aren't CSI retreats always magical?



CONGREGANTS AND SEEKERS ALIKE: Whether people are considering becoming Jews by choice or refreshing their Jewish knowledge, the Intro to Judaism class has lots to offer. This year's class is one of the largest ever, with more than 30 students: **Rika Abbir, Sarah Alloy, Konstantin Antonovich, Ingrid Apter, Patricia Arreola-Rico, Raegan Barker, Catherine Bergstrom, Kristina Bruehl, Tommy Collison, Nelly Do, Jessica Erickson and Adam Pauls, Osborn Erickson, Roman Fayman, Velia and Philip Frost, Ximena Hasbach, Melissa Houston, Jessica and David Klein, Patrick Lawler, Barbara Morgenthau and Hanmin Lee, Chris Parascandolo, Leslie and Merle Rabine, Josh Radman, Tamara Rosenkranz, Myles Saron, Chelsea Tirone, and Jacqueline Wachtel.**

A course for seekers and those refreshing their JQ

INTRO TO JUDAISM MORE POPULAR THAN EVER

The old New York subway ads said you didn't need to be Jewish to love Levy's real Jewish rye. In today's San Francisco, you don't need to be Jewish to learn about Judaism. And if you are Jewish, you can up your Jewish knowledge in the same place—CSI's Intro to Judaism class.

The Intro class draws participants for a variety of reasons, according to **Rabbi Abby Phelps**. "We have people who are interested in conversion. We have people in relationships with Jewish partners who want to deepen their understanding of Judaism. They study side by side with congregants who feel they didn't get an adequate Jewish education as kids. And some students have recently discovered Jewish ancestry in their family backgrounds," she notes. "Whatever your situation, this is a great place to get a blitz on basic Jewish ed."

The class is taught by all our clergy plus CSI executive director **Gordon Gladstone** and congregant **Lisa Erdberg**, who helped develop the original course with **Rabbi Emeritus Larry Raphael** more than a dozen years ago. This year's texts are *Settings of Silver* by Stephen M. Wylen and *Living Judaism* by Wayne D. Dosick, plus topical handouts.

Rabbi Phelps comments that this is a shared project using the richness and expertise of the clergy, staff and Lisa, each teaching where their expertise lies. **Rabbi Jessica Graf** teaches the classes on the Jewish lifecycle and Jewish calendar and festivals. **Cantor David Frommer** teaches about music. Gordon, who has an MA in history and lived in Israel for several years, leads two sessions on Jewish history. Rabbi Phelps' topics this year include text and prayer. Lisa leads sessions on Shabbat; Jewish Beliefs: God, Messiah and the Afterlife; and the wrap-up session where class members reflect on their journey through the course and how their thinking has evolved.

"One of the thoughts about having lay people teach," Lisa says, "is that there might be issues or questions that people would be more comfortable raising with someone who isn't clergy." A lifelong learner and teacher, Lisa attended a URJ seminar at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati on working with interfaith families. She adds that many of our participants come from backgrounds where asking questions got them into trouble when they were young. "They are certainly very comfortable challenging me about everything."

The majority of Intro participants are "seekers" looking for a spiritual comfort place. Many come from strong faith traditions, either Catholic or some type of fundamentalist background. "They want religion and spirituality in their lives," says Lisa, "but they rebelled against the version they grew up with."

Catherine Bergstrom signed up as a step in her conversion process. "I considered conversion before, but last fall I did a lot of reading and extensive research, which made me feel that this is the religion for me," says Catherine, a San Francisco native who was raised Catholic and went to Presentation High School and USF. After "Shabbat shopping," she found her way to Sherith Israel, came to High Holiday services and joined the class.

Catherine describes herself as "Jewish-curious" with lots of Jewish friends. "I always felt so comfortable; there's something about it that has always spoken to me. I would encourage anyone, even people who are already Jewish and want to brush up, to consider the Intro to Judaism class."

Whether you are introducing yourself to Judaism—or re-introducing yourself to Judaism—the Intro class will satisfy your hunger for Jewish knowledge. ■



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See page 8 for registration information.

