

First Annual Report to the Congregation  
May 1, 2011/27 Nisan 5771

As we approach the end of our first year, Yavneh's synagogue without walls has already evolved into a vibrant expression of Jewish Renewal in the Triangle. We are working to create a new community to explore and renew the richness of Judaism, particularly its prophetic and mystical traditions.

We have much to be grateful for: first of all, for the extraordinary welcome offered Yavneh by West Raleigh Presbyterian Church, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, and Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, whose congregants share their worship and meeting spaces with us at no cost. We have been worshipping during the past year at WRPC and will be relocating to St. Mark's on July 1. Please be sure to join us for Kabbalat Shabbat worship and a lively pot luck thank-you dinner at WRPC on Friday evening, June 17.

Next, we are grateful for the many generous donors and congregational members who have helped us meet our expenses during this crucial start-up period, including a remarkable anonymous donor who blessed us with a \$54,000 challenge grant – to which donations are still welcome!

We are committed to **remaining** a synagogue without walls for the long term – that is, a **synagogue without a building fund**. With your continued help in building our membership, we will succeed in reaching our goal of congregational sustainability without the burden of “high-octane fundraising” within the coming two to three years.

### **Membership/Participation**

- Yavneh has a solid member base for a new congregation – close to 60 member households at most recent count;
- We were delighted to average about 100 people at each High Holy day service last fall and expect even higher attendance next time;
- Our Shabbat and festival services are reliably attended, and our welcoming and warm praying community seems deeply appreciated by participants and visitors alike;
- Over 300 people receive our weekly updates and regularly visit our wow-inducing website.

### **Simchas (Joyous Events)**

- Yavneh held a rollicking Simchat Torah observance with the fabulous klezmer band, Freilach Time.

- We celebrated our first Hanukkah FUNdraiser, a musical and culinary feast with MISHPACHA and Dr. Jeff's amazing latkes.
- We rejoiced as Yavneh member Rachel Galper was honored by the Raleigh-Cary Jewish Federation as one of our community's Young Leaders.
- In January, we celebrated with an "un-birthday" pot-luck dinner party and hosted our first LGBT & Friends Rainbow Havdallah Mixer.
- Our Tu B'Shvat breakfast seder established a Yavneh tradition, as did our rollicking Purim party, featuring the chanting of verses from the *megillah* by **our wonderful new cantor, Karen Kumin, whom we are honored and delighted to welcome to Yavneh as our second clergy-person on staff. To my knowledge, we are the only synagogue in eastern North Carolina with an ordained cantor, and we look forward eagerly to our evolution as a singing congregation.**

**We also welcome Mary Blocher to our community. Mary will be providing us with two days of experienced non-profit administrative support each week, which Janet, Peter, Carol and I expect to be transformative in a practical way.**

- For Pesach, we were able to match all of those who requested a *seder* invitation with gracious hosts for the Passover meal.
- Erev Shavuot, Tuesday, June 7, we will join our friends at Beth Meyer Synagogue for worship and study, featuring Cantor Kumin's inspiring voice during the evening service and Reb Raachel's participation on an interfaith panel discussion of the Ten Commandments facilitated by Rabbi Eric Solomon and including Prof. George Braswell of Campbell University Divinity School and Imam Oliver Mohammed of As-salaam Mosque.

**Adult learning Programs** – our array of offerings includes:

- Foundations of the Jewish Mystical Tradition
- Introduction to Jewish Renewal
- Taste of Torah
- Body Prayer Group
- Book Club
- Jewish Healing Lunch and Learn series
- Study series based on *The Path of Blessing* by Rabbi Marcia Prager
- Study series on the Spiritual Power of Dreams
- An afternoon's study of *Megillat Esther* for grown-ups
- Discussion series on Martin Buber's *The Way of Man*

- Text study of parallel passages from the Torah and the Holy Koran, beginning in July
- and, in the planning stages, a “theological” book group and, also in cooperation with Beth Meyer Synagogue, a Jewish meditation group.

### **Scholar-in-Residence**

- Yavneh sponsored an outstanding Scholar-in-Residence event with renowned Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg. Reb Yitz’s keynote address on the imperative of Jewish-Christian reconciliation in order to fulfill our respective divine covenants, along with a wide-ranging panel discussion lead by distinguished local clergy and a spiritually intense and productive clergy-only session, made a deep impression on the more than 125 participants in the public and private gatherings.
- Next November 30, we will welcome Rabbi Shefa Gold for an evening of inspiring chant and reflection on “The Song of the Universe,” exploring Judaism’s teachings about our deep interconnections with the natural world.

### **B’nai Mitzvah**

- Yavneh has begun offering tutoring support for families with children preparing for B’nai Mitzvah and we are exploring the possibility of creating our own congregational religious school.

### **Social Action**

- St. Mark’s Episcopal Church and Yavneh co-hosted the 2010 World Aids Day Service.
- Yavneh participates in the monthly interfaith gathering of Congregations for Social Justice.
- Our Social Action Coordinator, Cindy Block, directs our shared projects with Beth Meyer Synagogue’s Social Action leadership.
- Yavneh members have been accepted as volunteer guides for the community mikvah currently under construction and serve on the community Chevre Kaddisha (burial society).

### **Shared Spiritual Leadership**

- Reb Raachel, Pastor Joe Ward of WRPC, and Yavneh member Rev. Stacy Grove, founder of HeartSpace Spiritual Resources, have co-lead a six-month seminar and spiritual direction series. A group of 20 Jews and Christians joined together in a program called Shared Spiritual Leadership, seeking to fulfill Rabbi Greenberg’s challenge: to overcome our faiths’ historic competition in favor of a

shared recognition of the spiritual integrity of our respective traditions. We will be hearing from “graduates” of the first SSL cohort in coming months, as they integrate their insights and wisdom into our community life.

**Rabbi** – Reb Raachel’s recent speaking and teaching schedule has included:

- Campbell University Divinity School
- WakeMed CPE Training Program
- FirstHealth Hospice (Moore County)
- First Baptist Church (Southern Pines)
- Church Women United
- Day-long Baptist clergy retreat
- In early June, she will be presenting a session at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Restorative Justice Conference, in collaboration with Federal Defender Marshall Dayan.

In addition, Reb Raachel serves as a volunteer chaplain for the Raleigh Police Department and in early April, she completed half of the training sessions required for membership in the International Conference of Police Chaplains.