

Second Annual Report to the Congregation
May 20, 2012/28 Iyar 5772
Rabbi Raachel Jurovics

Yavneh approaches the end of our second year fully integrated into the faith life of the Triangle's Jewish and multi-faith community. We are widely viewed not only as organizationally successful – for which we can be grateful – but also for inspiring others to seek the growing edge of Jewish spirituality and practice.

We remain deeply appreciative for the generous welcome offered Yavneh by St. Mark's Episcopal Church, for providing space for worship, learning, and social events, and by West Raleigh Presbyterian Church, for hosting the Shared Spiritual Leadership program, as well as our annual Purim party. I am delighted to report that the St. Mark's vestry has voted to invite Yavneh to remain at this beautiful church for the coming year.

Please plan to attend the erev Shavuot dairy pot-luck dinner and Torah study on Saturday evening, May 25, and to join with our St. Mark's friends for their 10:30 am Pentecost service on Sunday, May 26, followed by a community picnic, in order to share opportunities to learn and worship together, as well as to formally thank St. Mark's for this past year's hospitality.

Next, I extend my deepest gratitude to the many generous donors and congregational members who have helped us meet our expenses during our second year, including a second anonymous donor who blessed us with a \$12,000 challenge grant – a grant we are hoping to match (fittingly enough) by Independence Day, July 4.

Yavneh is committed to **remaining** a synagogue without walls for the long term – that is, **a synagogue without a building fund**. The number of member households has remained basically flat over the past year, however, so we continue to depend on your help to build our membership in order to achieve congregational sustainability without the burden of on-going “high-octane fundraising.”

Membership/Participation

- Yavneh have retained a solid member base for a new congregation – 60+ member households at most recent count;
- We again averaged about 100 people at each High Holy day service last fall and will be undertaking intense outreach to unaffiliated Jews over the summer;

- Our Shabbat and festival services are reliably attended, and our welcoming and warm praying community seems deeply appreciated by participants and visitors alike – as does the spectacular voice of our beloved cantor, Karen Kumin;
- Over 400 people receive our weekly updates and regularly visit our wonderful website. As many of you may be aware, our domain name was highjacked a couple of months ago, interfering temporarily with some of our communications capabilities, but – through near-heroic efforts on the part of Matt Gabor, our web-maven – we have recovered our good name and are again easily found on the internet.

Simchas (Joyous Events)

- Yavneh held our second klezmer Simchat Torah observance with the fabulous band, Freilach Time.
- We celebrated our second Hanukkah FUNdraiser, a musical and culinary feast with MISHPACHA, at the Irregardless Café, where Chef Solomon provided (and we consumed) 400 latkes.
- Our second Tu B'Shvat breakfast *seder* was a great treat, as was our rollicking Purim party, featuring the chanting of verses from the *megillah* and an awe-inspiring Elvis impersonation by Cantor Karen.
- For Pesach, we were able to match all of those who requested a *seder* invitation with gracious hosts for the Passover meal and we inaugurated a new annual Yavneh celebration, a Jewish-Christian social justice seder. This spring, 110 people gathered at the Irregardless to explore the haggadah's messages of liberation and hope; reservations have already been received for next year's gathering.
- As mentioned earlier, on erev Shavuot, Saturday, May 25, we will join our friends at St. Mark's for a traditional dairy meal and for Scripture study.
- At 4:00 pm Sunday, June 3, we again gather at Irregardless, this time to co-sponsor a learning and social event with As-Salaam Islamic Center, studying the spiritual import of Ramadan. We look forward to sharing conversation and friendship among Jews, Moslems, and Christians, under the guidance of Imam Oliver Mohammed, with whom many of us have had the privilege of learning. Delicious vegetarian refreshments will be served.

Adult learning Programs – this past year's offerings included:

- Reading with the Rabbi, a monthly theology study group
- A twice-monthly Jewish Meditation Group, co-sponsored with BMS, which will continue with weekly sessions beginning in June

- An erev Purim study of *Megillat Esther* for grown-ups
- An introduction to how Moslems study the Koran, co-sponsored with St. Mark's, presented by Imam Oliver Mohammed
- Several Kavannah Circles, facilitated by Stacy Grove, as well as some Body Prayer sessions lead by Maggid Rachel Galper
- A number of "Singing with Cantor K" afternoon song sessions
- A lunch & learn exploration of the spiritual resonances of the week-day Amidah
- The second cohort of the Shared Spiritual Leadership program, facilitated by Pastor Joe Ward of WRPC, Yavneh member Rev. Stacy Grove (founder of HeartSpace Spiritual Resources), and I. A group of about 20 Jews and Christians joined together in a transformational effort to overcome our faiths' historic competition in favor of a shared recognition of the spiritual integrity of our respective traditions.
 - Joe, Stacy, and I are pleased to have been invited to offer a presentation about this innovative interfaith effort at next month's Wild Goose Festival, a gathering of thousands of participants focused on the intersection of justice, spirituality, and art.
 - Recruitment for the third SSL cohort will begin mid-summer, with sessions expected to start in November.
 - Towards the end of our first fiscal year, inspired by the SSL, HeartSpace coordinated a Jewish-Christian pilgrimage to the Czech Republic. This fall, HeartSpace is sponsoring a Jewish-Christian pilgrimage to Israel, October 14-28, also lead by Joe, Stacy, and me. Trip information is available in the concourse.

Scholar-in-Residence

- Yavneh's second Scholar-in-Residence, Dr. Eugene Pogany, drew rapt audiences at Yavneh and at Quail Ridge Books, as he reflected on the spiritual lessons of his family's encounter with the Shoah. Among the weekend's most moving sessions was an interfaith panel, moderated by historian Marianne Wason, with Sr. Mary Margaret Weber and The Rev. Jim Melnyk, which addressed difficult questions of Jewish-Christian history with sensitivity, insight, and uncommon spiritual courage.
- Last November, we welcomed 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. We hope that Reb Shefa's schedule will permit a return visit this fall.

B'nai Mitzvah

- Yavneh offers tutoring support for families with children preparing for b'nai mitzvah and we are exploring the possibility of collaborating with another congregation on elementary Jewish education while offering our own family education programming one Shabbat a month. Two b'nai mitzvah have been celebrated in our community, Lexi Kadis and Roberto Warren.

Social Action

- 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, including the successful AbrahamBuild Habitat House. Cindy has also begun conversations with the St. Mark's social concerns committee, looking for opportunities to collaborate.
- Yavneh members have been accepted as volunteer guides and board members for the community mikvah, Libi Eir, at Beth Meyer and serve on the community Chevre Kaddisha (burial society), for which additional volunteers are urgently needed.
- Yavneh co-sponsored, with Raleigh & Cary Hadassah, the TBO Social Action Committee and Sisterhood, a presentation concerning human trafficking in NC.

Rabbi – In addition to numerous opportunities to offer pastoral support to members of Yavneh, as well as to unaffiliated Jews in the Triangle, my speaking and teaching schedule over the past year has included:

- Campbell University
- WakeMed CPE Training Program
- The installation of The Rev. Jim Melnyk as Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Smithfield
- Offering the benediction for the Raleigh Police Department Promotions Ceremony and for the Wake County Law Enforcement Memorial Ceremony
- Sessions with an adult Sunday School class at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, with the Education for Ministry adult learning group at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and with the World Religions class at Leesville HS.
- Preaching at weekly chapel for St. Mary's High School (of which our daughter Nicole is an alumna)
- Facilitating a Melton program, viewing the film "Time Bandits" and exploring its Jewish themes
- Facilitating a Lenten education series for St. John's Baptist Church

- Leading a meditation session for a conference sponsored by the Infinity Diamond Club, an inclusive social empowerment organization
- Preaching the Mother's Day Sunday sermon at Freedom Temple Church
- Later today, offering one of the keynote presentations at Broughton HS's interfaith candlelight service in honor of this year's graduating seniors
- On May 30, attending a reception at the White House in honor of Jewish Heritage Month