

Third Annual Report to the Congregation  
May 19, 2013/10 Sivan 5773  
Rabbi Raachel Jurovics

Yavneh approaches the end of our third year as a vital contributor to the faith life of the Triangle's Jewish and multi-faith community. We are grateful for the generous welcome offered Yavneh by St. Mark's Episcopal Church, for providing space for worship, learning, and social events, and by Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, for hosting our annual Purim party. We deeply appreciate the decision of the St. Mark's vestry to invite Yavneh to remain at this beautiful church for two more years.

We also appreciate the many generous donors and congregational members who have helped us meet our expenses during our third year, including an anonymous donor matching our spring fundraiser an extra dollar for every three donated to our \$25,000 goal.

Yavneh is committed to **remaining** a synagogue without walls for the long term – that is, **a synagogue without a building fund**. In addition to our web presence and social media outreach, we depend on person-to-person invitations to help recruit new members, an important part of our growth toward financial sustainability. As well, over the next 18 months, we plan to launch an online learning center that we hope will evolve into a secure source of income for our congregation.

Some of what follows will sound familiar, because we have established some healthy patterns in our early years of operation:

**Membership/Participation**

- Yavneh retains a solid member base for a new congregation;
- We averaged about 100 people at each High Holy day service last fall, services wonderfully enhanced by the spectacular voice of our beloved cantor and by Kol Yavneh, our volunteer High Holy day singers;
- Our Shabbat and festival services are reliably attended, and our welcoming and warm praying community seems deeply appreciated by participants and visitors alike;
- About 450 people receive our weekly updates and regularly visit our website.

**Simchas (Joyous Events)**

- Yavneh held our third klezmer Simchat Torah observance with the fabulous band, Freilach Time.

- We celebrated our third Hanukkah FUNdraiser at the Irregardless Café, a musical and culinary feast with entertainment by Cantor K (who has quite the flair for Yiddish vamping) and Freilach Time.
- Our Purim party, featured the chanting of verses from the *megillah* and high-comic (OK, low comic) enactment of the Purim story according to a variety of movie clichés.
- On Friday, March 1, we welcome renowned composer and Juillard professor Dr. Samuel Adler, along with local musicians and vocalists. In collaboration with Cantor Kumin, our guests brought some of Dr. Adler's Judaic compositions into our worship, and Dr. Adler shared a deeply personal and inspiring d'var Torah. We are indebted to the Eschler Music Foundation for bringing Dr. Adler to Raleigh for a residency and for inviting Yavneh to participate in the series of outstanding events scheduled during his stay.
- For Pesach, we were able to match all of those who requested a *seder* invitation with gracious hosts for the Passover meal and we celebrated our second annual Jewish-Christian social justice *seder*.
- On erev Shavuot, we joined our friends at Beth Meyer Synagogue for an evening of prayer, study, and refreshment as we reached Sinai and its Revelations yet again.

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

- A now weekly Jewish Meditation Group, co-sponsored with BMS.
- A Men's Spirituality Group, meeting monthly to explore how Torah/Jewish-based spirituality can inform the lives of Jewish men.
- A Purim afternoon study of *Megillat Esther* for grown-ups.
- Six lunch & learn sessions based on video teachings by Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi on deepening our prayer practice.
- The third cohort of the Shared Spiritual Leadership program, which I co-facilitate with Pastor Joe Ward and Yavneh member Rev. Stacy Grove. Once again, 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.
- A lunch & learn session facilitated by Rabbi Susan Cowchock on *piyyutim*, Jewish devotional poetry.
- The DIY Shabbat film series, combining potluck Shabbat dinners with viewing and discussion of diverse Jewish films, facilitated by Andrea Mensch, Senior Lecturer in Film Studies, and Prof. Sarah Stein, Department of Communications, both of NCSU.

### **Scholars-in-Residence**

- Fall Scholar: on the weekend of November 2-3, we welcomed Rabbi Chava Bahle to celebrate Yavneh's commitment to deep ecumenism through story, music, laughter, and wisdom drawn from around the world. Rabbi Bahle directs Or Tzafon Retreat Center, a center for the study of Jewish mysticism, spiritual practice and contemporary worship in northern Michigan, through which she offers online, phone-in and in-person retreats. She is a twice ordained rabbi and a maggid – a Jewish inspirational preacher and story-teller.
- Winter: January 18-20, Yavneh was honored to host Rabbi Lynn Claire Feinberg, the first female rabbi in Norway and all of Scandinavia, the first Norwegian-born Jew to become a rabbi, and the first Norwegian non-orthodox rabbi. Feinberg is an historian of religion, a spiritual director, and the rabbi of Havurat Kol haLev in Oslo, where she also serves as an external consultant to the Jewish Museum. An inspiring teacher of Jewish Renewal and a leader in interfaith outreach, Rabbi Feinberg's visit offered us an invaluable opportunity to gain insight into European Jewish life.
- Spring: Yavneh founding member Prof. Deidre Crumbley, Africana Studies/Interdisciplinary Studies, NCSU made three presentations, Friday, April 19 – Sunday, April 21. She drew from her most recent book, *Saved and Sanctified: The Rise of a Storefront Church in Great Migration Philadelphia*. Topics include: "At the Intersection between African-American and Jewish Lives in Great Migration Philadelphia"; "Gender, Race, and Religion: Listening to One Another's Stories"; "Faith, Migration, and Community: Voices from a Storefront Church."

### **Youth Education:**

- Yavneh offers tutoring support for families with children preparing for *b'nai mitzvah*, and our elementary students attend the Chabad Center of Raleigh's Sunday morning Hebrew program. This year, six Yavneh students enrolled in the Hebrew program.

### **Social Action**

- Yavneh members serve as volunteer guides and board members for the community mikvah, *Libi Eir*, at Beth Meyer and on the community *Chevre Kaddisha* (burial society), for which additional volunteers are urgently needed.
- Yavneh participates in the monthly interfaith gathering of Congregations for Social Justice.
- Our members are regularly invited to participate in BMS Social Action projects, which are announced in our weekly Updates

- We also partner with the St. Mark's Social Action Committee, especially in support of the Wilburn Elementary School project and in developing the New Hope Alliance, a soon-to-be non-profit consortium of congregations along New Hope Road between Louisville Road and New Bern Avenue.

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

- Two programs for the Glenaire retirement community in Cary
- Supporting the Sunday morning Hebrew program at the Chabad Center
- WakeMed CPE Training Program
- Guest facilitating for the Jewish meditation group
- Serving as a Raleigh Police Department chaplain
- Adult Sunday School program at Christ Episcopal Church
- Presentation concerning Shared Spiritual Leadership for a NCSU Encore class
- Presentation to the World Religions class at Leesville HS
- Participation in NC Holocaust Commemoration
- Teen program on Kabbalah at BMS
- Panel on the death penalty at Judea Reform Congregation
- Presentation to RATS, Raleigh Area Theological Society at Meredith College
- "Rabbi in Residence" visit to Beth Israel Congregation in Beaufort, SC