

The Jewish Proclaimer

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NCEJ HAS NEW WEBSITE

You can now download an application form for an NCEJ grant from its new website:

www.NCEJudaism.org

The website contains the text (but not art) of the past several Jewish Proclaimers, articles on conversion to Judaism, links, and a guestbook.

HUC HOLDS FIRST OUTREACH INSTITUTE

New York—Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion here conducts its first outreach training weekend for all third-year rabbinical and cantorial students, at the Arden conference center in nearby Harriman. The training will spread to its Cincinnati and Los Angeles campuses in the next two school years and be yearly thereafter at all three campuses.

Sponsored by the National Center to Encourage Judaism as the Gerecht Family Institute for Outreach, the weekend included sessions featuring:

Hearing from a Jews-by-choice panel; the initial interview; making congregations more friendly and open to prospective converts; religious law aspects

of the conversion ceremony; the status of Reform and Conservative converts in Israel; psycho-social and psycho-spiritual issues; the role of the rabbi or cantor; bet din, and conversion rituals.

Rabbi Aaron Panken, HUC dean, led the inaugural sessions with a staff including Dru Greenwood, director, and Kathy Kahn, associate director, of UAHC's Outreach Dept., and Rabbi Gary Loeb.

Students ended, Rabbi Panken notes, with "a far deeper understanding of the process of conversion and a strong commitment to actively engaging in outreach work."

Student comments include:

- "I learned about welcoming people into our communities from a place of love."

- "You have helped me learn how to more effectively reach out to those seekers who may come to us and to embrace them and encourage them."

- The weekend "has shown us how to open our minds to bringing people into Judaism."

- "This weekend forced me to begin to explore an aspect of my professional career that, honestly, was not yet on my radar screen."

- "This weekend I became comfortable with the term 'outreach.' Previously I had a negative approach to outreach. I viewed it as proselytizing and that it is a Christian phenomenon. I now realize that there are so many people already in our midst who we can give a helping hand toward conversion. In addition, conversion is now a much clearer point on the agenda of a generation of clergy!"

- This "has opened up for me new ways of thinking about issues surrounding conversion—it has also provided me with valuable approaches and resources, which will later really make a big difference in my work and the lives of those with whom I come in contact."

- "This program may be one of the most valuable educational experiences of my studies at HUC-JIR."

- "I can not imagine being ordained without this kind of preparation."

- "I knew nothing about conversion before I came here."

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE IN OUTREACH? THE BUDGET LINE

What are your biggest problems in increasing outreach? Put it simply:

1. Getting congregations into the right frame of mind—that it's all right, it's all right, to invite people to learn about Judaism.
2. Getting congregations into the right frame of mind—outreach should be a line item in your budget. It's just as important as janitorial services, or bima flowers, or oneg shabbat delicacies, or minyan schnapps. Just as important? No—it's far more important.

Why is that? Because, if you don't attract more Jews, you won't have a bottom line. Whatever else it is, a synagogue is a member organization, there's no government dues checkoff. If you don't have members you don't have a synagogue.

So each member has—just as in other associations and subscription endeavors—a “lifetime value.”

Here are the simple facts: If you have 500 members at \$1000 a year, and 10% drop out each year, that's 50. Your members have a lifetime value of 10 years or \$10,000. (The formula is 100 divided by the dropout rate, $500/50=10$.) It would not be out of line to spend \$1000 to bring in \$10,000. That's one bottom line.

You should have a line item in your budget for outreach, member acquisition and retention.

Put this into another frame: Keeping them is a good reason for synagogues and rabbis to make nice to members. As the good cashbook says:

Love thy member as thyself.

LET'S GET A CHARGE OUT OF SUMTER

Sumter, SC—Rabbi Robert A. Seigel of Cong. Sinai here tells us, “Five people signed up for conversion, and we are currently holding the first-ever (in 120+ years) conversion class in Sumter.”

Also, “Twice monthly 30-35 members of the Christian community are taking a 30-session Introduction to Judaism class. There may be additional conversion students from this.”

Isn't there a toast to this effect—may you live to be 120? Congregations, take longevity from this.

IS McLAUGHLIN A JEWISH NAME? IT IS IF McLAUGHLIN SAYS SO—NY TIMES

Marietta, GA—Temple Kol Emeth in this suburb of Atlanta is the subject of a complimentary article in the March 24 New York Times Magazine on

the many converts who are members—including the McLaughlins. The entire family—Felton and Deborah and their two daughters—all converted more than three years ago. Rabbi is Steven Lebow.

The article discusses the increasing interest in conversion to Judaism, and mentions a number of rabbis who are involved.

It reports that “In February, Hebrew Union College, the main Reform rabbinical school, began a program to train its rabbis-to-be in the art of conversion.” That's a reference to the training described in our preceding report.

You can see the article on our new website, www.NCEJudaism.org. An article in Moment magazine in December 2000 on the same subject is also available.

Temple's website is Kolemeth.net.

Its guestbook includes these comments:

“We are considering converting and would like to come and visit you. We have two children, ages 11 and 6.”

“I am not Jewish but my older sister is. I am interested in learning more about this faith. There are not any temples in my area.”

OPEN WINDOW FOR OPEN SYNAGOGUES— ADVERTISE OPEN DOORS, WIN GRANTS

National Center to Encourage Judaism keeps an open window for awarding grants to synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

Here is a simple rundown on what we do:

We award grants for half the advertising cost, up to \$800, for ads placed in secular (non-Jewish) media for Introduction to Judaism-type programs, such as Taste of Judaism. Programs limited to inter-faith students are eligible for half the normal awards. You can get two grants yearly for eligible programs in two different quarters.

These ads are not grant-rewarding: Institutional, membership, Passover/Chanukah-type workshops, High Holy Day.

NCEJ will also make grants for advertising Open House Shabbat to the general community, for a service that explains each element and is geared to a non-Jewish attendee. You should have preparatory materials available to distribute.

We award bonuses to winning synagogues detailing a program of integrating and furthering converts, and which distribute free pamphlets to visitors.

Our application form is on page 7 of this Proclaimer, and is also available on the web at www.NCEJudaism.org

DON'T LET THE PROCLAIMER GET AWAY

And is that—"Proclaimer"-- a Jewish word? It sure is. A rabbi asked us about that, fearful it might be...something else.

Certainly it's a Jewish word. Be a light unto the nations? How do you do it? You shine forth!

Jews can proclaim Judaism. You can make claims for Judaism—ground claims, for instance. If not for Judaism, there'd be no Christianity, no Islam. That's a pretty good stakeout.

We also claim this: We send The Jewish Proclaimer to just about all the synagogues in the U.S. and some in Canada, and to all our grantees with current addresses, and some organizations such as JCCs or UJFs that might hold Introduction classes.

Other folk can get a year's issues by sending a donation to NCEJ.

If you're done with the Proclaimer, reach further out--send it to your library for members to read.

WHERE DID RABBI AKIBA COME FROM? WHO'S COUNTING—ON LAG B'OMER?

Culver City, CA—Rabbi Allen S. Mailer of Temple Akiba, long favoring conversion, says the Proclaimer "is doing great work," and "all Jews and not just Rabbis" should encourage non-Jews to study Judaism. (310-398-5783)

In the temple's newsletter he notes that Rabbi Akiba was the son of a convert, and that one day, Lag b'Omer, the 33d day after Passover, Akiba and his students welcomed 20,000 new Jews, and "helped heal the hemorrhaging that had been occurring in the vitality of the Jewish community."

Rabbi Mailer suggests that Lag b'Omer would be a "good time to honor people who have become Jewish and to plan activities encouraging Jews to promote conversion."

Welcoming non-Jews into the Jewish people, he concludes, "is a mitzvah that keeps on giving."

U OF JUDAISM GRADUATES HUNDREDS

Los Angeles—U of Judaism wins another grant from NCEJ, as it continues turning out hundreds of graduates yearly from its Introduction to Judaism programs in this area. If only more Conservative synagogues and institutions took this U-turn!

Led by Rabbi Neal Weinberg, the 18-week program registers 500, 3/5 of them not Jewish, and reports 122 conversions in the past year.

One 1994 class graduate then converted, went to a kibbutz, met her husband there and was married in 1999, is working for a Jewish group and writes, "I am living a very traditional Jewish life, belong to a wonderful conservative shul and am starting to raise a Jewish family."

HISTORY & ROMANCE IN L.A. APPROACH

Los Angeles—UAHC-Pacific Southwest region tries a fresh approach in its Intro to Judaism ad:

"History! Romance! Perspective!"

It attracts 32 to its 18-week, \$275 course.

"Interesting number of already married couples with children taking the course," observes Rabbi Jerrold Goldstein, its director. (323-653-9962)

One student in an Intro class (quoted in a newsletter sent to the region's 84 temples) said he came from a Catholic, predominantly secular household, took an interfaith marriage workshop at Adat Elohim in Thousand Oaks, now "can't wait to learn more about the Jewish faith through my readings, this Intro class, and my son's religious education at our Temple," as he prepares to convert.

SAN DIEGO PATHWAYS: MORE ON TRAIL

San Diego—Pathways here nears a decade working with interfaith families. The director, Cheryl Bruser, notes more participants this year have been families, with the most children 3 to 5. But the class also includes 9 couples, newly married or engaged. (858-268-9200)

Ms Bruser finds that advertising at High Holy Day time gets the best results. This past year, some of the ad budget focused on specific local papers, based on an UJF study of zipcodes.

In one Pathways family, the daughter of a Jewish Israeli mother and non-Jewish German father is wed to a man with a paternal Jewish grandfather. The family now lights Shabbat candles and attends synagogue.

WHITTIER STARTS INTRO PROGRAM

Whittier, CA—Beth Sholom (C) starts its Introduction to Judaism 18-week course with 16 students, 2/3 of them not Jewish. Five are interested in converting.

Synagogue Pres. Alita Sevin comments the class is open, interested and eager to learn, varies from age 21 to 80. One member observes, "I want to find a faith that has been absent in my life."

Beth Sholom will offer a Taste of Judaism during the summer, and conversion classes as required. Several synagogue members who converted are available for answering questions, concerns and general support.

Board members at services "make sure to point out visitors, newcomers, new or returning members to each other...The Religious Chair and Membership Vice Pres. welcome all visitors at oneg shabbats...The Pres. not only greets all newcomers and visitors but also speaks with every member in attendance at services...Our Rabbi and Cantor attempt to have a conversation with all who attend services before they begin, as well at Oneg Shabbat."

SOLEL PROVIDES FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mississauga, Ontario—Solel Congregation draws 75 to its Shabbat Across Canada service, preceded by a dinner. 25 were not Jewish.

Outreach chair Sandy Aronoff considers this "an excellent turnout from the community." The Reform temple had 6 conversions the past year.

INTERFAITH WORKSHOP IN BRIDGEPORT

Bridgeport, CT—Cong. B'nai Israel (R) attracts 30 people to a workshop, "Thinking Outside the Box About Interfaith Relationships." 5/6 were not members. One topic was Thinking about Conversion. While such workshops don't receive an NCEJ grant, the synagogue is developing an Intro to Judaism program for which advertising would be eligible.

TWO-SCORE SHOW FOR MIAMI TASTE

Miami—Central Agency for Jewish Education receives another NCEJ grant for its Taste of Judaism minicourse, drawing 41 people, one-third not Jewish. Most students felt the free 3-session program had a positive impact on them, says adult ed director Rabbi Efrat Zarren-Zohar. Interested students are encouraged to continue in the Melton mini-school.

PLANTATION COTTONS TO INTRO CLASS

Plantation, FL—Temple Kol Ami (R) registers 29 for its 15-week \$250 Introduction course. Half are not Jewish, 2/3 of them interested in converting.

Since the class conclusion, Sr. Rabbi Sheldon J. Haar notes, "I have been flooded with appointments from practically everyone in the class, asking for 'further information' regarding 'what do I do now!' This has been the most positive response to our course in a long time and I am encouraged."

NORTHEAST REFORM CLASS WINS AGAIN

Needham, MA—UAHC Northeast Council gets another NCEJ grant, for its continuing Taste of Judaism series. Some 200 attended the 11 classes from last Sept. to this April, reports program liaison Joyce Schwartz. Two more classes are set, one in Russian.

Student backgrounds were diverse—the Boston class of 26 in March included Catholic, Unitarian, Muslim, Episcopalian and other Protestants.

About 15% of graduates go on to Intro and other classes. About 10% start toward conversion and synagogue affiliation.

"Over 70% of the participants hear about the Taste class from a secular newspaper advertisement," Ms Schwartz notes.

CONSERVATIVE KERUV DRAWS INTEREST

Newton Centre, MA—New England region Conservative movement attracts 12 synagogues with 45 persons attending to its Keruv outreach conference in April, coordinator Judy Greene reports.

In the region, including Maine and part of New Hampshire, there are now 10 keruv committees, and 7 congregations interested in forming one, while another 10 rabbis participate in an interfaith program.

Note: On request, NCEJ sent copies of The Jewish Proclaimer to the conference. We'd be pleased to send copies (as available) to similar conferences you might be holding. Just e-mail or fax or phone us.

CONSERVATIVES ACT IN GRAND RAPIDS

Grand Rapids, MI—Have you noticed how much more reporting we're doing on Conservative outreach in this issue? Here's another:

Cong. Ahavas Israel (C) wins another NCEJ grant, for its Introduction course advertising. The 23-week course (\$25-50) had 10 students, all not Jewish, and 6 of them interested in converting.

The class is smaller than in previous years, says Rabbi David J.B. Krishef, "but even so without the ad 30% would not have known about it." The ad also advertises several Hebrew classes, mostly popu-

lated by people attracted by the ad, without whom the classes would not be viable.

The synagogue has formed a Conversion Support Group, a team led by a convert and a potential convert, arranging for speakers on topics difficult for new Jews to absorb, such as having a traditional Shabbat dinner, a Seder, when to stand/sit/enter a service, etc. They are also working with the rabbi to develop a CD of the services, to help them learn both Hebrew and the melodies.

The rabbi is creating a free book area for all kinds of Jewish books. Each will have a card in it, for optional donations, to be used to buy more books. The area will include pamphlets written by the rabbi, and remainder or inexpensive books he finds.

"It is meant to be an eclectic mix of books, for appeal both to potential Jews and Jews seeking to be educated at various levels."

Conversions the past year included 3 families—2 adults; 2 adults with one child; one adult with a child—and 2 singles.

IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT LIVE, IN FRONTENAC

Frontenac, MO—Things are jumpin' come Friday in this St. Louis suburb. That's when B'nai El Cong. (R) holds its Friday Night Live, with Rabbi Solomon Agin on bass in the trio. (314-432-6393)

That's part of its monthly Light Up Shabbat, including dinner afterwards for just \$8.50. In Feb., 96 people stayed for that. The temple advertises the occasions.

"I try to create a Shabbat atmosphere in the hopes that people will want to observe Shabbat at home," the rabbi says. He's printed music books "and if they are taken home for use, I am delighted."

Twelve students, 10 of them not Jewish, signed up for the Intro course, An Open Door to Jewish Life. Four were interested in converting. Six conversions were held at the mikvah the past year.

POUGHKEEPSIE TEMPLE ENTERS RANKS

Poughkeepsie, NY—Vassar Temple (R) receives its first NCEJ grant, for its Taste course, attended by 12, none of whom was a member.

JUDAISM INTEREST IN GREENSBORO

Greensboro, NC—"There is a great deal of interest in Judaism in this southern city," writes Rabbi

Michael Pont of Beth David Synagogue (C). "More and more desire to convert, and many want to learn Hebrew to better understand the Bible."

His 9-session Basic Judaism course (\$25) drew 27 students, 19 of whom were not Jewish, 7 of whom were interested in converting.

Beth David itself had 2 conversions in 2001. Since it has the only working mikveh within a 100-mile radius, the 2 rabbis have participated in about 2 dozen conversions last year.

Students are invited to synagogue events, including services, a Hannukah party, scholar weekends, and community seder.

JEWISH COAT SPREADS FOR RALEIGH

Raleigh, NC—Temple Beth Or finds 42 students out of 48 registered attend its Introduction course (\$25/50). Half are not members, 22 are not Jewish, 13 are interested in converting.

VALLEY TEMPLE FINDS DIP IN TURNOUT

Cincinnati—Valley Temple (R) finds 9 reporting for its free Taste of Judaism series, only a third not Jewish.

One was attracted by 3 ads, finally answered one closest to home.

Another found the "presence of non-Jews intimidating, in terms of openly questioning Jewish traditions/beliefs."

At the conclusion of services, all introduce themselves to the group. Officers and rabbi then actively engage new people at the oneg. The membership chair, rabbi, or administrator telephone new people during the following week.

WEBSITES DRAW CONVERSION INTEREST

New York—The website www.convert.org gets 100,000 visitors a year, says its manager, Barbara Shairs. She establishes another site, Becomingajew.org, with an Ambassadors for Judaism club, and is giving away totebags with the website logo on them, "to let others know that the Jewish Community wants converts." Another site, Restoration of Ruth, serves those in Christian ministries who wish to convert, has drawn 21,000 visitors, she reports.
