

**YOU AND THE SYNAGOGUE = THE FUTURE**

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**THE SYNAGOGUE IS POINT OF DELIVERY**

Your synagogue is more important to Judaism today than it has ever been since emphasis shifted to it more than 2500 years ago.

This is why the National Center to Encourage Judaism focuses on grants to individual synagogues.

The latest developments in outreach stress that once again.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations is discussing dropping its 13 regional outreach coordinators, to counter a budget shortfall.

A few years ago the Rabbinical Assembly (C), dropped its fledgling outreach operation.

It's up to the localities, to individual synagogues—your synagogue, your local Jewish Federation—to carry on. That's how it works out, anyway. Over and over again we see the comments of attendees at Introduction to Judaism and Taste of Judaism classes noting how warm and welcoming the local rabbis and their mentors are.

The most important element in drawing people to your synagogue—Jews already or Jews prospective—is the warmth and welcome you provide. The most important element in turning people away from synagogues, and Judaism, is the chill factor, in rabbis and congregations.

Jewish movement headquarters can provide guidance, inspiration, and money, to stimulate outreach. But the success of outreach, at point of delivery, depends on you, and your synagogue.

Perhaps the discussions at Reform HQ will lead more individual synagogues to offer courses on their own, so there will be more classes the public can attend, and more Jewish choices it can make.

**NCEJ CAN HELP YOU INFORM THE PUBLIC**

By advertising, however so small, in your local papers—throwaways, neighborhood shoppers, regional editions, parents magazines, whatever—you can let the community know it is welcome to learn about Judaism at your synagogue.

That's a great way to build a base for your own membership replenishment and increase, as well.

This should be a regular, integral part of your own synagogue or Federation budget—general outreach.

By holding outreach sessions you can help your synagogue overcome a possible impression of aloofness and coldness, can help turn it around.

You help overcome a misimpression in the community that Judaism is insular, remote, closed.

You will find that some people attend because they are looking for a religious framework they have not yet found; others attend because they want to know something about the faith into which a relative may have married; others, because they want to learn more about the basis of their own religion.

All these potential reasons can be satisfied with your course and your action—and all Jewry, and your synagogue, will benefit.

To help you, NCEJ continues its program, now closing in on a decade, of grants for advertising your Introduction or Taste or similar outreach courses in the secular (non-Jewish) media. You can receive a grant up to \$800 for up to half your media advertising costs for that course—and you are eligible for two grants a year for separate programs in separate quarters.

All you need do is send us the filled-out application (the form is on page 7 of this Proclaimer and previous issues, and on the web at our site [NCEJudaism.org](http://NCEJudaism.org)), a copy of the ad or ads or radio-tv script, and a copy of the specific billing for the ads.

As before, ineligible ads include Shabbat/Shabbaton, High Holy Day, festival

workshops, single lectures—we want to help courses that reach out to prospective converts.

Also eligible is advertising for Open House Shabbats, which could tell a prospective convert the what and why of service. (See our Tucson story for more information on such events.)

We hope you will use the grant to help promote your next class--and apply again after that course.

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## **HUC-NY HOLDS 2<sup>ND</sup> OUTREACH RETREAT**

New York—Hebrew Union College, New York campus, holds its second annual Gerecht Family Outreach Institute retreat Jan. 17-19 at the Edith Macy Conference Center in Westchester, for 22 rabbinical and cantorial third-year students. Leaders are the associate dean, Rabbi Shirley Idelson, and UAHC outreach director Dru Greenwood and associate director Kathy Kahn.

HUC is planning extension of the program to its Los Angeles campus.

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## **OVERSUBSCRIBED IN MOBILE CLASS**

Mobile, AL—Four ads in the daily Register pulled a good many people to Springhill Ave. Temple's Taste of Judaism minicourse. "I was very impressed with such a strong response to our advertising," comments Rabbi Donald Kunstadt (R). Of 39 in the class, all but 2 were non-Jews.

"Because there was such a strong interest and so many students had to be put on hold, because of a cap on class, I plan on other classes," he says.

All of the students were invited to a special worship service for the class.

Springhill had 3 conversions this past year.

Among responses:

"I want to learn more, I had already considered conversion and now I am ready to pursue it further. This class was warm and friendly and I was sorry the time was so short," a retired woman notes.

A 20s Catholic male partnered with a Protestant considers conversion: "I feel that most of my current beliefs about spirituality are congruent with Judaism."

"My husband is a linguist and has a Sephardic line in his lineage."

A 50-year-old lapsed Protestant woman considering conversion says the class "clarified many questions/misconceptions I had about Judaism and it reinforced my desire to pursue conversion. I feel

much closer to the Jewish faith and Judaism, and I feel this is the spiritual home I have been seeking."

A 20s female already attending services with her prospective inlaws writes she is "more confident about my decision to convert. I'm excited about all the things I have yet to learn about Judaism."

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## **TUCSON DRAWS HUNDREDS TO PROGRAMS**

Tucson, AZ—Temple Emanu-El (R) draws about 1300 people to its three years of Taste of Judaism programs, including about 400 in the most recent, third year. "Our numbers have been simply terrific," writes Rabbi Samuel M. Cohon (520-327-4501).

The temple also holds a regular Simply Shabbat service, along the lines of the Open House Shabbat we are encouraging. Attendees get a four-page outline of the elements of the service, each explained in three parts—what is it, the history, and why is it there.

If you'd like a copy of this, send us a self-addressed 37-cent stamped envelope and we'll mail it to you. (We hope to post it on our website shortly.)

Attendance at the Oct. Simply Shabbat was 450, about twice the regular attendance.

The temple's ads are good ones—we're reproducing three of them in this *Proclaimer*.

### Among student comments:

"The Rabbi's kindness, knowledge, accessibility and acceptance were warming. We also met some new friends who also have 'mixed marriages.'"

"Each class was easy to grasp. I thought the Jewish religion would be hard to understand."

"I feel like continuing an exploration of Judaism by enrolling in Basic Judaism."

"I feel only more sure that this is the right faith for me."

All participants receive 2 follow-up mailings thanking them for participation and inviting them to enroll in other Adult Education Academy courses (especially Basic Judaism) and to take part in special events at the temple. All received invitations to the Simply Shabbat service in Oct. and Jan., and to the Chanukah celebration.

A key to continued participation has been the personal follow-ups and mailings to Taste alumni.

The temple has introduced 2 programs to integrate interfaith couples and Jews by choice. It has become clear, it says, that these and even born Jews

“without much background need educational opportunities...to feel comfortable with their own Judaism and especially with teaching it to their own children.”

One, “Practical Judaism,” teaches basic skills monthly on Sunday mornings. Enrollment is 25. 75-minute classes include printed materials on how to “do” Judaism at home, and tapes of basic prayers and songs. A recorded CD of temple service music is given free to all temple members and preschool-children parents.

Another Sunday program, Emanu-GEL (Greet, Eat, and Learn) discusses issues in raising children while bagels&lox & coffee are available—topics such as talking about God, death, drugs and alcohol.

Simply Shabbat is an open, interactive, less formal teaching service, with stories, explanations, and the teaching of melodies and words to make the service more accessible and enjoyable. Both rabbis and the cantor lead the service, and each takes a turn going into the congregation to explain part of the service and to take questions. Attendees learn about classes, membership, holidays, religious school, special events and conversion classes.

Advice for other synagogues: “Advertise in the general media, including ‘throwaway weeklies.’ Give out, as we do, a written explanation of the Shabbat service that includes both the names of the prayers and their meaning and function within the service.

“Have greeters to welcome visitors and gently invite them to sign the guest register, but never push. And, have a really nice oneg afterwards. Also, send out a press release the week before, and invite reporters to contact the rabbis for more information. And stick around at the oneg until the very end, because the most interesting things happen then.”

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## **FIFTH AWARD TO FOSTER CITY**

Foster City, CA—Peninsula Sinai Congregation (R) wins its fifth NCEJ grant for its combined High Holyday and Basics of Judaism minicourse. Eighteen attend the free 3-week course, 2/3 of them not members, half of them not Jewish.

The temple had 5 conversions in the year.

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## **U-JUDAISM LEADS CONSERVATIVE WAY**

Los Angeles—University of Judaism wins its second NCEJ grant for 2002, as it continues its highly successful Introduction to Judaism program in the metropolitan area.

Participating students numbered 552, almost 3/5 not Jewish, and 148 reported interested in converting. Conversions are 110 for the year.

This is with tuition of \$292 for one, \$544 a couple, plus \$18 for each registration.

Follow-up is by the school’s Dept of Continuing Education in which the students may sign up to receive notices and discounts on cultural and events. The Intro program includes support groups led by a professional therapist, who is a resource for future conversion issues.

Students must connect to a synagogue of their choice, by attending services and meeting several times with that rabbi.

Converts are asked to speak to prospective converts at the U’s Shabbaton and Elderhostel programs about what brought them to Judaism, and their experiences in the Jewish community.

### Among comments:

“I wanted to let you know how much your course has meant to me and my family. When I went through the conversion ceremony last week, my husband who had been ambivalent about my conversion joined me at the beit din and sat with the rabbis as I did the mikveh. Unexpectedly (to both him and me) he was very moved by the ceremony & I feel that he will become more supportive as I make our home & lifestyle more Jewish. Thank you so much for your program, which has had a wonderful effect on many lives, including mine.”

“My father was a Jew and although I never knew him, I have recently met his brother for the first time and after 25 years of my life, it dawns on me that it is so strange that I feel like a Jew in my heart...I love the tenets of Judaism...I love that we are encouraged to “wrestle” with God.”

“I have learned so much we will go on to practise. We have a Jewish home. The class has changed my life.”

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## LOS GATOS INTRO CLASS TOPS 2-SCORE

Los Gatos, CA—Cong. Shir Hadash (R) returns for another NCEJ advertising grant.

Its Introduction to Judaism class draws 42 students, 7/8 of them not members, 3/5 of them not Jewish. Fees for the 7 ½ week program are \$160-195, for members/non, with 5 books included.

As a follow-up, it has 16 couples in an interfaith group, ¾ not members, matched with Jewish buddies during the year.

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## SAN DIEGO PATHWAYS LAYS A ROAD

San Diego—Pathways to Judaism had 31 families enrolled in 2002, its second largest year ever, reports director Cheryl Bruser. Twentytwo families graduated midyear from the previous program.

The program continued into the fall after an earlier decision by the UJF to end its yearly grant of over \$60,000, amidst questioning if there were better ways to spend outreach money than on relatively few families. A cited alternative was Taste of Judaism, as less intense but reaching more people and encouraging them to attend classes at local synagogues.

Advertising budget is over \$8,000. “We learned over the last few years that advertising around the time of the High Holy Days truly obtains the best results, and this year, again, proved true. We advertised in two major publications...Last year we tried ‘spreading the dollars’ around into several smaller local newspapers and found that that actually wasn’t very successful, so this year we focused on the three largest circulation papers and just two smaller ones.”

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## TASTE NEARS 60, IN SANTA BARBARA

Santa Barbara—Cong. B’nai B’rith attracts 58 people to its 3-week Taste of Judaism minicourse, none of them members, 3/5 of them not Jewish. It had 10 conversions in the past year.

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## SIX DOZEN TO OTTAWA CLASS

Ottawa, Ontario—Temple Israel’s Taste program draws 72 people, none of them members, and about half not Jewish, reports coordinator Dar Blue.

The temple (R) had 4 conversions the past year.

Follow-up programs include an Introduction course, and workshops on interfaith topics.

Comment: Take note, here and above, that none of the attendees were congregation members—putting on these programs gives you the chance to appeal to outsiders, and to show you are friendly and welcoming—and the result can well be that you will increase your membership.

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## BOULDER TURNS UP LESSER GEMS

Boulder, CO—Cong. Bonai Shalom (C) does what its audience wants. It provides a class on Lesser Known Gems of Jewish Philosophy.

Explains Executive Director Rona Cantor, “This course was designed to fill a specific niche. Boulder has many “intro to Judaism”-type courses, all very elementary in nature. We didn’t expect to attract large numbers of people. This course was aimed at people who have a deeper philosophical bent and not intended to duplicate existing classes. We feel it has been very successful in reaching the intellectual crowd.”

However, “several people realized they were over their heads with regard to the knowledge of Judaism required to make sense of the subject philosophy. This provided us with an opportunity to direct these people into the Introduction to Judaism courses offered in the community.”

Of the 22 attendees for the 10-13 week free course, half were not members, and about a third not Jewish. Classes were on Saturday afternoons, so there was no writing of names or comments. But, says Ms Cantor of the students, “They are particularly interested in sessions on reincarnation, which is a big draw in Buddhist-oriented Boulder. Some Jewish members are recent converts looking to strengthen their knowledge of Judaism.”

The synagogue had 6 conversions the past year.

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## **NORWICH CLASS SPARSE BUT SELECT**

Norwich, CT—Only seven attend the free Taste course offered by Beth Jacob Synagogue (C), but all are not Jewish. A “smaller class than last time, but enjoyable,” says Rabbi Gary Atkins.

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## **DOZEN FOLK AT JACKSONVILLE INTRO**

Jacksonville, FL—Beth Sholom Congregation (C) draws a dozen to its 29-session Introduction course, 7 of them not Jewish.

Class was based on the course offered by the University of Judaism (above), where the new rabbi, Daniel Mehlman, had been ordained in 2000. He grew up in the Conservative movement in Argentina, lived in Israel for 13 years, and has been in the U.S. 12 years.

In his first full-time pulpit, in Reno, with 2 other rabbis he was in a bet din that allowed for conversion of 8 people in 2001 and 15 in 2002. (Among them: a chazan in Reno, and a member of the Chevra Kadisha.)

Helping in the Reno and Jacksonville classes as scholar in residence was a rabbinical school classmate, Rabbi John Crites-Borak, who was a graduate of the Intro class in Los Angeles before his conversion.

Classes were offered Sunday mornings and Saturdays from 1 to 2 p.m., when writing was not permitted, with the intention that students attended morning service and stayed after lunch to learn.

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## **PLANTATION HARVEST SECOND CROP IN 02**

Plantation, FL—Temple Kol Ami (R) receives its second NCEJ grant in 2002, for a 14-week Introduction course. Fees are \$100/members, \$250/non.

Attendance is 32, 2/3 not Jewish, and 14 interested in converting. The temple had 10 conversions in the preceding year.

Senior Rabbi Sheldon J. Haar describes the class as “bright, interested, involved and so many committed soon-to-be Jews!”

“I was particularly delighted at this year’s course: practically everyone in the class has made an appointment with Rabbi (Daniel N.) Treiser or myself to discuss what they have to do further toward the

goal of conversion, or is already in the actual process of converting to Judaism. While many came into the course without a ‘commitment,’ many more left with a ‘commitment.’”

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## **METAIRIE, LA., SAYS THE GRANTS HELP**

Metairie, LA—“I doubt that we would have offered our recent Taste of Judaism Program, had there not been the inducement of matching funds for advertising,” writes Rabbi Robert H. Loewy of Cong. Gates of Prayer (R), in this New Orleans suburb.

Fiftyfive people attended—all but 2 not Jewish. Twentyfour signed up for an Introduction course.

“The vast majority were Christians interested in the roots of their faith. A number had Jewish ancestors.”

### Among comments on the 3-session course:

“It whetted my appetite to learn more and I do intend to continue with your future classes.”

“I feel the principles etc. of Judaism and other aspects of the class are something which should be communicated more to the community at large to bring more understanding and sharing.”

“As a Christian, and the granddaughter of a German Jew, I took the class with the hope of a deeper understanding of Scripture...I am hungry to learn more!”

“I felt that Jews were, or taught, that they were no-good moneygrubbers or cold-hearts. But I learned that they are very honorable and very caring.”

“I am very interested in taking next classes because my Lord was born a Jew. Will I be able to afford the classes? Are all Jews rich? Are there really poor Jews? Very informative class.”

This “demystified some aspects of Judaism. I don’t feel as afraid to ask questions of my Jewish friends. It feels more accessible, less mysterious.”

“The atmosphere was particularly welcoming and questions were always fielded—as a knowledge-seeker, I truly appreciated that.”

“Rabbi was friendly and warm!”

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## **BALTIMORE BASIC JUDAISM PULLS 25**

Baltimore—Beth Tfiloh Cong. (Rec) attracts 25 to its Crash Course in Basic Judaism, as outlined by the National Jewish Outreach Program. While 2/3 of the audience is not members, all but 3 are Jewish.

The congregation had 7 conversions in the preceding year. It takes part in a community-wide Intro course.

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## **NORTHEAST UAHC HAS 6 TASTE CLASSES**

Needham, MA—Northeast Council of UAHC holds 6 different Taste classes in the area, Aug.-Nov. 2002, and has 110 attending. It plans 6 more classes for 2002-3, including 2 in Russian for New Americans.

About 15% of graduates go on to other classes, says outreach coordinator Joyce Schwartz, and 10% “start on the path toward synagogue affiliation, conversion and an active commitment to Jewish life.”

Over 70% hear of the Taste class from a secular newspaper ad.

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## **NEW MEMBER NICHE IN GRAND RAPIDS**

Grand Rapids, MI—Cong. Ahavas Israel (C) sets up a new affiliation category for people in the conversion process—B’nai Noah. This “draws potential converts to feel more attached to the synagogue,” explains Rabbi David J.B. Krishef.

There’s also a Conversion Support Group led by a recent convert who arranges speakers on such topics as a traditional Shabbat dinner, Pesah Seder, service order, and family questions.

“The newest and most exciting project is our production of a CD of our services—Shabbat evening and morning—and the Shabbat home ritual,” which will be distributed either at cost or free, to members and affiliates, says the rabbi.

While only 6 attended the 23-week \$50 Intro course—5, not Jewish—“the total enrollment in our classes this year is huge, thanks to a redesigned, larger ad that listed all of the classes,” the rabbi notes.

“As in past years, the viability of our Judaic studies program depends on the numbers drawn in by the ad—essentially, the ones coming in to study not for the purpose of conversion are helping to make the classes possible for those coming to study for conversion and for Jews seeking enrichment.”

The congregation had 6 conversions in the preceding year.

Rabbi Krishef is continuing the books program he started in 2001. “I purchase anything I can find on Jewish topics at a discount from bookstores or publishers, and we leave it on a cart for people to take. Each book does have an optional donation card in it for those who wish to help buy more books. People are taking the books and although the contributions in return have been minimal, so is the cost of running the program.”

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## **KCMO RUNS BASIC JUDAISM COURSE**

Kansas City, MO—Cong. Beth Sholom (C) has 15 people attending its 16-week \$50 Basic Judaism course—none of them Jewish. Eight are interested in converting. Ten conversions took place at the synagogue in the preceding year.

Associate Rabbi Steven Rubenstein describes the class as “a good mix of personalities; serious students interested in continuing study as new Jews or as Christians.”

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## **PROCLAIMER SENT TO U.S. SYNAGOGUES**

*The Jewish Proclaimer* is sent to all U.S. synagogues we know of, and some in Canada, and to previous grantees—about 3200 or so altogether. Individuals may receive this with a donation.

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