

MACHAR'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008-2009

April 2009

Membership

135 member households. We now have 15 families w/children under school age!
21 new member families. 17 member families not returning.

SOCIETY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

Machar is well represented at the Society for Humanistic Judaism, the Northern American organizing group of our movement. Marlene Cohen is the Machar representative to the group. She also serves on the SHJ Education Committee. Machar's Deb Godden is Secretary of the SHJ, and co-chairs the Education Committee; Phil Gould is Immediate Past President, chairs the Fundraising Committee, and serves on the Communications and Finance Committees; and Mark Ellyne is an At-Large member and chair of the Finance Committee. They all attended SHJ board meetings in April 2008 in Los Angeles. On April 5, 2008 Marlene facilitated an Educators' Town Forum: Meeting the Challenges of Successful School Programs. Rabbi Ben Biber was a presenter in a Plenary session on April 6 with Lori Lipman Brown and Rabbi Greg Epstein on "Connecting to the World: Living Our Values." For the coming year, Mark Ellyne is on the SHJ slate VP and Deb Godden for Secretary. Marlene Cohen, Mark Ellyne, and Phil Gould have been asked to be on the SHJ Strategic Planning Committee.

CONGREGATIONAL

A Permanent Machar Home

Machar commissioned a survey to explore a long-standing desire for a "Machar Center" – a home for Machar in a building which would either be rented, occupied in partnership with another organization, or wholly owned. Several participants mentioned the benefits that could come from a Machar Center, but on the whole, sufficient backing was not present to pursue a building at this time, particularly in the current economic climate. The survey also asked members more general questions about their experience in Machar. It revealed several strengths and weaknesses of the congregation which the board is addressing in its ongoing work.

We acquired a professional payroll service. We are in the process of hiring a professional accountant.

Congregational Communication Through Technology Use

After several years of website management by volunteers, Machar has professionalized this function by contracting with a member to manage and house the website. A team of volunteers continues to add content and provide support. They embarked on redesigning Machar's website to make it easier to manage. With the help of our webmaster, we were able to get a completely new website up and running in about 6 months. Lacking a "physical" home for Machar, our intent is to use our website as our "virtual" home, a storage place for information about Machar and about Humanistic Judaism, as well as a tool for outreach. The rate of visits to our new site has been far greater than to our former site. This is particularly noticeable when we update home page content, which we once or twice month. The site includes a password-protected members' area, which is in early days of development and use. This area will include a place where our Sunday school can store information for students and families.

We continue our electronic newsletter, now accessed through our website; more good quality photos, new liturgy.

Publicity

We debuted new brochures for our Jewish Cultural School (which include yearly inserts w/fees), and a handout for our new "Tot Havurah." We designed and mailed postcard reminders for our weekend with Rabbi Jerris.

We regularly distributed announcements of Machar's congregational, Adult Ed, and JCS activities to local media outlets, including the Gazette, the Washington Post, and Washington Jewish Week. This resulted in at least one mention of an upcoming activity in the Washington Post's Montgomery Weekly section, and a photo of one event in Washington Jewish Week.

We are posting current information on our web site more regularly, resulting in more hits to the site.

Membership Recruitment

Table at Takoma Park (MD) Folk Festival
Placement of ads in more print and online publications.
More information on our website.

New Member Mentoring

In its first year of providing a Mentor Program for New Members, Machar had seventeen pairs of one current member family being matched as mentors to a new Machar member family. Mentor families usually lived in the neighborhood of the newcomers and had some commonalities such as ages of adults and children; in one case two cat lovers were paired. The mentor family took the initiative to get to know the new family and sometimes accompany them to Machar events. This project was successful and will be continued.

We designed new shopping bags with our logo and the slogans “Working Together for a Brighter Tomorrow” and “Enlightenment Judaism for a Brighter Tomorrow.” We introduced the new members at Machar events and presented them with their filled bags, which included our Member Handbook a welcome letter from the Machar President, a Machar notepad, apples, honey, honey dipper and a copy of *Judaism in a Secular Age*.

Neighborhood Havurot

Machar members live in DC, Maryland and Virginia; members volunteer to hold pot luck Havurah gatherings in their homes, inviting those in their neighborhoods. In this way long-term and new members who live near-by get to know each other. In 2008-09 there have been six neighborhood havurah gatherings.

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

Rosh Hashanah, Kol Nidre, and Yom Kippur services

Partnered with Federation’s Geshar City reduced-price ticket effort for Young Adults.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur children’s services organized and conducted by member volunteers

Yom Kippur Teen discussion

Tashlikh service in Rock Creek Park

JCS Sukkot Celebration

JCS Hanukkah party, including activities for pre-school children

JCS Purim party

Machar community Passover Seder (4/11), with Young Adults table

Jewish Cultural School

Background:

Registration - 55 students in 6 classes (1/2; 3-6; b’nei mitzvah); 20 sessions total

Our first classes for tots, ages 3-5. We will hold 3 classes this Spring. Tots have also attended Hanukkah and Purim parties and other special events.

The Machar Band

The band lost many teenage players last year and we’re cultivating a new crop of players this year. It continues to be fun for band members and new players continue to join. We’re playing at several Machar b’nei mitzvah ceremonies this Spring.

Special activities and programs:

- Staff Meeting – Prior to School Opening
- Coffee with the director for parents
- Israeli Dancing with Sophia Bernstein
- Kol HaRuach - Klezmer Band – performance (partnered with Adult Ed)
- Hanukkah party
- All school field trip (with parents) to the Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore, MD
- Sixth grade field trip to US Holocaust Museum
- Yesodot Dance Troupe (local HS students in the troupe) (grant-funded)

- Purim Puppet Extravaganza (grant-funded)
- Class led Shabbat Services
- Fourth grade field trip to Ratner Art Museum; meeting with artist Phillip Ratner
- Teacher meeting with Rabbi Miriam Jerris
- Fourth grade trip to Ellis Island and lower East side of NYC

Grants:

- We received \$2400 from the Jewish Federation for the media and art center.
- We received an additional \$250 to fund the Purim Puppet Extravaganza

Library:

- Parents and teachers continue to borrow books from the JCS library, and teachers are using books and DVDs. We are continuing to purchase DVDs and books for both children and adults.
- For the Jewish Federation grant for next year, we have applied for funds to re-write the second, third and fifth grade curricula in order to enrich our students' academic experiences.

B'nei Mitzvah:

- Three group ceremonies for 12 students will be held, on May 23, May 30, and June 6.

Teen Group

- All events deal with SH Jewish perspectives on a social justice issue and foster empowerment and skills to help teens become activists, organizers, and leaders.
- Continue to work with an Assistant Teen Coordinator, particularly to address teens with any special needs or challenges.
- Received our second incentive grant from the Jewish Federation's Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning and ran a joint community-service program serving the homeless together with a chapter of BBYO for teens with special needs.
- Established our first Teen Leadership Committee, which meets 3 times a year to help with programming and recruitment.
- Topics explored this year include youth advocacy, poverty issues, peers with special needs, and youth in Israel
- Attendance at SHJ youth conclave – 3 teens, 1 college student. Machar conclave participants will help run workshop on "Living Green".
- Teens led their second Shabbat for the congregation.
- Two Teen Group events coordinated with wider Machar congregational activities.

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

Adult Education - Sunday Morning and Selected Friday Evenings (following Shabbat service)

- Rabbi Miriam Jerris, Rabbi of the SHJ, visited Machar for the weekend of March 27-29. She conducted Shabbat services on March 27 followed by a talk on "Diversity Within Judaism: the Many Faces of Our GHJ Family." On Saturday she met with the Machar Board to discuss a variety of issues, then led an afternoon workshop for Machar members and the public on "Styles of Spirituality" and ended the day with a dinner with board members. Rabbi Jerris addressed students and parents of Machar's Jewish Cultural School on Sunday, March 28 and led an Adult Education workshop on "Articulating Humanistic Judaism."
- Adult Ed Working Group, composed of 9 members representing a membership cross-section plans and oversees implementation of program.
- Identified individuals to lead adult education programs for 2008-2009.
- Two brochures issued in fall and spring, including calendar and program notes for each event.
- Brochures posted on Machar website; shared electronically and in paper with members; distributed locally in bookstores/libraries; individual events posted in local newspapers.
- Feedback gathered at each session; shared with speakers and members of Working Group, being used to plan adult education program for 2009-10.

- Sessions have featured known outsiders and also presented a broad array of talent of members of Machar on topics that include social justice, Jewish history, health care issues, environment, and Secular Humanistic Judaism. We were honored to have a presentation in March 2009 from NPR's Susan Stamberg, remembering her life in radio interviewing.
- Teens incorporated in programming: Shabbat featuring teens, prior year B'nei Mitzvah students presented their projects.
- Some Humanistic Life Issues sessions, designed to permit members to share experiences/issues related to secular humanistic Judaism.
- Some Friday Pot Luck Shabbats for group camaraderie

Young Adults

- The Young Adults Havurah met monthly mostly for holiday parties and social events, including a secular Diwali dinner party celebrating humanism in both Jewish and Indian cultures.
- Partnered with Federation's Geshet City program in high-holiday membership effort.
- Young Adult seder — a special table at the congregation seder

The **Naturalistic Spirituality Havurah** met monthly to explore the connections between spirituality and philosophical naturalism, humanism, and the breadth of human experiences of inspiration, hope, love, ecstasy, transformation, self-actualization, and more.

Wimmin in Transition (WITs), our women's group, which meets monthly for dinner and supportive schmooze, celebrated its fifth birthday in January. This group has been more than just a social group; members attended a recent board meeting to give input about Machar activities and planning; a few have agreed to serve on the board.

SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Social Action

- International Human Rights Day 2008 –
 - Participated with the Jewish Cultural School in Amnesty International's annual postcard and holiday card writing campaign to prisoners of conscience. Each class wrote to a specific prisoner
- Met with 4th grade class at the Jewish Cultural School to talk about social action and how they can get involved.
- Participated in second JCRC-sponsored meeting for social action chairs from local congregations
- Co-sponsored two meetings on the economic crisis in our community with other progressive congregations in the area. Machar made up about 20% of the participants at the first of these meetings.
- Continued involvement with Greater Washington Jewish Task Force on Darfur in organizing events to increase awareness of the continuing genocide and increase political action.
- Participated in the Brit Tzedek v'Shalom Days of Advocacy in June, 2008, on Capitol Hill.
- Continued monthly newsletter columns with news items, updates, and action items
- Continued to work on DC Voting rights campaign –
 - Participated in postcard campaign that was delivered before the crucial vote
 - Contacted other congregations to support DC voting rights
 - Pushed for SHJ endorsement of DC voting rights, leading to a statement on the issue by SHJ
- Co-wrote, with another SHJ member congregation, letter to Lou Altman and Humanorah describing how we are able to engage in social justice activity without jeopardizing our congregation
- Hosted Yom HaShoah Shabbat, with special guest speaker Herb Silverman, President and Founder of the Secular Coalition for America

Community Service

Participated in the Rock Creek/Potomac River Watershed cleanup

Staffed Capital Interfaith Hospitality Network homeless shelter. (Sole Jewish congregation.)

Ran Yom Kippur and Purim food drives for local food bank.