

Am Kolel

A Jewish Community and Renewal Center

June 2010 Report



Am Kolel is an independent Jewish community and renewal center dedicated to Jewish renewal by addressing spiritual needs in a welcoming, inclusive community and responding to issues facing society with a progressive Jewish presence.

Am Kolel's Sanctuary is a Jewish, spiritual and ecumenical retreat center in Montgomery County, MD.



Am Kolel, A Jewish Community and Renewal Center

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Am Kolel Annual Report June 2009- May 2010

Our Management

Am Kolel is directed by *Rabbi David Shneyer* and governed by a Board of eight Trustees. Our full time staff includes *Maura Gost*, our Business Manager, and *Paula Marcus*, our Administrative Assistant. *Gilab Rosner*, also full time, is the Sanctuary Retreat Manager, supported by the Am Kolel staff and the Sanctuary Committee.

The Pillars of Am Kolel Torah, Avodah and G'Milut Chasadim

Torah

Learning, growing in wisdom, is considered by our tradition to be central to Jewish life. For many, Torah is the most important Jewish practice because it leads to a life of Mitzvot, right actions.

- ✧ **Adult Learning** -This past fall and spring Am Kolel offered classes in Jewish thought and literature, taught by Reb David. We have continued our Mussar Circle, originally inspired by a retreat with Alan Morinis. Several members also studied Hebrew with Tamar Peleg and liturgy with Reb David.
- ✧ **Jewish Renewal Weekends** – Am Kolel sponsored three Renewal Weekends this year at Sanctuary, the first in the summer with Judith Plaskow, pioneer Jewish feminist and author of *Standing Again at Sinai*, during Shavuot, the second in the fall with Arthur Kurzweil, author and Kabbalist-Magician, and the third in the spring with storyteller Noa Baum.
- ✧ **Martin Buber Summer Youth Kibbutz** - started by Reb David seven years ago at Mike Tabor's farm in southern Pennsylvania, Buber Youth Kibbutz met at Sanctuary last summer. Twelve teenagers participated in a week of communal living, farming, and environmental education. Participants also prepared their own meals and engaged in daily learning based on Martin Buber's teachings.
- ✧ **Am Kolel - Kehilah Chadasha Bernard and Rae Alice Cohen Library** - under the care of librarians, Ann Bradbury and Harriet Ryder, our library of more than 2,000 volumes is a great treasure available to our members, friends and guests. Located at Sanctuary, anyone can come by and enjoy the gems of Jewish learning. Donations for new volumes are welcome as well as for our DVD library. We are most grateful to Perry Cohen and his family for continuing to support this loving tribute. Recently, we acquired from Rabbi Neal Rose, head of Judaic Studies at the University of Manitoba, his Hassidic library. We now house one of the largest Hassidic reference collections in the region.

Avodah

Avodah means "sacred service" and is that pillar of Judaism when we share gratitude to the Holy One of Being for life, and express our yearnings as individuals and as a community for health, clarity and peace.

- ✧ **Shabbat Services and Holiday Celebrations** – Most Shabbat mornings we gather at the Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in North Bethesda. Some 25 to 50 folks gather for a reflective, joyful, musical and user-friendly service and Torah discussion. The service is followed by a pot-luck vegetarian/dairy Kiddush lunch. Once a month we hold our Shabbat services at Sanctuary. Watch the calendar for the dates for Open Shabbes!
- ✧ **We also offer services** and gatherings for other major and minor Jewish holidays. Simchat Torah has become a very special time when we organize and lead services at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue for the larger Jewish community. Last year 400 folks gathered for Simchat Torah. Other regular holiday events include a Sukkot Celebration, a Hanukah Party, a Tu Bishvat Seder and a freilach Purim Party.
- ✧ **High Holidays with Kehila Chadasha** - We have been most grateful to join with members of the Kehila Chadasha havurah community for the Yom Tovim. More than 1,000 individuals attend! We look forward to returning to Wootton High School this coming September.

G'milut Chasadim/Tikkun Olam

Another central pillar of Judaism is G'milut Chasadim or “acts of loving kindness” and Tikkun Olam or “repairing the world.” Am Kolel tries to serve the community in many ways. Below is the short list!

- ✧ **Tzedakah** - Gene Lipman Acre Plus - Along with our subscribers to Am Kolel's CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program, we raise organically grown vegetables for shelters in Montgomery County. This year we provided one ton of food to the Manna Food Center.
- ✧ **Tzedakah Contributions** in varying amounts are used to lend support to groups meeting social needs in the community and around the world (e.g. Baby Blanket Project, American Jewish World Service, ...)
- ✧ **Tikkun Olam**- This past year we raised funds for the Sulha Peace Project in Israel, Rabbis for Human Rights, the Montgomery Countryside Alliance to protect the Agriculture Reserve, and supported Heartbeat Jerusalem, a project bringing Palestinian and Israel teenagers together through music.
- ✧ **Jewish – Bedouin Friendship Committee** – Am Kolel initiated this local committee to support the efforts of ROIYA, a new project in the town of Lakia near Beersheva to create a library and resource center for the Bedouin population in the area. The local committee consists of 8 Jews and Bedouins. Am Kolel seeded ROIYA \$5000 from Reb David's Discretionary Fund and our Peace Fund to help ROYA get organized.
- ✧ **YES-MEP Concert for Middle East Peace.** An all day event in early December featuring Jewish, Palestinian, Israel, American, Christian and Muslim groups performed at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue to give support to the Obama administration's initiatives in the Middle East. YES-MEP (Yes- Middle East Peace) is an interfaith coalition. Am Kolel is one of the founders and co-sponsors of the group and the event.
- ✧ **Chanukah Celebration and Human Rights Concert** – In December, we sponsored our third community-wide Chanukah Concert for Human Rights. Held at Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, the event attracted 200 attendees and honored Rabbis for Human Rights, Equality Maryland and HIAS. Our thanks to Rob and Michael Coltun for opening this evening of Jazz featuring Greg Wall and the Later Prophets from NYC. We appreciate your generous support of this event.
- ✧ **Immigrant Rights** – Through Reb David, Am Kolel continues to support the Immigrant Rights Reform Movement.
- ✧ **Environmental Action** – We continue to work closely with the Montgomery Countryside Alliance and the Chesapeake Climate Action Network.
- ✧ **Health Care for All** - Am Kolel is one of a handful of Jewish organizations that has supported this initiative to provide health care for all the residents of Maryland. In the spring several members of Am Kolel participant in the Health Care Reform Rally at the Ritz Carleton. Reb David and several other clergy were escorted away from the Ritz Carlton by the District police.
- ✧ **End the Death Penalty** – Am Kolel continues to lend it's support and name to end the death penalty in the State of Maryland.

Other Branches of Am Kolel at Work

Am Kolel Judaic Resource Center

- ✧ **Life Cycle Events – From Birth to Death.** One of the most important services we provide the Jewish community is help, guidance for life cycle events and rites of passage. We are the only institution in the D.C. area that has a staff of rabbis and cantors devoted to serving these needs for the non-affiliated and for those in need of an alternative. We consult, mentor and officiate at baby naming ceremonies, Bnai Mitzvah ceremonies, weddings, funerals, unveiling, conversions and more. We also offer healing and Mussar circles, as well as spiritual direction for those in need.
- ✧ **Institutional consultation** – We often consult with Jewish and non-Jewish institutions such as The Jewish Community Relations Council, local synagogues, havurot, churches, social and environmental justice groups and universities.
- ✧ **Administrative support** – Am Kolel provides administrative support for Kehila Chadasha.

Interfaith Activities

- ✧ **Prayer Vigil for the Earth** - For the 15th year Am Kolel members participated in the Prayer Vigil for the Earth, a three day gathering on the Mall for the healing of our planet.
- ✧ **Sacred Traditions** - This spring, coordinated by 1000 Blessings, Am Kolel, hosted a meeting of six religious leaders

who shared meditative practices from the Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian traditions.

- ✧ **Seminars on Middle East History** - coordinated by Reb David in his capacity as the co-chair of Middle East Committee of the UNA-NCA, Am Kolel co-sponsored along with Washington Interfaith, the Foundation for Middle East Peace, the Peace Cafes and Sixth and I, two extraordinary talks by Professor Nathan Brown of George Washington University and Ambassador Phil Wilcox, founder of the Foundation for Middle East Peace. The two seminars dealt principally with history of conflict in the region beginning with the break up of the Ottoman Empire to the present time.
- ✧ **Discussions on the Middle East** – This spring Am Kolel organized several speaking engagements for Gershon Baskin, the founder and director of the Israel-Palestine Center for Research. More than \$3000 was raised for his organization.

The Jewish Folk Arts Festival

Last November Am Kolel organized a community wide tribute to Cantor Sue Roemer, Reb David's singing partner for more than three decades with the Fabbrangen Fiddlers. This concert, featuring colleagues from the DC area and around the country, including her own children, established the Sue Roemer Endowment Fund for the Jewish Folk Arts Festival. This allowed us to hire a new festival coordinator this spring. The next Festival will take place at the JCC in Rockville on November 21 – exactly one year since the concert and tribute! Sadly, Sue died two months ago. She will be missed but her enormous contributions to Jewish life and culture will now continue through the Festival.

Sanctuary~ Retreat & Renewal Center

An ecumenical and spiritual retreat center, more than 30 groups have found renewal at Sanctuary during this past year. They have included Insight Meditation, Jewish Group Homes, The Wellness Center, Awakening Heart Silent Retreats with Rabbi Jeff Roth, Mankind Project, Kehila Chadasha, and several church groups. Sanctuary also hosts individual retreats, weddings, family reunions and Bnai Mitzvah. Sanctuary is managed by the Sanctuary Committee. Ira Levine served as Sanctuary Chair this past year.

- ✧ **Open Shabbes** – Approximately one Shabbat a month is set aside at Sanctuary for Am Kolel members, friends and the Jewish community. Some come for a Friday night dinner, other for services and Kiddush lunch on Saturday, and others for a day of enjoying good company and the natural setting.
- ✧ **Adult Lunch and Learn** - Participants spend a morning and part of an afternoon engaged in some subject with a special presenter/scholar. We serve a continental breakfast as well as lunch.
- ✧ **Simchaot - Celebrations at Sanctuary** - This past year there were three weddings, two bnai mitzvah, and one family reunions at Sanctuary! Consider having your simcha at Sanctuary, too!

Restricted Funds

We also maintain several restricted funds used for very specific purposes such as: subsidies to members, supporting peace and justice initiatives, or new publications. For a full list of funds and their uses, see our website.

Am Kolel Board of Trustees June 2009 - 2010

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Jeff Slaver, President & Chairman
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