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

Photos clockwise from top left: Hanukah party, Shavuot Fest, March for Our Lives, Interfaith Seder

Am Kolel, A Jewish Renewal Community
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Our Management

Am Kolel is directed by Rabbi David Shneyer and governed by a Board of eight Trustees. Reb David is also our spiritual leader. The Sanctuary Management team currently consists of Cyndi Leitner, our office manager, Teri Pool, our new admin, and Paulette Irvin. We also employ other support staff as is needed.

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

Torah

Learning, growing in wisdom, is central to Jewish life.

❖ Adult Learning – Reb David offered classes in Jewish thought at his home. We continue to partner with the Revitz House offering two semesters of courses on Jewish philosophy, Hassidism, Jewish poetry, and social justice issues. Open to Revitz residents and our members at no charge, these classes attracted 30-50 participants.

❖ Jewish Renewal Weekends – Am Kolel sponsored several Renewal Weekends and Open Shabbes’ at Sanctuary.

❖ Am Kolel - Kehila Chadasha Bernard and Rae Alice Cohen Library – under the care of our librarian, Ann Bradbury, along with Susan Freiband, our library of more than 2,000 volumes is a great treasure available to our members, friends and guests. We are most grateful to Perry Cohen and his family for continuing to support this loving tribute.

Avodah

Avodah means “sacred service” and is the pillar of Judaism when we share gratitude to the Source of Life, and express our yearnings as individuals and as a community.

❖ Shabbat Services and Holiday Celebrations – Most Shabbat mornings we gather at the Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in North Bethesda. Some 20 to 40 folks gather for a reflective, joyful, musical and user-friendly service and Torah discussion. The service is followed by a potluck vegetarian/dairy Kiddush lunch. Nine times a year we celebrate Shabbat at Sanctuary. This past March, Cherie Brown treated us to a workshop in co-counseling.

❖ We also offer services and gatherings for other major and minor Jewish holidays. Once again, we lead Simchat Torah services at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue for the larger Jewish community. Last year 400 folks gathered for Simchat Torah and dancing with the Torah scrolls in the streets. Other regular holiday events included a Sukkot dinner and celebration, a Hanukah Party hosted by Anne and Arthur, a Tu Bishvat Seder, and a wonderfully fun Purim dinner, with a DJ, at Cedar Lane. This year, we held a Shavuot Fest at Sanctuary, featuring learning with Rabbi Sarah Tasman, Michelle Ava, De Herman and Reb David, plus ice cream and Seudah of blintzes, fruits and salads.

❖ High Holidays with Kehila Chadasha - We once again joined with members of the Kehila Chadasha Havurah for the Yom Tovim. More than 1,100 individuals attended! We look forward to returning to Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda for services this Fall. Am Kolel hosted a gathering on the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah at the Viers Mill Recreation Center on Beach Drive, which attracted about 180 people.
Another central pillar of Judaism is G'milut Chasadim or “acts of loving kindness” and Tikkun Olam or “repairing the world.” Am Kolel serves the community in many ways.

**Tzedakah** - The Gene Lipman Acre Plus. Along with our subscribers to Am Kolel’s CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program, we harvested hundreds of pounds of organically grown vegetables for the Manna Food Center and two shelters.

**Tzedakah Contributions** in varying amounts are used to lend support to groups meeting social needs in the community and around the world (e.g. Jews United for Justice, Bend the Arc, the Montgomery Countryside Alliance, Manna Food Center, Avodah, HIAS, Syrian Refugee Relief, Youth Against Hunger, Animal Rescue League). Reb David’s Discretionary Fund also supports individuals in need. More than $10,000 was distributed this year between the two funds.

**Visitors Project** - We received a grant renewal from the Montgomery County’s Community Partnerships program to partially fund a project to train visitors to visit with dementia and Alzheimer's residents in nursing homes who do not receive regular visits. This year we trained 14 new volunteers, bringing our total number of visitors to over 20 serving six nursing homes in the county. Ken Silverstein, who coordinated the project these past months, has agreed to continue the project on his own, along with friends now that our funding and incubating process has ended.

**Tikkun Olam - Middle East.** We increased our efforts encouraging reconciliation in the region.

- We again sponsored J Street Conference through a special gift provided by the Wagner family, dedicating funds to J Street U, which made it possible for 10 students to attend. *Working with J Street U, we are supporting a health clinic in the West Bank village of Jabbet ad-Dhib.*
- We organized a Vigil at the Embassy of Israel protesting the government's plan to expel 36,000 African asylum seekers from Israel. Joined by T’ruah, the New Israel Fund, HIAS and others, our protest contributed to the suspension of these plans.
- Through our Israel Peace Fund, and special fundraisers, we supported the human rights work of Rabbi Ascherman and Heartbeat, a project bringing Palestinian and Israeli teenagers together through music.
- During Pesach, we co-sponsored an Interfaith Freedom Seder, attended by over 200, with Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Congressman Jamie Raskin and others we commemorated the 49th anniversary of the original Freedom Seder and the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- In April we co-sponsored the Yom HaZikaron event at Sixth & I, remembering losses by both Israelis and Palestinians in that struggle. Along with the NIF, the DCJCC, the JCRC, the Nehemiah Cohen Foundation and other organizations, Am Kolel also co-sponsored the Education Day on Israeli-Arab Issues in May.

**Tikkun Olam - USA**

- We continue to support T’ruah, the North American Rabbinic Voice for Human Rights and their various campaigns.
- Am Kolel sponsored a Hanukah Human Rights Concert held at Temple Emanuel on December 10, honoring Rabbi Arik Ascherman and raising funds for HIAS and their work on behalf of with refugees.
- March for Our Lives, March 24. Members of Am Kolel and Kehila gathered near Pennsylvania Avenue to participate in the March against gun violence. On this Shabbat "we let our feet do the praying."
- We also supported JUFJ efforts on behalf of refugees and immigrants, as well as successful efforts to pass legislation raising the minimum wage in Montgomery County to $15 per hour. We also supported the campaign on behalf of pay for sick leave and co-sponsored the JUFJ Labor Seder.
- Am Kolel is working with JUFJ to address issues of racism and antisemitism in light of recent events in DC.

**Environmental Action –** We continue to support the work of the Montgomery Countryside Alliance, the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake and 350.org. Am Kolel is founding member of the Jewish Green Council of GW. This year we organized a Symposium on Faith, Climate and Advocacy. Co-sponsored by Cedar Lane U.U. and the Kehila Chadasha by 140 activists.
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 is help and guidance for life cycle events and rites of passage. We are the only institution in the D.C. area that has officiants on call, devoted to serving the needs of the non-affiliated. We consult, mentor and officiate at baby naming ceremonies, B’ni Mitzvah ceremonies, weddings, funerals, unveiling, conversions and more. We also offer spiritual direction for those in need.

- **Am Kolel Pardes at Garden of Remembrance** – Am Kolel maintains its own cemetery as part of the Garden of Remembrance in Clarksburg. Do you need plots?

- **Institutional Consultation** – We often consult with Jewish and non-Jewish institutions such as The Jewish Community Relations Council, the Faith Community Advisory Council, local synagogues, havurot, churches, social and environmental justice groups and universities.

- **Incubator** – We incubate new projects such as the Visitors Project for People with Dementia.

Interfaith and Intergroup Activities

- **Faith Community Advisory Council** - Initiated by Ike Leggett, MoCo County Exec, Reb David serves on the Executive Committee.

- **Poolesville Ministerium** - Reb David is a member of the Poolesville clergy association.

Sanctuary – Retreat & Renewal Center

- **Retreats:** Our center was used by more than 30 groups this year. Jewish groups included Avodah, At the Well, Jews United for Justice, Jewish Group Homes, Fabrangen Cheder, Kehila Chadasha, and The Awakened Heart Project. We hosted groups from many different yogic, healing and spiritual traditions, as well as a number of church groups. Increasing numbers of county human services agencies are using Sanctuary for staff meetings during the week gratis.

- **Celebrations at Sanctuary** - This past year we hosted several weddings, simchaot and family gatherings.

- **Am Kolel at Sanctuary** - We continue to offer Jewish Renewal Weekends and Open Shabbes

Special Funds

- We also maintain several restricted and dedicated 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. www.am-kolel.org

- **Our newest fund is the Ellen Schall Memorial Fund.** Ellen, a dear member of Am Kolel for close to twenty years, died last year. Her family established a fund to support those with disabilities to subsidize attendance at Am Kolel events, including travel and registration costs. She will be greatly missed.

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