Am Kolel
A Jewish Renewal Community

Annual Report - June 2019

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: SongRise at Hanukkah Human Rights Coffeehouse, Mike Tabor & Jamie Raskin at Purim Rally, Freedom Seder at Cedar Lane and Wedding Celebration at Sanctuary

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Am Kolel Annual Report June 2018 - May 2019

Our Management

Am Kolel is directed by Rabbi David Shneyer and governed by eight trustees. Our staff includes Cyndi Leitner, office manager and Nicole Stassi (new), Administrative Assistant and Publications Editor. Our Sanctuary Management Team consists of Cyndi Leitner, Tracey Slotta, tenant-caretaker, Paulette Irvin, housekeeping, and Reb David. George Paley, our Admin this last year, will continue as our IT and Web/Social Media Consultant.

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 on Contemporary Jewish Thinkers and Jewish Talmudic Thought this past year. We continue to partner with the Revitz House offering classes on Jewish philosophy, Hassidism, Jewish poetry and music.

- **Jewish Renewal Weekends** – Am Kolel sponsored several Renewal Weekends and Open Shabbat’s at Sanctuary. Last fall we enjoyed the teachings of Rabbi Natan Margolit on Organic Judaism. The most recent Renewal Shabbat featured Seth Dellinger, a Feldenkrais Therapist.

- **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 15 to 40 folks gather for a reflective, joyful, musical and user-friendly service. Members are welcome to sponsor Shabbat Kiddush in honor of in memory of a loved one or special occasion. Speak with the office about arrangements.

- **We also offer services** and gatherings for other major and minor Jewish holidays. Once again, Reb David and musician friends lead Simchat Torah services at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue for the larger Jewish community. Some 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 with Revitz House.

- **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 fall. Am Kolel hosted the second day Rosh Hashanah at a local park.

G'milut Chasadim/Tikkun Olam

G’milut Chasadim or “acts of loving kindness” and Tikkun Olam or “repairing the world.”

- **Tzedakah** - The Gene Lipman Acre Plus. Now in our 13th season, we harvested hundreds of pounds of organically grown vegetables for the Manna Food Center and two shelters. The Acre Plus is supported by 4 CSA families and donors. Come, volunteer for a couple of hours.
**Tzedakah Contributions** in varying amounts are used to lend support to groups meeting social and eco justice 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, the Shalom Center, HIAS, Syrian Refugee Relief, Youth Against Hunger, One Common Unity, FARM and Chesapeake Climate Action Network. Reb David's Discretionary Fund also supports individuals in need. More than $15,000 was distributed this year between the two funds.

**Visitors Project** - The Visitors Project for People with Dementia serving people who live in nursing homes that are rarely, if ever, visited was developed and sponsored by Am Kolel for two years. Presently, the project is on hold, awaiting new leadership and funding to carry it forward.

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

- We again sponsored the J Street Conference through a special gift provided by the Wagner family, making it possible for 10 students to attend. Working with J Street U and Taghyeer, we provided significant funds to establish a health clinic in the West Bank village of Jubbet ad-Dhib. Yasher Koach to the Wagners!
- Through our Israel Peace Fund, and special fundraisers, we supported the human rights work of Rabbi Ascherman and his new human rights organization Torat Tzedek. Recently, Rabbi Ascherman agreed to serve as our community’s personal Human Rights Shaliakh (emissary) in Israel and Palestine. We are the first congregation to establish this relationship.
- In May, we co-sponsored the Yom HaZikaron Memorial Ceremony at Sixth & I, remembering losses by both Israelis and Palestinians in that struggle. Organized by the New Israel Fund in cooperation with Combatants for Peace, the Parents Circle and Family Forum and other organizations, the ceremony attracted 140 participants, 9,000 attended the parent event in Tel Aviv.
- We are also a member of the Greater Washington Forum on Israeli Arab Issues. The film The 21%: the Lives of Arab Citizens of Israel was shown at AFI, May 19.

**Tikkun Olam - USA** We continue to support T’ruah, the North American Rabbinic Voice for Human Rights and their various campaigns.

- Last August Am Kolel sponsored Welcome the Stranger: A Solidarity Fundraiser for Legal Aid and Services Working to Reunite Children with their Parents. We raised $6000 for the ACLU, KIND and HIAS.
- Am Kolel sponsored a Hanukah Human Rights Coffeehouse held at Temple Emanuel in December featuring SongRise. Attended by 140 people funds were raised for Torat Tzedek, Mary House and Casa de Maryland.
- The Poor People’s Campaign - several members of Am Kolel participated in rallies sponsored by the Poor People’s Campaign this past year.
- Am Kolel was also present lobbying in Annapolis along with Maryland Healthcare for All Coalition for a Board to be established to regulate pharmaceutical companies and the costs of prescription drugs. The Bill was passed!
- Shushan Purim Party and Rally - To Bring Down Walls of Bigotry and Injustice This event, a first for us, held at Temple Shalom in March, featured the Fiddlers, speakers Jamie Raskin and Marc Elrich, honoring long time activist, Mike Tabor. Standing Room Only! Several thousand dollars was raised for JUFJ.
- We also supported JUFJ Campaigns and their successful efforts to pass legislation raising the minimum wage to $15 per hour in the County and State.

**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. We are now working with the Jewish Climate Action Network to create a national coalition of Jewish groups dedicated to lobbying efforts on the Hill.
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’nai Mitzvah ceremonies, weddings, funerals, unveiling, conversions and more.

- **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.

- **Incubating** – This year we are pleased to help nurture two new organizations, SongRise and Bridge. SongRise is an a cappella chorus of twenty women’s voices who sing songs of social justice. Bridge, founded by MacKenzie Bills, is a new organization devoted to building bridges through education and dialogue with diverse populations of youth. They will be holding their first retreats at Sanctuary this year. Check out their web sites. We are also the fiscal sponsor of the Kosher Kitchen Documentary “We Made Matzoh Balls for the Revolution”, to be released in June!

**Interfaith and Intergroup Activities**

- **Faith Community Advisory Council of Montgomery County** - Reb David serves on the Executive Committee.

- **Am Kolel is a member of the Interfaith Council of Greater Washington.**

- During the Pesach season, Am Kolel and Cedar Lane UU co-sponsored a Freedom Seder at Cedar Lane, attended by more 100 people. Mike Tabor, a cofounder of the first Freedom Seder fifty years ago, spoke. We also heard from other Latinos and people of color addressing racism, bigotry and antisemitism now.

- We also co-sponsored the Labor Seder, organized by JUFJ and attended by over 300 people. Some twenty five members of Am Kolel attended.

- Reb David co-lead a Refugee Seder sponsored by refugees organizations and held at Temple Sinai.

- Reb David also co-lead a Jewish Muslim Seder at the Adams Center in Sterling, Virginia.

**Sanctuary—Retreat & Renewal Center**

- **Retreats:** Our center was used by some two dozen groups this year. Jewish groups included Avodah, At the Well, Jews United for Justice, Jewish Group Homes, 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 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](http://www.am-kolel.org)

- **A new fund is the Ellen Schall Memorial Fund.** Ellen’s family established a fund to support those with disabilities in need of subsidies to attend Am Kolel events, including travel and registration costs.