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: Am Kolel Hanukah Party, a pre-wedding party at Sanctuary, Fire Drill Friday and Am Kolel hosts faith leaders meeting.

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Our Management

Am Kolel is directed by Rabbi David Shneyer and governed by eight trustees. This past year we had a number of staff transitions and the addition of a Rabbinic Intern for six months who assisted in developing our renewed Judaic Resource Center and outreach efforts. Our present staff includes, Christel Gopin, Office Manager, Cyndi Leitner, Community Relations Director and Angelika Meier-Schellerscheim, Retreat Overseer, as well as Paulette Irvin, Sanctuary Housekeeper. Our accounting oversight is performed by Consultance.

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 continues to offer classes in Jewish thought and culture throughout the year. This includes mentoring persons interested in converting to Judaism.
- Jewish Renewal Shabbatot - Am Kolel offers monthly day retreats at Sanctuary Retreat Center. Regrettably, our Open Shabbas' and special March retreat had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. Special holidays such as Sukkot continue to be an opportunity for learning and communal celebration.
- Am Kolel - Kehila Chadasha Bernard and Rae Alice Cohen Library – We look forward to relocating our wonderful library of more than 2000 books of Judaic when we move to our new Center in the lower part of the County. We are most grateful to Perry Cohen and his family for sustaining this loving tribute to his parents.

Avodah

Avodah means “sacred service” and is the pillar of Judaism where we express our gratitude and our yearning as individuals and as a community by:

- offering regular Shabbat and holiday services at Cedar Lane UU Congregation in North Bethesda and in the homes of members. Our services are now on Zoom.
- leading and participating in the Simchat Torah celebration at the 6th and I Historic Synagogue. The celebration was attended by 400 people!
- participating in interfaith services and gatherings such as the Unity Walk and MLKJr Memorial at Cedar Lane.
- holding delicious holiday dinners.
- offering a Prayer, Sharing and Study Circle on Wednesday evenings on Zoom during the quarantine period.
- celebrating and partnering with Kehila Chadasha in the presentation of the High Holidays services. This coming year we may need to adapt to the restrictions placed upon us by the virus.

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, KIND, Taghyeer and Interfaith Works.

Reb David's Discretionary Fund also supports individuals in need. More than $15,000 was distributed this year between the two funds.

**Tikkun Olam**

(Social Action, human rights and environmental action)

**Last summer:**
- We cosponsored a parlor meeting with Rabbi Ascherman of Torat Tzedek
- Am Kolel participated in the Poor People's Campaign Rally in DC.
- Several members attended in the Vigil to End Human Detention Camps in Lafayette Park on TIsha B’Av sponsored by HIAS, the RAC and several Latino immigrant rights organization.
- We participated in the Never Again Action and United We Dream action and sit in in the Cannon Office Building protesting detention centers.
- We were represented at the Light for Liberty Vigil across from the White House.

**In the fall:**
- Members of Am Kolel participated in the Jews and Allies United Training to address racism and antisemitism lead by Am Kolel member Cherie Brown.
- Along with Kehila and others Am Kolel members donated food and clothing on Yom Kippur for Manna and Interfaith Works.
- Reb David and Am Kolel helped to found the Jewish Earth Alliance.
- Am Kolel’s new Tikkun Olam Advocacy Committee solicited hundreds of people to send postcard to Senator McConnell demanding support for legislation preventing gun violence. The committee also sent post cards to Governor Larry Hogan protesting the widening of I495/I270.
- Am Kolel organized Sukkot service and action across from White House and, then, marched to Chase Bank where Reb David and others made demands for JP Morgan to cease support for the fossil fuel industry.
- Am Kolel co-sponsors the J Street Conference with support from the Wagner family.
- Several members of Am Kolel attend Fire Drill Rallies organized by Jane Fonda in support of the Green New Deal. Members of Am Kolel were arrested, including Reb David, Diane Jacobstein, Bill Murphy, De Herman and others.
- Reb David, under the auspices of the Faith Community Advisory Council co lead Dialogue Meetings on racism.

**Winter**
- Am Kolel cosponsored the Interfaith MLK Jr Memorial at Cedar Lane.
- We sponsored Ali Abu Awwad, founder of Tahjeer, the Palestinian Non Violence Movement and Community Development Project.
- Reb David attended the new Jewish Farmer Network, where some 150 young Jews are returning to the land and advancing environmental education and activism.
Spring

- Am Kolel allies with efforts to address the growing tyranny, injustice and inequity in America. Am Kolel supports Bend the Arc actions in addressing racism and white nationalism.
- We recently became the fiscal sponsor for the CSA Subsidy Program to help provide fresh and pesticide free vegetables to families of first responders in our area. Created by Mike Tabor and Esther Siegel.
- We continue to grow and provide vegetables to Stepping Stones and Manna Food this season through our Gene Lippman Acre Plus garden at Sanctuary.
- We are working with J Street to protest the proposed Annexation of Palestinian lands.

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 religious 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.
- 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 continue to incubate SongRise. SongRise is an a cappella chorus of twenty women’s voices who sing songs of social justice. We are also the fiscal sponsor of the Kosher Kitchen Documentary “We Made Matzoh Balls for the Revolution”, to be released this summer, finally!

Interfaith and Intergroup Activities

- Faith Community Advisory Council of Montgomery County - Reb David represents us on this board.
- Am Kolel is a member of the Interfaith Council of Greater Washington.
- We also co-sponsored the Labor Seder, organized by JUFJ, but, sadly, was cancelled due to the virus.
- We hosted an interfaith retreat in partnership with JAMAAT, Jews and Muslims and Allies Acting Together

Sanctuary – Retreat & Renewal Center

- Retreats: Before the pandemic, our center hosted several retreats. We hope to reopen Sanctuary in the fall. As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, we have lost about half of our income.

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
- A new fund is the CSA Subsidy Program, created by Mike Tabor and Ester Siegel to subsidize organic vegetables for families of first responders.