



Temple Israel Is Collaborating With Conservative Congregation In Israel



Marking the beginning of a collaboration between Temple Israel and Kehillat Netzach Israel in Ashkelon, Israel, *shana tova* greetings were sent from each child in the Religious School to the children of Kehillat Netzach Israel, a Masorti synagogue which is “pairing” with Temple Israel. Religious School Dalet students displayed cards to be sent to Israel in front of a bulletin board showing cards that were sent here from Israel.

Temple Israel is partnering with a Masorti (Conservative) synagogue in Ashkelon, Israel, sharing school programs, adult education activities and a variety of other initiatives, as well as ideas and information about the membership of both congregations.

The project was the idea of Temple Israel Board member Jackie Einstein Astrof and Vice President Rebecca Yousefzadeh Sassouni, who decided to look for an Israeli congregation with which Temple Israel could associate. They brought their idea to the Board of Trustees, Executive Committee and Israel Affairs Committee, which all endorsed the plan. “We thought it could be an enriching partnership on many levels for both congregations,” Mrs. Astrof said.

Their search resulted in contact with Kehillat Netzach Israel, located in southern Israel, about 40 minutes from Tel Aviv. “We are the only non-Orthodox synagogue in Ashkelon,” their website says, “and offer an egalitarian, pluralistic and family-oriented approach to Judaism and cater to a range of languages, including Hebrew, English, Spanish and Russian.” The congregation says they are a melting pot of modern Israeli society with members from many different backgrounds including *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim*, veteran Israelis and new immigrants, the elderly, adults, youth and children. The Temple Israel Youth House trip to Israel last February included a *Shabbaton* stay at Kehillat Netzach

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Religious School Receives UJA Grant for Innovative Kindergarten Programming

Temple Israel’s Religious School has received a major grant from the UJA Federation to continue innovative programming in education.

The \$6,000 grant, through the Jewish Education Project’s LOMED Program, is for congregations that have gone through Project ReImagine. “The grant will support a brand-new initiative, called the Nitzanim Family Connection,” said Religious School Director Rabbi Tracy Klirs. “It is designed to foster deep and

lasting connections between the families with children in our Nitzanim, or kindergarten program, and between them and our rabbis and Temple Israel. The Nitzanim Family Connection will entail a series of informal get-togethers for the Nitzanim parents, usually at the same time their children are in the Religious School.” The grant proposal was written by Rabbi Klirs, with input from Rabbi Adelson and LOMED consultant Suri Jacknis, the advisor to the Nitzanim Family Connection planning team.

The group’s first get-together was held a few weeks ago in Rabbi Seth and Judy Adelson’s *sukkah*. “By gathering input from these parents on their interests, hopes and dreams, we hope to structure future get-togethers to meet their interests, as well as direct them to connect with other projects and opportunities at Temple Israel which they will find especially meaningful,” Rabbi Klirs said. “It is hoped that through these get-togethers,

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Israel. The congregation welcomed and housed 39 Temple Israel teens on the trip, led by Rabbi Seth Adelson. Coincidentally, former Waxman High School Youth Activities Director Itamar Futterman grew up as a member of the congregation.

Founded in 1967, Kehillat Netzach Israel is one of the more established Conservative congregations in Israel. There are five on-site kindergarten classes, a comprehensive afternoon daycare program, youth activities, adult education programs, a conversion program, a Bar/Bat Mitzvah program and a summer day camp. "We provide a wide range of social and educational programs with Jewish content, reaching out into the wider community," the congregation says as part of their vision, or mission statement.

Terri Davis, the overseas coordinator of Kehillat Netzach Israel is scheduled to come to Temple Israel in mid-November to further develop the relationship between the two congregations. She will meet with each of the directors of Temple Israel's three schools, as well as Rabbis Howard Stecker and Seth Adelson. Discussions are underway for Kehillat Netzach Israel's senior rabbi to visit Temple Israel this winter.

Activities scheduled to be discussed include:

- Beth HaGan getting-to-know-you sessions, where children draw pictures and describe how they celebrate holidays or simply detail their favorite activities and foods enabling students and their parents to "meet" their counterparts.
- Religious School students can schedule on-line chat sessions about home life, hob-

bies and *mitzvah* projects.

• Waxman High School and teens of Netzach Israel could embark on an agreed upon project and then discuss it at various points. For example, teens could plan a joint photo exhibition showing New York and Ashkelon everyday scenes and family portraits.

• A common Jewish text or current book could be studied and discussed online in a variety of formats, allowing members of both congregations to discuss Jewish thought or literature.

• Twinning of members of both congregations in like professions, for the sharing of

experiences and business ideas.

The Religious School got relations between the two synagogues underway before Rosh Hashanah, when students sent New Year cards to their counterparts in Israel.

"The purpose of our partnership is for the members of Temple Israel to get to know the members of Kehillat Netzach Israel, to share ideas with them and to share programs with them," Mrs. Astrof said. She invites Temple Israel members to get involved with the project by contacting her at <jastrof@optonline.net> or Mrs. Sassouni at <rebeccasassouni@gmail.com>.

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Nitzanim families will discover deepened meaning and purpose in the synagogue, the Jewish community, and in Jewish life."

The initial Nitzanim Family Connection event was well attended and met with universal enthusiasm. Both Rabbi Adelson and Rabbi Howard Stecker participated, leading the Nitzanim parents in text study and discussion. Nitzanim Family Connection Coordinator Eleanor Askari arranged for a bagel brunch, and provided childcare at the Adelson's home for younger siblings who are not yet in the Religious School. The parents expressed a desire to continue meeting regularly.

The inspiration for this initiative came from the LOMED summer institute, featuring Dr. Ron Wolfson, an expert on how to revitalize synagogue life and Jewish education. He emphasized the importance of building relationships as the cornerstone to lasting and rewarding membership in any community. Rabbi Adelson, Beth HaGan Director Rachel Mathless, Shabbat Ha-Mishpachah Coordinator Jennifer Khoda and Rabbi Klirs attended the summer institute.

A core team, which will meet monthly to consider the input from the Nitzanim families, will plan upcoming events. In addition to Rabbi Klirs, the team is composed of Rabbi Adelson, Jennifer Khoda and Mrs. Askari, who is also a Nitzanim parent.

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