

## **Minutes of Havurat Tikvah Annual Community Meeting Sunday, June 7, 2009 at St. Andrews Fellowship Hall**

Co-roshim David Holloman and Helen Lipman opened the well-attended meeting with a kavannah and read a message from Arlene Berger, our student rabbi, reminding us of the saying from Pirke Ahvot that whoever finds a teacher, finds a friend. The best way to study Torah is with friends, she wrote, as you're doing in Havurat Tikvah.

Helen gave special recognition to our Hebrew school teachers, Hardin Rubin (prayerbook and Jewish holidays) and Gil Roth (modern Hebrew and Israel) for their three dedicated years of teaching, which included successfully preparing several students to lead their b'nai mitzvot services. In thanks, the havurah gave each teacher a small gift.

David prefaced his State of the Havurah remarks with an appreciation of Sharon Kugelmass, who is stepping down as chair of Chicken Soup. He called her a tireless resource.

During this past year, David cited five steps that the board and other members have taken to strengthen our community. First, the havurah has committed to professional programming for the Religious School, hiring Reuven Green as Education Director for 2009-10. Second, the havurah has begun to develop a Five-Year Plan. In addition, the havurah participated in the Charlotte Jewish Community Planning Committee for the first time, experimented at services with different music and wider participation from old and new members, and, not insignificantly, functioned in the black. The havurah has held the line on expenditures and not raised dues during these difficult years.

Standing chairpersons gave brief committee reports of the past year's activities, successes and challenges. Highlights follow.

Religious Committee, Co-chairs Pam Crown and Bill Gross: In addition to planning services, holiday celebrations and our student rabbi's visits, the committee considered new ideas from the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation convention ( via D. Holloman), studied the possibility of starting an adult women's bat mitzvah group, and held several discussions about how and whether the havurah can help its members with life cycle events, such as weddings, funerals and conversions. Charlie Brown, HT member and spiritual leader of a congregation in Gastonia, has agreed to serve as a resource for funerals and brises. Committee members also met with Arlene Berger for advice on what life cycle support our small group could realistically offer. (Both chairs will be stepping down next year; Pam will continue on the committee.)

Community Relations, Debbie Langsam: Debbie provided monthly articles to Charlotte Jewish News and placed photos, too. David Holloman submitted ads to The Charlotte Observer and CJN.

Adult Education/Web Master, David deGroot: Israeli film nights and a visit from Charlotte's Israeli representative were a moderate success. Hannukah game night drew the largest attendance. He is open to new ideas. He has purchased automatic backup for the HT website and updated content with news of changes in our Religious School. New member inquiries come almost entirely through the website.

Social Action, Co-chairs Penni Powell and Pat Burnham: Penni stressed that it is essential that everyone in the havurah sign up to volunteer for some group. Projects this past year included School Tools, Crop Walk, Friendship Trays, gleaning, Dilworth soup kitchen, Samaritan House, and Project Linus (knitting blankets). All projects will continue next year. (See later notes on the volunteer problem.) Penni is stepping down from the chair next year.

Membership, Brian Feinglass: Brian sent an e-mail report, as he was home awaiting surgery. He will be notifying prospective families of changes in the Religious School program, including tutoring to bring Hebrew beginners up to speed, plans for more family-oriented events and the news that Hebrew High has agreed to accept our b'nai mitzvah students and is considering moderating tuition. Our roshim identified Brian as one of the drivers behind plans to professionalize our school. Brian's conversations with interested families indicated that education was a prime factor in choosing to join.

Religious School, Hardin Rubin, lead teacher: The Sunday morning school had a nice year with five students (a sixth had to drop out because of illness). One beginning Hebrew student was individually tutored before class by a teenage volunteer and has made good progress. Rifkeh Roth may be ready for bat mitzvah this coming fall.

Treasurer, Frank Fleming: Frank reported that membership is stable, which is a factor in the board's decision to invest in attracting new families via Religious School.

Chicken Soup, Sharon Kugelmass: As our group ages, Sharon said, our members require more support (in illness, bereavement, and other needs) and Chicken Soup requires more participation. She expressed gratitude to Leah Sepsenwol for jumping in to lead the committee. Leah has already contributed new electronic ways for Chicken Soup to communicate. The challenge, according to Sharon: How do we do Chicken Soup in a caring way but not get burned out.

Religious School, Wendy Fishman, chair/parent: Helen read a publicity release written by Wendy announcing the hiring of Reuven Green as Education Director. He will develop a curriculum expressly for the havurah and lead our Religious School next year. Enrollment is open for classes which begin September 13, 2009. The release described Reuven's considerable teaching background in Jewish education in Charlotte and elsewhere. Wendy has been active in taking the school to the next level.

Reuven, addressing the meeting, said he looks at his new role as a great opportunity to do something "that I'm passionate about." He then outlined his plans for creating an expanded curriculum for grades 1 – 7, though we don't currently have students in all grades. Using an experiential and creative curriculum that reflects Reconstructionist perspectives, classes will help students learn about Jewish history, kashrut laws and ethics, Hebrew prayer and holidays while developing their own ideas about religious life. Current Israeli affairs also will be included. Reuven will be drawing

on his friends in Charlotte's Jewish education community for ideas, materials and talent, plus the Reconstructionist educators' organization.

Our student rabbi, Arlene Berger, who will be studying in Israel this summer and the fall semester, is under contract for two visits in 2010. Dates being considered are January 30-31, April 18-19 and May 2-3.

Questions about what holidays align with those dates led Leah Sepsenwol to comment that this year she missed having a service for Shavuot (including the memorial Yitzkor service), as the holiday fell on a Friday and Saturday. We need to observe the major holidays with Yitzkor services to show our kids the Jewish religious cycle, she said, not just talk about them in Religious School. Steve Powell, Shabbat service coordinator, replied that if we have a service on a weekday, people have to walk the talk and attend, and not just the participants. Phyllis Woollen noted that in the past when we've tried services during the week they've been poorly attended. Steve said we might be able to commit to doing Yitzkor three times a year if we had some flexibility about the day.

Frank Fleming, treasurer, presented our current financial statement and the proposed July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010 budget (expected income, \$19,100, expected expenses, \$19,030) for consideration. There will be no change in the dues structure. For the first time, Religious School expenses have become a line item in the havurah budget rather than a separately tracked fund that, in earlier years, supported a parent-financed, parent-taught cooperative school. The havurah has budgeted \$5,000 for the school next year, applying some savings from the shortened schedule for our student rabbi. In the budget presented, Frank changed the fiscal year to match the money flow, July to June. It is not clear whether we need to amend the bylaws to adopt a new fiscal year. Current bylaws refer to the time period covered by membership dues as September 1 to August 31. The matter will be considered by the board. Members approved the proposed budget.

The meeting was opened to general discussion on leadership succession, as we do not have a full board for next year or a co-rosh to learn the job before David steps down. The discussion quickly expanded to the challenge of finding enough volunteers to chair committees and meet social action project commitments.

David H. pointed out that if we don't have leaders in development, the havurah won't get where it wants to be next year, much less in five years. Steve Powell proposed creating a paid administrative position to give some relief to elected officers, committee chairs and other volunteers. David noted that often the first hire for a small Reconstructionist congregation is an administrator, not a rabbi. Charlie Brown wondered if there might be people who would be willing to be co-rosh if we hired an administrative aide. Sharon Kugelmass said we might need a committee to consider how to make it more attractive to serve. Penni Powell shared the frustration of chairpersons who do the organizing, then also have to become the "doer" when no volunteers respond. This is a particular problem when the havurah has committed to provide a service for outside community organization. The chair feels she has to meet that obligation. Alan Kaplan suggested we might need to assign members a specific volunteer duty on a specific date.

These issues will be the primary agenda at the next board meeting July 12.

Last minute calendar announcements: the gleaning field trip that was scheduled for June 14 was canceled; a Project Linus meeting will be held June 28.

The meeting was adjourned by consensus.

Respectfully submitted,  
Martha F. Brenner for Ellen Myers, Scribe