

February/March 2015
5775

B'nai Israel Synagogue

Upcoming Services and Events

February 6
Services (lay-led)

February 13
Shabbat Services
(student rabbi)

March 6
Shabbat Services
(student rabbi)

March 7
Purim Party

March 20
Shabbat Services
(student rabbi)

*Shabbat Services
are at 7:00pm on
noted Friday
evenings

*On student rabbi
weekends, we also
offer Torah Study,
Adult Education
and Children's
Education

President's Message, by Victor Lieberman

Warm welcome
wishes on a cold
Winter day!

As we finish celebrating our 2nd new year (Jews get quite a few of them), we look forward to a busy and activity-filled winter and spring season. Services conducted by our visiting student rabbi, Ari Naveh, continue throughout, as do our adult education, Torah discussions, and children's activity programming. If you have not taken the opportunity to participate yet this year, I hope you will feel invited and encouraged to join us at any point your schedules permit. See elsewhere in this *Bulletin* for dates and times of these and other events.

Also, as we move

through the winter and spring seasons, it will shortly become time to consider our plans for next year (beginning in fall). We will have an opportunity to participate in the student rabbinic program again through Hebrew Union College (HUC) and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), and will be discussing what sort of visit schedule (frequency) we'd like, and related matters. Please feel free and invited to send your input and comments about rabbinic visits to the board (you can use the general synagogue e-mail account on our webpage, address NDBnailIsrael@gmail.com). We welcome your feedback!

We had a wonderful

Hanukkah party this past December, and it was great seeing so many families and friends at the pot luck dinner and latke-fest. And by the time you're done digesting that, you should all be ready to tuck in to some hamentaschen in March. See you soon!



*Shabbat Services begin
at 7:00pm on Friday,
February 6*



Educational
Shabbat Service
February 6,
2015

By Victor Lieberman

The Jewish Student Organization (JSO) at UND asked if they might make use of the synagogue on Friday, Feb. 6th, for an interfaith event going on that week. We were glad to assist and help host this visit. Students participating in this interfaith week will be invited to attend a regular Friday-night service at our synagogue. In addition to being a regular service to which all congregation

members are welcome (as always), additional explanations and discussion of Jewish religious and the synagogue service will be included this evening, though not, I hope, in too intrusive a way for those attending as usual. The JSO will sponsor the oneg that evening. Please join us in welcoming our guests and hosting this event at our synagogue.

The 4 Things Jewish Leaders Can Do to Honor MLK Day, by Student Rabbi Ariel Naveh

I watched the incredible film Selma through a near-constant film of tears. Many of these tears were a function of the brutality depicted on screen that so many people of color faced 50 years ago in their struggle to gain the rights ostensibly bestowed upon them as American citizens. However, most of those tears were shed because I knew, deep down, that we still have so much further to go, and it seems that there are too many factions in our society today who are perfectly content in taking us backwards, rather than forwards. I cried copious tears because I knew that I had an obligation to do right for those who have been dispossessed, for those who have been beaten and broken, not in spite, but because of my Jewishness. And so as we proceed on together to honor the great stentorian leader that was the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, here are a just some ways that we as leaders in the Jewish community can stand up, so that 50 years hence, our children's children, and the children's children of all people can one day stand together, truly free.

1. Acknowledge the deep, systemic nature of racism within our country – The truth is, it is the imperative of every single citizen of our great nation to sincerely reckon with the state of race and racism within it. By forgoing the issue, sweeping it under the carpet as no longer a pressing issue in our communities, we run the risk of only exacerbating it. The aforementioned

examples of predatory lending in the housing market; the recent deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO and Eric Gardner in New York at the hands of law enforcement; weakening gun control legislation; a rise in "Stand Your Ground" legislation in states nationwide; the Supreme Court's recent gutting of LBJ's historic Voting Rights Act. All of these, ALL OF THESE are examples of the almost permanent state of racial bias built into the basic makeup of our country. And all of them are only fixable if and when we as a nation take a good, long look at ourselves, our history, and how we relate to each other, and pledge to try harder, and do better in the years to come.

About 50 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson stood at the Main Quadrangle of the library at Howard University in Washington, DC and, in his commencement address to the soon-to-be graduates, laid out his administration's accomplishments in the realm of Civil Rights: the prohibition of discrimination based on race and skin color, integration of schools, and soon to be signed, the crowning achievement of LBJ's civil rights legislation: the Voting Rights Act. LBJ ticked off these accomplishments with

great pride, as he should have, but his pride was tempered with the reality of the state of the black person in mid-century America. "Negro poverty is not white poverty," President Johnson proclaimed, "Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences--deep, corrosive, obstinate differences--radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual." In 1965, the President realized that structurally, life in America was objectively different – and often markedly worse – for people of color than it was for their white countrymen. Hundreds of years of forced enslavement, followed by almost as many years of unabashed discrimination primarily sanctioned by governmental authority has led to the implementation, and perpetuation of two discrete states in which white people, and people of color live. 50 years later, that diagnosis has not changed, but sadly, far fewer people are willing to admit it.

2. Advocate for Societal Acknowledgement - *The concept of reparations is incredible fraught, and has often been met with major resistance, because people misunderstand it to mean paying a large*

financial sum to members of the black community, and squaring the issue. In reality, reparations is less about the monetary compensation than it is about the current generation of non-African Americans acknowledging the almost innumerable wrongdoings done to people of color in this country since its inception, if not earlier, making the connection between those wrongdoings and the current state of people of color today, and vowing to make it right for generations to come; a sort of national teshuvah. This is an overwhelming difficult process, one that will take a significant amount of reflection and reckoning, but as we as Jews also know, teshuvah is not supposed to come easy. We know that starting around this time of the Jewish calendar year, we are required to take serious stock of our lives, our actions, and our relationship to the world around us and see where we shined, and where we fell short. But that is not all; as Maimonides, the 12th century Jewish philosopher and scholar notes, 'One accomplishes full teshuvah only when, while he is yet able to sin, he is faced again with a situation in which he had previously sinned, and he nonetheless does not [commit that sin] – but only as a

consequence of teshuvah, rather than out of fear, or because of physical inability [to carry that sin out]." A vow to change our ways is meaningless unless we are presented with an opportunity to continue the status quo, and we choose to alter it. We have a real opportunity – if not an obligation – to confront our country's racial history, and figure out what can be wrought from it for every single American to come. This is no small task, but it starts with small actions: root out your own prejudices and stereotypes, own them, and try to fix them as best as possible. But know that this is only a start; it must be paired with national, collective action as well.

3. Organize Within and Without Your Congregations and Communities – We within the Jewish community have an especial prerogative for this kind of reflection, as we are not very far removed from generations of societal alienation here, and in the many nations from which our families emigrated not too long ago. The specter of the Holocaust still hangs low, even if the generation of those who lived to tell about it slowly passes. For many, this specter inspired swift action during the heated battles of the Civil Rights era in the 1960s. Professor Attina Grossman,

writing in a recent edition of Tablet magazine describes Bob Ross "[who] recalled about his student days at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he had originally joined the picket line boycotting a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter because 'It was the Jewish thing. If you're silent, you're complicit.'" The larger-than-life figures of Rabbis Joachim Prinz and Abraham Joshua Heschel, and the great scholar Michael Walzer, themselves all survivors of the Shoah, were integral figures in the fight for racial egalitarianism. Prinz stated at the time "When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence." Some, like Mickey Shwerner and Andrew Goodman laid down their lives alongside their black brothers to ensure that no man of any color would ever suffer such a fate ever again.

All of these incredible figures took to heart the call to action Moses implored the Israelite

people to understand as they stood at the banks of the Jordan River, about to cross into the Promised Land: "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today." Our status as 'others,' as previously discriminated, reviled and exiled, in times ancient and modern obligates us to do better by the generations of all peoples to come. We fail every single time we excuse the racism inherent in our system; we lose every single time we fail to see the 'other' as an equal and we do nothing about it.

But we cannot act, nor can we lead in a bubble; this work can only be done with people of all faiths, colors, and creeds.

4. Make Your Voice Heard in the Government - We as faith leaders have a particular and unique opportunity to effect change not just on the communal level, but on the governmental level. Our voices are heard because political leaders know who we represent, and more importantly, the Book we have behind us. As such, it is our moral imperative to use that voice for good. We must demand a reenactment of LBJ's Voters' Rights Act, a

structural shift of community policing nationwide, a welfare system that takes into account poverty stricken communities of color, serious and effective gun control, and so many other important pieces of legislation that will effect change, and affect all who seek it.

When Abraham Joshua Heschel stated that he was praying with his feet marching with Dr. King, this is what he meant. As we honor all of the valiant men and women on whose shoulders we stand in order to do this good, we too must heed that call and pray with our feet, our mouths, our hands, and our congregations. Let's get to work.

Membership Report

By Victor Lieberman

We often are asked, how big is your congregation? How many members belong to your synagogue? As of our most recent board meeting this January, that answer is 11. There are eleven members (families or individuals) who have chosen to be members of the congregation.

Membership obviously is at a particularly low ebb at present. This has many implications. To give just one recent example, the board decided to forego our Tu B'Shevat seder event this year, which typically involves a pot luck dinner and conducting the seder for everyone attending. It isn't the case that this (and other activities) involve huge expense. They don't. They do involve time and preparation, and board members already are stretched quite thin overseeing the many other synagogue activities we do throughout the year (student rabbinic program, Passover community seder, children's and adult education activities, building maintenance, paying bills, etc.).

We would like the synagogue to do more, and have the range and variety of activities that best meet the needs and desires of our members. Right now they do—all 11 of them. I say this to be just slightly challenging. All of us on the board are keenly interested in sponsoring activities and services which may be enjoyed by all members of our Grand Forks Jewish community, regardless of their synagogue affiliation. There does, however, come a point when we hit a quite pragmatic wall, and find we can only do so much. This is all by way of saying that we'd welcome your help and participation in what we do, and seek your input on how we can offer activities of interest to others. We are a completely volunteer organization. Participation more than finances, as often as not, limit what we are able to do and offer to our community.

Please consider taking a more active role in our congregation. On the most basic level, this is the difference between having a community with Jews in it, and a Jewish community. We'd very much like both!

Charitable Giving For Jewish Disaster Relief

By Victor Lieberman

As anyone who's lived in Grand Forks more than 24-hours likely knows, in 1997 a catastrophe struck our city. The flood and fire devastated our community and inflicted huge financial losses to individuals and institutions, including the B'nai Israel Synagogue building. What you may not know is that this natural flood event was followed almost immediately by a quite different and more benevolent one: a flood of volunteer assistance and financial donations to our congregation.

The donations that came pouring in quite literally from all over the world, were just breathtaking. As with all other structures in our area, the damage to our building was extensive, and costly to repair. The entire lower level of the synagogue, which had only just been remodeled the previous year, had to be completely gutted down to the raw beams and support structure. It very, very

literally was only due to the generosity of complete strangers that arrived absolutely spontaneously, that our congregation was able to effect these renovations and repairs to our structure and facilities (HVAC, kitchen, etc.). Our gratitude, and our debt, was and is immense.

When renovations to the building were complete, it turned out that there still were funds left over from those donated. It was decided by the board at that time to honor the spirit and generosity of those who gave at our time of critical need, and to use what donations remained to provide assistance to other Jewish congregations and organizations that may have experienced similar catastrophic events or tragedies. Our goal is to spend this fund through charitable giving to others—to give in the same spirit that others gave to us.

The congregation has made many donations over the years since 1997, but money still remains in this account. At this time, we would like to

encourage others in the congregation to help the synagogue board with this effort. If you learn of a congregation or Jewish organization that has experienced some disaster, or has had a tragedy befall them, please let us know. The synagogue will look into the matter and, if there is an opportunity and place to send aid, we shall do so.

Susan Raatz, chair of the synagogue Tzedakah Committee, has volunteered to receive recommendations and work with congregation members to learn what we can about specific occurrences, and determine where and if assistance can be sent. In the past, donations typically have been made in the amounts of between \$500 - \$1,000, but we shall consider each recommendation on a case-by-case basis. Susan can be reached by e-mail at Susan.Raatz@ars.usda.gov, or you may send your suggestions to the general synagogue e-mail account, at NDBnailsrael@gmail.com. And thank you for your help!

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2014 Chanukah Highlights



We're on the Web!

See us at:

<http://www.bnaiisraelnd.org/>

