

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 17th February 2019

Reports to the AGM

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CHAIRMAN

My report last year spent quite a lot of time discussing financial matters, and it feels right that I start off on this topic again. At the start of 2018, we changed the venue for our erev Shabbat and Shabbat services from Columcille to St Marks. In last year's report I said that we expected that this would save us some £2,000 per year. You'll see from our accounts, which don't actually cover the whole of 2018, that our expenditure on premises is round about £2,000 less than last year. From a financial point of view I think it's fair to say that our move has been a success. However it's just as important to state that the move has also been successful in terms of service practicalities and 'ambience'. (I'm not really sure that that is the right word to use but I can't think of a better one!) It was always going to be the case that some people preferred Columcille and some St Marks, but I do believe that we have maintained the friendly yet serious atmosphere of our services, and some of the advantages such as there being much less work involved in setting up services are certainly beneficial.

As well as identifying savings, at last year's AGM I also suggested that we should look at fundraising, and as you all know, we held a fundraising evening after the High Holydays. It was a great evening; we not only raised over £800, but we also had a great time too. Many people contributed to the evening, not least the performers who all gave up their time for our community, but special thanks go to Ricky Hogg for organising the event, making sure everything ran smoothly on the night and generally ensuring that we all had a good time.

I think I'll finish on the finance side by saying that the one thing we mustn't do is sit on our laurels after this year. We still need to watch our expenditure, and it would be really good if we can make our fundraising evening an annual event – and as with all our activities, the more people who are involved the better. What I do know is that our new treasurer, Andrew Yule, has already shown that he is more than capable of updating Council on our finances. Andrew took over as treasurer from Adam Clark at the end of last year, and both Adam

and Andrew have been instrumental in getting our finances to their current position.

One of the other topics I mentioned in my report last year was that we need to consider who will take over from me as Chair in 2020 (assuming I'm re-elected at this year's AGM!). I said last year that it is my intention to stay on as Chair for three years, and that remains the case. This means that we will need to elect a new Chair next year. At the moment no-one has intimated that they would be interested in standing, and this is one of the most pressing issues that we need to address in the coming year. We have discussed this in Council, and still don't have a solution. I do want to make it clear that I do intend to stand down in 2020, for the reasons that I mentioned at last year's AGM.

Moving on to other aspects of our community, there continue to be many areas of which we can be justifiably proud. Our services continue to run as smoothly as ever, we have a great Rabbi, and some of our services are what you might call 'non-traditional'; we had two meditative services last year (with more planned this year) and our service at Newstead was as successful as ever. Our cheder continues to thrive, as do our adult educational activities and the Exploring Judaism group.

So what do I think our challenges are for the coming year? I've already mentioned two of them (fundraising and identifying the next Chair). The other area I'd like to highlight is the welfare of our members i.e., the welfare of all of us. I mentioned this in one of my 'word from the Chair' articles in Etrog a few months ago. I know that there are members who do look out for other members, and we have introduced initiatives such as providing a taxi for those of us who are less mobile. However I still wonder whether we could be doing more. I did ask in my article for any thoughts or comments – I received none. I'm going to use the opportunity of the AGM to see whether that really is the case or whether there isn't more we could be doing.

When I started writing this report, I did look at what I wrote for last year's AGM. My concluding remarks were as follows:

In concluding my report, I'd like to thank everyone who is involved in running our community. I have mentioned one or two people in my report, but there are many more who contribute. Some have done so for many years, some have only been involved comparatively recently. Whichever you are, thank you. And of course, a big thanks to Rabbi Mark. One of the recurrent themes when I speak with people at the likes of interfaith events is how often people say how lucky we are to have Rabbi Mark as our Rabbi. As well as saying yes, we are indeed lucky, I do also feel a sense of pride at belonging to our community – I hope you feel the same too.

I know it's cheating, but the same comments are just as appropriate this year as last, so rather than use some different words just for the sake of it, I'll conclude by saying – see above!

Nick Silk

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

2018 was a year of consolidation in our religious activity following the move to St. Marks and the changes in service support that released Nick Silk to take up the chairmanship of the community. Once again we had a full calendar of services, with Rabbi Mark leading us at the major festivals as well as to be with us for Tu B'shvat, and Sukkot. The one exception was Yom Kippur, when our services were once again led by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, ably assisted by Sharon as lead singer. Yael Budd was batmitzvah in March, and we held ceremonies to admit Andrew Yule, and Bernadett, Talia, and Noach Khandakar as Jews by choice. We welcomed Woody Zollinger to our community – received with double welcome and gratitude after the anxiety of his early days. As last year, two erev Shabbat services

were led by Rabbi Mark in meditative style, and this experiment appears to be on the way to becoming tradition.

A full calendar of services requires the combined efforts of many people to make everything happen smoothly. As our warden, Charlie Raab has borne a great deal of the work, assisted by Des Shanko. Stew Green's work liaising with our venues has been invaluable. Service support has largely fallen on Gareth Owen, to whom we owe heartfelt thanks as he leaves that role. Helen Ford continues to organise and lead the Kabbalat Shabbat services, and our lay leaders for various services last year also included Gillian Raab, Norman Crane, Wendy Crane, Ricky Hogg, Nick Silk, Andrew Yule, and me. Sue Bard organised the second part of Mich Sampson's series of workshops for service singers.

I have no doubt that we will be able to support a full calendar of services in 2019. But there are areas in which we need to develop our practice. One of these is to fully capitalise on Mich's excellent workshops by pulling our singers together into groups that will be effective in services. Another is to increase the number of service leaders, to reduce our present over-reliance on a small number of people.

Services are a collective effort, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those I've mentioned (with apologies to anyone I've accidentally omitted), and above all Rabbi Mark, whose monthly visits are certainly the highlight of community life. It's satisfying to report that we go forward into a new calendar year with high expectations. We start 2019 on firm foundations, on which we hope to build, above all by drawing more people into active participation in this, our most visible and arguably our most important activity.

CHEDER

We have had another enjoyable and successful year at Sukkat Shalom Cheder. We still have around 28 children enrolled, including four of whom we were delighted to welcome to Kita Aleph in September. An added bonus is that two of the parents of the new children have agreed to get involved. **Mor Kandlik-Eltanani**, is about to restart for us a Pre-Cheder group for toddlers during our regular Cheder time, and **Gila Holliman** has very kindly agreed to help out with Hebrew teaching in Kitas Bet and Gimmel. Welcome to them and thank you both for stepping in to join our staff. I would also like to thank all our parents for their continued support, and in particular for providing fantastic food for our snacks at every session.

Talking of staff, I would like to say, once again, a huge thank you to our teachers, **Katy Bromberg, Rebecca Wober, Lorraine Hershon, Yonatan and Melissa Eisenberg, Adam Budd** and **Gillian Raab**, all of whom have been a tower of strength in supporting me and working so hard planning for and teaching their classes. In last year's report I mentioned my desire to encourage the post bar/batmitzvah children to stay on at Cheder in some capacity after the age of 13, and I'm pleased to say that **Yael Budd** and **Elkan Hershon** have both chosen, of their own volition, to keep coming along on Saturday afternoons and acting as *madrachim* (youth leaders/teaching assistants) and have been a big support to all the teachers, especially the younger classes.

The role of *madrach* is one that the Liberal and Reform Movement are both keen to encourage and develop: hence when Rabbi Mark sent round an email last Autumn advertising the **2019 Joint Liberal Judaism and Reform Judaism Teacher Training day** in January at the Alyth Synagogue in Golders Green. I decided at the last minute not only to attend and represent Sukkat Shalom Cheder, but to take Elkan with me, so he could join in with the special *madrachim* programme that had been put on that day, and I think he benefitted greatly from meeting other young people who are carrying out the

same roles in Progressive Jewish communities all over Britain. Though I have to say, it proved equally as worthwhile for me to attend, in terms of the range of activities, lectures and workshops that took place at the Conference, and the many ideas I gathered there that I think will prove beneficial to our Cheder in a variety of ways: but, most of all, as I don't believe Sukkat Shalom has been represented before at this event, it was amusing to see the looks on the faces of so many of the participants who were amazed to discover that we had come all the way from Edinburgh to represent our Cheder (as you probably know, anywhere North of Finchley is considered remote in those parts!)

Like everyone, my life continues to be busy and hectic, and when I appealed earlier in the year for assistance to help with the administration of Cheder I received immediate offers of support. To this end, I am so grateful to my wife **Lorraine** who, in addition to continuing to teach and nurture the children of Kita Bet, has taken on quite a bit of the day-to-day running and communication that keeps Cheder ticking over. I was also very grateful that **Gail Potts**, who already oversees our Cheder web page, came forward instantly to take on the role of arranging the yearly calendar of sessions and liaising with **Stew Green**, who has had the job of booking our room space at Marchmont St Giles for some time now. Thank you so much to Gail and to Stew for carrying out their roles so well and going the extra mile this year to solve difficulties as they came along. I would also like to thank our Chair **Nick Silk** who has given me much support in the running of Cheder and has always been there for a friendly chat and lots of helpful suggestions. Finally, thank you, too, to Council for their continued support in making Cheder a vibrant part of our synagogue and encouraging joint events between the Community and Cheder.

To this end, we had our second very successful joint Chanukah party at Marchmont St Giles last December, including a *Great British Latke Bake-Off* (congratulations to the Almeleh family who received the ultimate approval of our judging panel with their revolutionary take on

the traditional Chanukah *latke* (a South African variation I believe, Rael?) and some super activities for the children organised with great aplomb by Katy Budd, Rebecca Wober and Yonatan Eisenberg, plus **Isak Hershon** who ran a popular Chanukah Origami activity!

The other event that stands out in my mind from the past year is the very successful Mini Cheder Service that we held at St Marks in October, the first time that I can recall Cheder happening on a Saturday morning, and also, I believe, the first Cheder session we have held at St Marks Unitarian. It was very well supported by our Cheder families and I received very enthusiastic feedback about how valued it was by parents, children and teachers. And thank you to **Charlie Raab** for bringing along the Torah scroll and our portable Ark to give the children the full flavour of the Shabbat morning Torah Service. We plan to have more sessions like this during the year, to further familiarise the children with the prayers and atmosphere of a Shabbat morning service.

For the coming year, the Cheder Teachers continue to generate some superb ideas to inspire the Cheder children with a sense of their Jewishness and keep them interested in Judaism as a whole and our community in particular. This year our classes have covered such diverse topics as the laws and practices of Shabbat, *kashrut*, *Lag b'Omer*, challah baking, chocolate *rugelach* making and a host of others. We have also had some excellent sessions with the upper classes led by Adam Budd on Jewish emigration, the Holocaust and other aspects of Jewish modern history, and Rebecca Wober has just started a wonderful project mapping our children's family origins geographically in the Diaspora. And someone has just suggested a session on Jewish weddings (it's never too early!!).

Katy Budd will be co-ordinating a social awareness/*Tikkun Olam* project with her class to produce decorative blankets for Project Linus and is also about to run a session on *Havdalah*, using resources provided by the popular PJ Library scheme: many of our Cheder families, including my own, have benefitted from the

scheme's provision of free Jewish children's books. Katy is currently building links with PJ Library in order to obtain more resources for our Cheder. I know that in all areas of Sukkat Shalom, we are becoming increasingly mindful of rising costs, and in the case of the Cheder, with the hefty prices for ordering items such as Hebrew text books: so we, too, are looking at ways of raising extra money for teaching resources and the general running of the Cheder. Any ideas on ways of doing this, and possible sources of support, would be gratefully received.

Incidentally, our new pre-Cheder group commences on Saturday 23rd February, and if you would like to bring along your pre-school age children to this, and have not yet received an email invitation with links to the songs they will be singing, Mor Kandlik-Eltanani will be delighted to hear from you at mor.kandlik@gmail.com

Finally, I would like to thank Yonatan Eisenberg, who along with his wife Melissa, have contributed so much to Cheder teaching in the last few years. Kitas Bet and Gimmel will, in particular, miss his native Hebrew language teaching, and we will all miss him as a colleague. While he has reluctantly stood down from regular teaching at Cheder, in order to prioritise his other increased communal duties, we hope that both Yonatan and Melissa will continue to be a part of the Cheder community in other ways, and I'm sure that, in this respect, Sorcha will soon be bringing them back to Marchmont St Giles on a Saturday afternoon!!

Daniel Hershon, *Cheder Senior*

Teacher

SERVICE LOGISTICS

2018 was a good year for Service Support.

The move to St Marks has helped to run events much more smoothly. As we now hold services in one place for most of the year,

this means that everything we need is now within one location rather than spread across two or more!

Regular services have been running smoothly during the year. I have taken great pride in being able to ensure that those leading the services have everything they need so that the service can go smoothly.

The High Holy Days services were successful as well, thanks to several of our congregants who were dedicated enough to help us ensure that the doors were always covered. This helped people to come and go smoothly during the services, and that no disruptions occurred either. Indeed, many visitors who came left some lovely comments telling us how well everything was run!

2019 marks the end of my time on Service Support. After several years doing this, and having overseen some great change in our venue, I feel this is a good point to step down. I look forward to seeing my successor pick up where I've left off, and I'm sure bring new, fresh ideas to improve our community!

Gareth Owen

BURIALS GROUP

I am pleased to announce that there have been no deaths within our community over 2018 and early 2019.

After several years I will officially be standing down as Burial chairman for our community at this years (2019) AGM. I will not be putting my name forward for re-election.

I would like to thank all those who have served on the burial committee while I have been Chair. It's been an honour and privilege to have served our community in this important role. I will of course be on hand to offer my full help and support to the next burial Chairperson.

Ricky Hogg

MEMBERSHIP

We are delighted that Stefano Giossi has taken on the role of membership secretary during the year and done much of the work mentioned below. Stefano maintains the membership database and undertakes the process of signing up new members. Gillian Raab, as secretary, maintains the Mailchimp list that we use to communicate with members and others, including former members whom we keep informed about our activities.

During the year we have undertaken several tasks to ensure that our practices are compliant with the new GDPR regulations. These include getting all members to check the information we hold about them and to remove any information that is not needed for the running of the community. We have also obtained formal permission to email those on our lists.

The count of people who were members in 2018 is 109, a small increase from the figure of 104 from last year. As was the case for the new members last year, they include several younger members who are contributing much to the community.

Stefano Giossi and Gillian Raab

INTERFAITH

The Jewish representative on The Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA) is Sam Danzig from EHC. Sukkat Shalom member Stew Green was the EIFA Chair until last October and is currently co-opted to the Board to undertake a re-write of the constitution. Many of our members participated in the Peace Walk organised by EIFA and we welcomed many interfaith visitors to our Tu b'Shevat seder in 2019.

Sue Bard and Gillian Raab

NEWSLETTER

The next edition of Sukkat Shalom's newsletter, Etrog, will be its eighteenth, marking its three years of bi-monthly publication, mainly on-line (with print copies for those who want them on request). The Etrog team consists of Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin, Charlie Raab and

Gillian Raab. We try to cover matters of both local and also broader interest to our readership.

Among other things, it is a forum for introducing our new members and it's both humbling and fascinating to learn about the diverse ways in which new people have come to Sukkat Shalom and in many cases to Liberal Judaism, and the persistence and determination that many of them have shown in reaching us. Our new members are unanimous in citing the importance of the warmth of the welcome they receive from their very first and often tentative approaches. Typical comments have been :

'I simply knew after my first visit that Judaism was what I'd been looking for. The warm and friendly welcome from everyone I've met at Sukkat Shalom has been quite incredible'

'Fortunately for me I found a community and organisation that are both very supportive and actively encouraging.'

'I have found the experience welcoming and different for me, It had taken a lot effort as I can be shy when in new situations.'

Etrog is also an important archive for Sukkat Shalom, recording in words and pictures our events, celebrations and debates. We are always open to new ideas, suggestions and contributions – so if you have any, please let us know.

Sue Bard

ADULT EDUCATION

The general pattern of adult education has remained the same as in previous years. On his monthly visits Rabbi Mark Solomon, usually on a Shabbat afternoon leads study sessions called Tea and Talmud. The texts we have looked at have included Bible and other types of Jewish literature. No prior knowledge of Hebrew language is needed. We are often joined by non members and regulars include members of other faith groups or none. This helps to make the topics under discussion lively and thought provoking. The day after on the Sunday afternoon Rabbi leads a more general discussion group. We have looked at the construction and content of the new draft Siddur. We have spent some time looking at extracts from Maimonides Guide For The Perplexed. With Rabbi Mark's expert leadership we are perhaps a little less bewildered.

Rabbi Mark sets out a curriculum for the year for the exploring Judaism group. He takes the group on Sunday mornings and I cover the rest of the curriculum once a month after the Kabbalat Shabbat service. In addition I hold sessions for people wishing to learn to read Hebrew and to study a book of the Bible and/ or biblical Hebrew grammar. **Books studied have included Judges and Amos.**

Norman Crane

SECURITY AND DATA PROTECTION

This is the first report I've written, so please bear with me. This is also my first experience as a Data Protection Officer and I'm grateful for both the opportunity and the patience of my fellow council members.

From my perspective, we have taken three main steps forward –

- We have reviewed and formalised procedures for the greeters which should make things more straightforward as we seek a replacement for Gareth at Service Support.

- We have also taken great pains to enable us to comply with the new General Data Protection Regulations which also was a great opportunity to purge old and irrelevant data. We are slowly transforming the way we take care of our members' data securely and with precision.
- Finally, we have formalised our relationship with new Police Scotland "Preventions, Interventions and Partnerships" procedures. The "PIP" is the police department responsible for community liaisons.

As with much of my role, items falling under others' responsibility will also impact on these considerations, such as the work just getting started to refresh the website, taking advantage to also update the underlying infrastructure supporting it to be more secure.

Overall this has been a great learning experience for me, long may it continue!

Yonatan Eisenberg