

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Sunday 20th February 2022**

### **Reports to the AGM**

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### **Co chairs' Report**

Last year our report commented on the changes that the COVID 19 lockdown had made to our Community some good and some bad. After another year of lockdown we can only echo the points we made last year. Most importantly, our enormous gratitude to Rabbi Mark Solomon for everything he has done to rise to the challenges of putting so much of our activity online. He has gone from leading one service a month for us, to leading two services every week. Initially these were all online, but as restrictions eased, they are either online only or hybrid. His study sessions and the choosing Judaism class are now all weekly, when previously they were only held during his monthly visits to Edinburgh.

But we now face a new challenge. How can we continue to benefit from the good things that lockdown did for us now that in-person meetings are possible while at the same time overcoming the bad things that COVID brought to our community. This is the main challenge that faces our council in making plans the coming year. The lack of in-person contact between members has been the worst aspect of COVID for us. We have not been able to get to know many of our new associate members who are on a path to a conversion to Judaism. We have missed informal chats at the kiddush after services and especially the shared community meals that used to be so popular. But, as we start in-person activities, we must try to maintain the benefits that arose from moving activities online during lockdown; in particular, the benefits that online services and study sessions have brought for people who are unable to attend in person. The same is true for online social events that Kyla has organised and the

Wonderful Wednesday socials. You will see from the Cheder report how well the teachers have adapted to lockdown. For these reasons we are committed to continuing our online activities now that in-person meetings are possible. The Religious Affairs report below gives more details. But things now are not the same as before lockdown. We have more remote members so perhaps we need to rethink some of our service patterns with that in mind.

One proposal we are considering is to have special community weekends when we have extra activities to encourage our distant members to come to visit Edinburgh with hospitality from local members. We hope that this and other initiatives will allow us to make the best of the online and in-person worlds for our community. We are always open to other suggestions as to how we could change to adapt to the post-Covid world.

The Shul Council has held meetings every month, with the co-chairs sharing the responsibilities of chairing and minute taking. We would like to thank Ricky Hogg, who stood down during the year and has long been an active member, for all his work for us.

We don't want to repeat all the details of the reports from our members that are in the rest of this document. But there is one thing we would like to mention that makes us proud, it is the generosity that our members have shown in donating to our Kol Nidre Appeal. We were able to send over £1,600 to each of our four charities. Well done everyone.

**Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin, Gillian Raab and Nick Silk**

## **Religious affairs**

Ironically, the human and social disaster of 2020 was easier for us to navigate than 2021, with its constant uncertainty and variation in rules. The gradual easing of the Covid menace is more than welcome, but it brings new challenges for service organisation. The most pressing problem is balancing the interests of our remote members, and those for whom physical attendance is difficult, with the need to meet in person for communal worship. This is a difficulty that Judaism has never faced before, in all the millennia of its long history!

Like other faith communities, Liberal Judaism is trying various solutions, but is still far from finding an ideal. For Sukkat Shalom, Rabbi Mark has used his extraordinary combination of technical and religious skills to provide hybrid services when he is in Edinburgh or Leicester, but the Edinburgh lay leaders realised after a very few experiments that hybrid services are beyond our capabilities. Perhaps this will change in the future as our technical knowledge grows, but for the moment we are following a service pattern combining hybrid (led by Rabbi Mark), in-person (lay-led) and Zoom (both). We'll have to review this pattern in the light of experience and peoples' changing preferences—will in-person services ever be so popular again, when they will never again be the only option?

Despite these uncertainties, our religious activity has remained at a high level, with services of one kind or another at every weekend, and with observance of all the festivals. Participation in services is high, our connection with Leicester and Manchester remains strong, Rabbi Mark has continued his experiments with other siddurim, and we have the pleasure of hearing him try out different tunes with a freedom that wouldn't be possible in in-person services. Highlights of the year include:

- B'nei mitzvah: Emily Potts, Bella Almeleh, Connie Dover, and Isak Hershon

- Admission ceremonies for Jordanna Conn, Nancy Jones, Sarah Jauncey Delgano, Marloes Schoonheim, and Willem Steele z”l
- High Holy Day services back at St. Marks, led by Rabbi Mark and Andrew Goldstein (sadly, for the last time)
- At last, very recently, the stone-setting for Mike Valencia z”l gave us the opportunity so sadly missed last year to come together to remember him

It takes a lot of people to run the services for a community like ours. First and foremost Rabbi Mark, of course, but we couldn’t do without our lay service leaders: Nick Silk, Dan Hershon, Ricky Hogg, Sue Bard, and Gillian Raab. Charlie Raab has resumed his sterling work as warden, and Stew Green his work of managing venue bookings. And Nick well deserves a second mention as, in effect, joint RA organiser, uncomplainingly sweeping up behind all of my mistakes and omissions.

We now look forward to picking up where the pandemic so rudely interrupted us two years ago: different kinds of services, more service leaders (come forward, please!), better integration with the cheder, and even—a long-cherished hope—getting our singers coordinated. Plenty of opportunities: your help would be most welcome!

### **Maurice Naftalin**

#### **CHEDER**

Mor and Gila have continued to Co-Chair Cheder and intend to carry on this responsibility for the 2022-23 Cheder year. The first term of Cheder in 2021-22 was held entirely on Zoom, but the teachers were able to hold a successful in-person Chanukah party at Marchmont St Giles. We maintained online sessions for the start of the second term, but the teachers are planning to move towards more in person sessions – roughly once a month online and once a month in person, including in-person Purim and end-of-year parties.

Kitah Aleph is taught by Katy and has 8 children registered, with 4 children regularly attending. Most Aleph children did attend the in-person party so we hope to see most of the younger children at our parties later this year. Katy has worked on Hebrew letter recognition through a variety of mediums (including a very well received lesson using Lego!) and there are always holiday themed stories each session.

Kitah Bet is taught by Mor and has 10 children registered – all of whom attend regularly. This age is well suited for online and the sessions have been very successful. The children are working on Hebrew literacy and developing their knowledge of Bible stories. Mor has developed several games to play with the children online and is planning for more interactive games when we can be together. The children all did an independent project in the first term and presented on their chosen topic at an online session – the Shabbat topic proved the most popular and everyone enjoyed hearing about different families’ traditions.

Kitah Gimel is taught by George and has 7 children registered – though a few of these children have commenced their B’Nei Mitzvah lessons and therefore do not always attend these

sessions (though are always welcome when they can attend!). George leads discussions on key topics such as Jewish history, traditions and texts, and the children participate in online quizzes that they enjoy. We have had some conversations with Rabbi Mark about how to integrate the Kitah Gimel teaching closer to the pre-B'Nei Mitzvah lessons and this work is ongoing.

The children all received packs at the start of the year with materials for their learning – jotters, folders and craft items for the younger children. We sent out a small addition to Kitah Aleph at the start of the year with some additional crafting items. For our in-person parties we have on site crafts and activities, and hand out snack and gift bags.

**Gila Holliman Co-Chair Cheder**

## **BURIALS**

As last year, we have two deaths to report this year. The funeral of Michael Elam's mother (Sonia Elam) took place on the 2nd of June 2021 and that of Prof Sarah Broadie OBE took place on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021, see Jonathan Broadie's tribute to her in the November/December [issue of Etrog](#). Rabbi Mark Solomon conducted the funerals that both burial arrangements have went well. We continue to have a good relationship with both William Purves funeral Directors and the Dean Cemetery.

**Ricky Hogg**

## **MEMBERSHIP**

In 2021, Sukkat Shalom's membership increased significantly. At the end of 2021, our community had 30 associate members, 29 of whom were members of Exploring Judaism. The previous year, there were 19 associate members. This shows that during the pandemic more people decided to learn more about Judaism or to begin a path to conversion. On the other hand, non-Jewish friends or family members of our full members still rarely opt for associate membership, instead preferring to remain only informally linked to our community.

The huge increase in associate members is a challenge for our community. Associate members now represent approximately one fifth of all members. The main difficulty lies in registering and keeping track of new associate members as some might quit Exploring Judaism and leave the community without completing the course. Taking into account that before the pandemic the average number of people attending the study group was approximately eight or ten, it is also difficult for Rabbi Mark to follow the individual progress of each member of the Exploring Judaism group. Despite the organisational difficulties, it is certainly positive that so many people considered our community as a place where their spiritual or social needs could be met.

As to ordinary members, there was an increase from 109 in 2020 to 125 at the end of 2021. Probably, the reason for such a rise is linked to our online and hybrid services, which make it easier for Jews who aren't our members to follow us and to get to know our community before joining.

Most members regularly pay their fees, whether full or reduced. There is a small number of members that it is difficult to contact. We strongly recommend members to reply to our emails and let us know when they cannot pay the fees. Contacting an increasing number of members and sending reminders are time-consuming processes. While we are aware that the pandemic has worsened financial hardships for families and individuals, membership fees remain the only real source of income for our community.

**Stefano Giossi Treasurer and membership secretary**

## **Interfaith Matters**

Sukkat Shalom's clergy and community members have participated in a wide range of interfaith activities this year. Despite the challenges of meeting in person due to the continuing negative impacts of the pandemic, the Sukkat Shalom community was actively engaged on line through a wide variety of events.

These events included participating as panellists and attendees in on line programmes presented by the Edinburgh Interfaith Association including Interfaith Insights, the Future of Faith, Spotlight on Faith, City of Dublin and Edinburgh Interfaith Discussion and many other events.

Members of Sukkat Shalom also contributed to the national Holocaust Memorial Day Ceremony (on line) and in person at the Edinburgh City Chambers event hosted by the Lord Provost. One hundred representatives of many different faiths participated in the City Chambers events to honour the memory of the victims and others associated with the Jewish Holocaust, the Bosnian and Rwanda Genocides and other atrocities.

I was elected chair of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association this year and in this capacity was appointed to two Scottish Government committees. One committee meets weekly and is focused on interfaith relations. The second committee meets monthly and is focused on vaccine inclusivity that also includes working with all faiths and none to promote uptake of vaccines.

Finally, I wish to commend the co - chairs of Sukkat Shalom for their active role in interfaith activities. For the second year in a row many of our members and clergy contributed a video of their menorah lighting to be shared with people of all faiths and none on the internet to introduce them to our festival of Chanukah. This is just one example of many important roles members of Sukkat Shalom have performed to promote positive interfaith relations in our city and far beyond.

**Joe Goldblatt**

## **Communications**

**reminders; WhatsApp Care and Support Group; Newsletter ( Etrog).**

Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin, Charlie Raab, Gillian Raab and Lexy Ray, with input also from Rebekah Gronowski and Nick Silk are together responsible for the bi-monthly newsletter, Etrog and for the weekly reminders. In the absence of our former at least fortnightly, and sometimes weekly physical gatherings of one kind or another and the continuing generation of a plethora of local, UK wide and international online opportunities, our weekly mailchimp

reminders are a vital source of up- to- date news, information and invitations to register for what's on offer.

Our WhatsApp Care and Support Group, established at the beginning of lockdown had been a great asset to the community, supporting members in many ways. People have requested and received help, shared good and bad news, and sometimes just chatted about whatever's been on their mind. The exchanges on the WhatsApp group at the end of November, and the delay in handling them, had a serious impact on our community. Now the Sukkat Shalom council has drawn up a code of conduct for group members, and a way of moderating the group, that aim to address the problems that led to that.

Our newsletter, Etrog, like our reminders is produced and distributed online, using mailchimp, with print copies posted out to anyone who requests this. Lexy Ray joined us this year, generously contributing her professional skills and her time to the physical design and production of both the electronic and print versions of Etrog. Among many other things, we have documented our cycle of festival celebrations and the life events of our members - including memorable bnei mitzvah and our first civil partnerships for mixed sex couples. We have marked our members many creative achievements and have reflected on and responded to events here in Scotland, such as COP 26

## **Sue Bard**

### **Care Team**

During the past 12 months, the members of the Care Team, including Gem Newman, Nancy Jones, Des Shanko and myself as chair completed the following tasks on behalf of the community.

- We continued to correspond with members of the community who were unwell by sending them get well cards on behalf of the community.
- We continued to send sympathy cards to members of the community who have suffered a bereavement.
- The chair applied to and was accepted onto the seven-week Honeycomb Counselling Workshop conducted by Liberal and Reform Judaism. The chair completed this course and shared his learnings with the members of the committee as well as the co-chairs of Sukkat Shalom.
- The chair attended two Pastoral Counselling de-brief sessions led by a rabbi from Liberal and Reform Judaism to continue to process how to assist members of our community who are experiencing personal problems.
- The chair contacted Jewish Care Scotland and is arranging a meeting with them to determine how they may best help members of our community in the future.
- The chair, assisted by Nick Silk and the Council completed a set of guidance notes for volunteers who are members of the Care Team.
- The chair notified the co-chairs of the potential of inviting members of the Care Team to submit their information to Disclosure Scotland to further promote safeguarding for the community and this is now underway.

- The Care Team created and has conducted three Wonderful Wednesday programmes attended by an average of four persons per programme and the programme has received positive reviews with one attendee writing 'I am really looking forward to the next programme and seeing all our regular faces and new ones too. This is a warm and welcoming programme that makes everyone feel welcome. It is nice to share a giggle or two and it is really uplifting.'

**Joe Goldblatt**

## **ADULT LEARNING**

During this second pandemic year, adult learning has continued on Zoom. While this does exclude some people who can't, or prefer not to get together in this way, it has continued to include many more people who, for various reasons, couldn't get to in-person classes. The Leicester, Manchester and Edinburgh communities continue to learn together along with members and friends of all those communities in other parts of the UK. All of this is possible because of Rabbi Mark Solomon's scholarship, energy, creativity and his inclusive approach to learning and learners. While we hope that during the coming year, some in-person learning will be possible again we expect to continue to learn online as well.

During the year Rabbi Mark has offered weekly study groups in Jewish Philosophy and in Talmud, as well as a weekly (formerly monthly) 'Exploring Judaism' group for people interested in learning more about Liberal Judaism as well as those preparing for conversion. During the course of the year, the Jewish Philosophy group has been reading and discussing Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed.' The Talmud group has been reading and discussing multiple fascinating topics throughout the year, including: 'Promised Land or Permitted Land'? from Bavli Sotah, 'Rabbis and Heretics' from Bavli Sanhedrin, 'Moses as God's Husband' from Bavli Shabbat and, currently, 'Matrilineality and Patrilineality' from both Bavli and Yerushalmi Talmud texts.

As a result of the pandemic, The Ark (Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue) vastly expanded its Biblical Hebrew programme, all of which not only went on-line, but was also made available to all Liberal Jewish community members and friends. The Ark now offers four levels of weekly classes from complete beginners to advanced, taught by their senior rabbis Aaron Goldstein and Lea Muhlstein. This year, no less than 25 members/associate members of Sukkat Shalom were enrolled in these Hebrew classes, four of whom have also become Friends or Supporters of The Ark. In a relatively small community such as ours, the advantages of this kind of on-line learning are enormous, both because of the range of opportunities and the chance to learn and form bonds with members of other communities.

And finally, yet another pandemic -era, online, cross- communities opportunity that has arisen – and is being eagerly taken up, is the chance to learn to leyn with Mich Sampson.

No wonder many of us are feeling 'more religious' than we used to be.

**Sue Bard**