

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

**Reports to the AGM**

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## **CHAIRMAN**

Having written the Religious Affairs report for every AGM since our foundation, it feels somewhat strange writing the Chair's report. However, I have done so, and after one year in office I think we can look back on 2017 with some pride.

At the AGM last year we took what for us was the fairly momentous step of increasing our membership subs. This was the first time we had taken this step and it was on the back of several years of seeing our reserves falling. You will see from our accounts that our subscription income increased by some £2,000 compared to last year. I wouldn't want to claim that the increase is just down to our increasing our subs, but it certainly is good that we have seen our income increase in this way.

Continuing the finance theme, one of the other things we said that we would do at last year's AGM was to review our expenditure. Our three main areas of expenditure are Rabbi's fees, cheder and venue accommodation. Certainly, to Council, the most obvious area to review was accommodation and as you all know, this has resulted in us moving from Columcille to St Mark's for our regular erev Shabbat and Shabbat services. As I have said several times in my 'Word from the Chair' articles in Etrog, this wasn't a step that we took lightly. We had, and still have, a very good relationship with Columcille, and they have looked after us well in the years that we have held services there. However, we also have a very good relationship with St Mark's, and when we evaluated the pros and cons of each venue, there was essentially no difference between the two, with one exception, and that's the cost. By moving to St Mark's, we expect to save some £2,000 in 2018. Clearly this saving doesn't show in the accounts presented to this AGM, but we do expect to see a saving going forward.

The last thing I would like to say on the topic of money is to thank Phil Wadler for his period as Treasurer. Phil is currently enjoying a sabbatical in Brazil, but we will see him later in the year. Adam Clark took over as Treasurer in January – the constitution allows for Council to appoint a Treasurer in the period between AGMs should the Treasurer resign – and is being ably assisted by Andrew Yule. It is great to see that two of our newest members have stepped up and taken this on.

This neatly leads onto another of our successes and something which I think we can be proud of, and that's the number of converts we helped attend the Beth Din in 2017 where they were formally recognised as Jewish. We had two services during the year when they were welcomed to Judaism and to our community, and they were both really nice and really special.

There is one other new initiative that I would like to highlight, and that's our 'Year of Song' project. While you'll all be glad to know that I've not signed up to participate in singing, I do know that the workshops and practice sessions that have taken place so far have been very successful. We are lucky to have Mich Sampson leading the workshops and Rabbi Mark backing these up with practice sessions. And indeed it is great that we obtained a grant to cover much of the cost of this initiative. I look forward to the time when I have my voice drowned out by our choir (as I suspect do most of you!).

There are a couple of other things I want to mention, and that's our cheder and services. You'll see the reports on both of these in the reports for this AGM, but it is only right that I highlight how well we continue to do in both areas. Cheder continues to thrive under with Dan Hershon at its helm, while Charlie Raab has taken over as warden

for the services and they are as efficiently co-ordinated and run as ever.

As I said at the start of this report we have had many successes this year. Does that mean we don't have any challenges? I'm not sure that 'challenge' is the word that I would use, but there are a couple of things that I think we as a community should focus on during this next year. The first continues to be finance. We have increased our subs, and we have taken to steps to reduce our expenditure, but one of the things we haven't done for some time is to have any fundraising events. In years gone by we have held various events – particularly ceilidhs – and it would be really good if we could hold some fundraising activities this year. Not only do they raise funds, but they are great for socialising. If anyone would like to organise any fundraising events this year, I can assure you that you will have my full support.

The other topic I think we as a community could focus on is social action. We do have people within the community who keep in touch with other members who aren't well, and during 2017 we introduced our scheme whereby less mobile members of the community could get to services and other events in a taxi paid for by the community – yet another initiative of which we can be rightly proud. However I think that perhaps we could be doing more. In this context I always think of the initiative that the Nottingham Liberal Community are involved with, where they help run a soup kitchen once a week with a local Muslim community. It would be really good if we could do something on the social action front, and as with fundraising, I can assure you that if you would like to promote this, you will have my full support.

At a recent Council meeting, one of the members of Council suggested that we should consider having a vice-Chair. The initial reason for suggesting this was because I had been to a number of events at which I had represented ELJC, and having a vice-chair would provide support for me at such events (i.e., I wouldn't have to go to them all!). However when we discussed this at Council, the discussion quickly moved on to how having such a position would be good in terms of succession planning. I'm only one year into my term of office, but it is quite right that we should be looking at succession. This is particularly so as I would like to set the precedent of having the Chair's term of three years. While the constitution allows for four, we had always envisaged the normal term as being three years, and put four as a bit of a contingency. I know this as it was me who suggested we put four years in the constitution. I think that having three years as a term is preferable to four for various reasons, and hopefully will allow for more members to come forward to volunteer. On that basis, I will be mentioning this at the AGM.

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.

Nick Silk

## **RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

The religious side of our activities has been fully sustained again this year. We had a full calendar of services, with lucky timing allowing Rabbi Mark to be with us for Tu B'shvat, Shavuot, and Simchat Torah as well as the major festivals – except for Rosh Hashanah, when our services were once again led by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, ably assisted by Sharon as lead singer. Elkan Hershon was barmitzvah, and we had no fewer than seven admissions ceremonies: for Adam Clark, Alex Dillon, Stefano Giossi, Paul McPhail, Shannon Mooney, Fraser Halliday and Becky Gilhooley. The innovation of meditative services was well received, and we plan to continue with them and possibly to try other experimental forms.

The year saw many changes in the organisation of our services. Nick Silk handed over his responsibilities for organisation, though he is still there working hard as a helper on many occasions. But I'm happy to say that we were able to find the numerous volunteers needed to replace the many functions that Nick had been doing all on his own! Charlie Raab is now our warden, assisted by Des Shanko. Stew Green liaises with the venues. Service support is organised by Gareth Owen and Bob Lerman, with a rota of volunteers consisting of half our community! Helen Ford organises and leads the Kabbalat Shabbat services, and our lay leaders for various services last year also included Adam Budd, Gillian Raab, Norman Crane, Wendy Crane, Ricky Hogg, Stew Green and Nick Silk. Sue Bard applied for a grant to support Mich Sampson's workshops for service singers, and has since organised the workshops themselves.

Organisationally, this year will be one for consolidating last year's changes, and for adapting to our new home at St Mark's Unitarian Church. But other changes will continue: there will certainly be a positive impact on our services from the singing workshops, and in a

bigger change still, we will be using LJ's new experimental draft siddur for most of our Shabbat morning services.

In conclusion, you'll see from what I've written that our services are both a central part of community life and a truly collective effort, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those I've mentioned – and the many helpers who I don't have space to list – who keep this aspect of our community alive; not least, of course, 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.

Maurice Naftalin

## **CHEDER**

Looking back at the report I gave for last year's AGM, I am pleased to see that the seeds we planted at that stage, when Cheder had an entirely new team of teachers, seem to have borne much fruit in the ensuing year. Sukkat Shalom Cheder continues to be a tight-knit and thriving bunch of teachers, children and mums and dads, who all do their bit to keep Cheder ticking along with warmth, strong commitment and, of course, a sense of humour.

I am constantly aware in Cheder that we all fight against certain factors to keep Cheder going each week: in the case of my family and the other Cheder families who live some distance from central Edinburgh, I know only too well that it can be a tough order, particularly in the current Winter weather conditions, to get our children along to Cheder each fortnight, and against a sea of other conflicting commitments: family *simchas*, children's parties, sports, dance, school and professional commitments, it is easy to take the path of least resistance, particularly on a Saturday afternoon: which makes me particularly proud that our parents and teachers still

manage to get themselves to Cheder as often as they do, and that they understand the need to give our children a strong grounding in Jewish knowledge and an appreciation of their heritage. I am also pleased to report that our decision last year to move the times of Cheder forward from 3.30 to 2.45pm seems to have been a success and I hope it has in general made it easier for families to attend and get home earlier afterwards.

I wasn't going to single out any one family or individual for praise, because they are all very committed to Cheder, but I feel I did want to mention Evi Barzel, who had a break from Cheder of many months last year when her dad Ronen and the whole family were living and working in New York: having had the marvellous experience of attending a Jewish Day School there, I didn't know whether Evi might find our little Cheder a bit tame for her after that! But no, she dived back in and used the knowledge and experience gained at her New York school to continue her learning and to share it with her fellow Cheder pupils here. Not only that, but when her long time Saturday dancing commitment clashed with the new start times for Cheder, she did not give up: while aware that she would have to miss the first half of Cheder for dancing, she and Ronen have had a taxi waiting every fortnight straight after that session to make a frenzied dash across the city in order to join us for the second half of Cheder in Marchmont. I am also delighted that one of our other parents, Adi, is helping Evi further by teaching her more advanced Hebrew one-to-one during the Cheder sessions: it is nice when families make such a strong commitment to Cheder that we are able to adapt ourselves in a reciprocal manner to the needs of our pupils. I hope Ronen and Evi will forgive me for singling them out, but I do think this is a marvellous example of our Cheder families' commitment to attending.

I would very much like to thank all our teachers and helpers, Rebecca Wober, Katy Bromberg, Lorraine Hershon, Yonatan and Melissa



Eisenberg, Adam Budd, Sophie Bleau and Gillian Raab for their hard work and commitment and the energy and imagination they put into planning and teaching lessons for the children. 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. Once again, excuse me for singling out an individual here, but I must give a special thank you to David Blair who has brought along regularly his absolutely delicious home-baked cakes: David you are a star, and it has been a particular delight to have James, David, Leland and Lucas join us as a new family to Cheder this year. Thank you, too, to Gail Potts who continues to organise the snack rota and keep our webpage updated.

Great efforts have been made this year, both by our Rabbi, Mark Solomon, our Chair, Nick Silk and several other synagogue Council and community members to strengthen the bonds between Cheder and ELJC as a whole, and to see if we can run more joint communal events between the two, and while it is very much a work in progress, I and many others have been delighted by the results so far. I am very grateful to Rabbi Mark for rearranging his tight Shabbat schedule on at least three occasions this year to attend Cheder, in order to lead some inspiring sessions for Tu B'Shevat, Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot. His presence greatly enthused and stimulated the imaginations of the Cheder children on each occasion, and the Shofar-blowing workshops were a particular highlight!

I am also meeting up with Nick, our Chair, on a regular basis, to update him on Cheder and to co-ordinate more joint events. As a result, we had a very successful Chanukah party last December, which I am sure you will have read about in Etrog, and which many Sukkat Shalom members enthusiastically attended and enjoyed. The mass *Chanukiah* lighting was a wonder to behold and the Chanukah activities for the children were organised and led by a fantastic team

of Liberal Judaism/Netzer students Francesca Kurlansky, Ben Wyatt, Josh Powell and Sarah Brown. I am grateful to Nick for putting me in contact with Francesca, and she has offered to run all kinds of Cheder events and sessions for us in the future, which I think will be an enormous asset and support to us.

In addition to that, I am now in regular contact with Ellie Lawson who is based at Liberal Judaism in London. She has, in particular, agreed to assist with two areas of priority that I have for the future: namely, to develop both the pre-school and post- Bar/Batmitzvah end of Cheder. Many of our Cheder children have brothers and sisters who come along with their parents on Shabbat while their siblings are attending classes. In this respect, I am most grateful to Gillian Raab for starting up a pre-school Cheder group which meets for a short session in Cheder time. I hope this will draw in the younger children to feel a part of our Cheder, and to get them used to the cheder atmosphere before they subsequently begin full class sessions at the age of around five. Liberal Judaism/Netzer are keen to support and develop these sessions for us in any way we feel is appropriate. Please do get in touch with Gillian if you have pre-school age children and would like to come along.

At the same time, I have been aware for some time that those children who have completed their Bar/Bat Mitzvahs tend to leave our Barmitzvah-age top class straight afterwards and that very little else is provided for them by the Community. I am therefore pleased that Ellie Lawson is going to help provide ways of channelling those teenagers who want to stay actively engaged and involved with Liberal Judaism: this could involve running a post-Bar/Batmitzvah group under the auspices of Cheder and encouraging those children to attend weekend training sessions run by L.J. Netzer to become young community leaders and assistant teachers at their own synagogues' cheders, as

well as attending Netzer Summer camps and other events during the year. While this is still very much a concept at present, and not a fully-fleshed out plan, I would be most grateful to hear from anyone in our community who might be able to help with developing this new addition to Cheder activities in the near future and would very much encourage any post-Barmitzvah teenagers in our synagogue who are interested in being a part of this to come forward so we can assess how much support and need there would be in Sukkat Shalom for such activities.

Finally, in last year's Cheder report I articulated my belief that what we were aiming for in our Cheder was that all the children enjoy coming for both the learning, the Jewish atmosphere and the socialisation with other Jewish children. I was most encouraged by a recent article in the *Jewish Chronicle* written by David Lister, the rabbi of Edgware United Synagogue, who, in re-assessing the value of the Cheder in his own Orthodox community, stated the following:

*“Simply equipping pupils with knowledge of Judaism will not ensure that they will live fulfilled lives as Jews. We will only produce Jews who care about their Judaism if we win pupils' hearts as well as their minds. The primary goal (of Cheder teachers) should be to inspire.....the more messy or spectacular, the more unlike anything that happens at home or at school, the better. If the children gain nothing but a thirst for Jewish learning and practice, they will be set for a lifetime of engagement with Judaism.”*

I know that both myself and my fellow teachers in Edinburgh, very much hope that our Cheder at Sukkat Shalom continues to fulfil similar objectives.

Dan Hershon

## **SERVICE LOGISTICS**

Bob Lerman and I took over the helper's rota from Joe Goldblatt the end of 2016, and we had big shoes to fill. It's been a fantastic year, and thanks to all of our great helpers for making our first year a success!

We ensured that there is always coverage for each event on the calendar, making sure that there are enough people to help set the service up, greet visitors and run the service smoothly.

Particularly successful were the High Holyday services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We were able to successfully coordinate the moving of items from Columcille over to St Mark's and back for the services, as well as ensuring that there was security coverage all throughout the service.

The move to St Mark's from Columcille went well - we moved the Ark and all other items to St Mark's permanently. It was quite a busy day, but everyone pulled together and we successfully moved everything into our new home. We look forward to another year of services, and hopefully we can make next year as good as the last! Thanks again to everyone who helps out with the rota, and continues to help!

Gareth Owen

## **BURIALS GROUP**

I am pleased to announce that there have been no deaths within our community over 2017, since the last AGM and early 2018.

I have also updated burial cost information on our web site from William Purves Funeral Directors and the Dean cemetery.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those on the burial committee for their continued assistance over the last year.

Ricky Hogg

## **MEMBERSHIP**

As of the end of January 2018 we have 103 current members. During 2017 we had 104 people who were members, up from 101 in 2016. Our valued member Joy Northcott passed away in early 2017 and a further five members in 2016 are no longer members in 2017, for a variety of reasons, but we have gained eight new members during the year. We are delighted that these include several much younger members who are contributing a huge amount to the community.

Sharon Goldwater has maintained our membership data base for the last four years. Her work commitments mean that she is no longer able to do this, so the responsibility has passed to me. I hope I can maintain her high standards of accuracy. Many thanks to Sharon for all this painstaking work.

Gillian Raab

## **INTERFAITH**

I am delighted that in what has been my final year as Jewish Rep that Nick Silk has asked me to write a report for the AGM - to the best of my memory, this is a first.

I'm especially pleased to do so because from my perception the Jewish community's commitment to this aspect of wider 'service' has continued to grow year on year. Furthermore, this year in particular has I feel, been particularly positive, aided in part by 2017 being the bicentenary of the Jewish community in Edinburgh. This provided an excellent reason for the Hebrew congregation and ELJC to offer to jointly host the annual Interfaith Peace Walk in May. The event was hugely successful and attracted a record attendance of close on 100, the majority of whom participated in the whole walk from the City centre to Salisbury Road where Rabbi Rose did excellent work providing tours of the shul.

I am typing this on the day of the ELJC Tu B'shevat seder which like last year, the community is opening to people of other faiths to attend and share. This is another very positive development to be proud of and in terms of advance 'registrations' looks like being every bit as successful as last year.

In addition to hosting, we have also provided a significant Jewish presence to key EIFA events. I am grateful to: Norman Crane who gave an excellent session on the significance of food within Judaism theology and practice at the Three Faiths Scriptural Reasoning afternoon (NB this event is going to be broadened out to other faiths later this year); Wendy Crane who provided a very informative and personal input on a Jewish woman of faith who has influenced her (she chose Regina Jonas, the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi); and Nick Silk who represented the Jewish community in Rabbi Rose's stead at the annual Peace Service in September. Nick read John

Rayner's reflection on peace from p 293 of the Liberal siddur followed by Y'hee Ratson (May it be Your Will) from the same page (in Hebrew and English).

One other new area this year has been development of the multi-faith Listening Service which provides 'listener-friends' for the Sheriff Court. These volunteers offer a non-judgemental ear to anyone present who may need it - court users, family members, staff etc. Some members of EHC are already volunteering but it would be good to have more, particularly from ELJC. If you would like to find out more, please email [courtchaplancy@gmail.com](mailto:courtchaplancy@gmail.com)

All of the above is extremely positive and to be celebrated and I sincerely hope that we will continue to build on it as we go forward. However I cannot fully do justice to this report without mentioning one area of disappointment. Namely, our attendance at Holocaust Memorial Day. This year's event was hosted at Gracemount High School and like previous years, attendance from within the Jewish community was quite low overall. A pity because I believe that keeping the memory alive is one of our biggest responsibilities. Furthermore, I cannot help but wonder what the many members of other faiths attending must think when they see relatively few of us there? And what potential impact this may have on their own commitment to the event? I do hope we will do better in future years.

Having got that off my chest, let me finish on a positive note. Firstly, by thanking all who have supported me and those who have importantly, helped to disseminate EIFA news through the various channels. In particular, Sue Bard, John Danzig and Hilary Rifkind have been extremely helpful in this regard. Secondly I would again like to welcome my replacements, Clare Levy and Sam Danzig. It's great to have 'new blood' for this role and having met them both a couple of

times, I know they have lots of energy for this work. I wish them every success! Please give them all the support you can.

Stew Green

## **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. This has attracted a widening group of people this year. Topics are both entertaining and thought provoking. On Sunday afternoons the Rabbi leads a discussion group. This year the subject has concerned the why's and wherefore's of prayer and liturgy in preparation for the arrival of the planned new Liberal Judaism Siddur.

On Sunday mornings Rabbi Mark takes an exploring Judaism class and on the first Friday of each month, after the Kabbalat Shabbat service I give a supplementary session to the same group. In addition I lead a Bible study session and this year we have completed the difficult but rewarding task of reading the book of Job.

Norman Crane