

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 19th March 2023

Reports to the AGM

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CO-CHAIRS

Our report last year chronicled the uncertainties (as well as the pleasures) of emerging from lockdown. This year has seen some consolidation and gain in confidence with both online and in-person services and events flourishing, offering diversity, choice and a real chance for our more remote members to be part of a community. The growth noted in our intergenerational community during lockdown has continued this year with new members and associate members.

Having four co-chairs was only ever supposed to be a temporary solution to our council's failure in 2019 to attract (or even force) anyone to stand for chair. So 'succession planning' has been a preoccupation of 2022. We have had help with this from community member Stew Green, who with great generosity and skill has worked with the council, and with the co-chairs, in identifying what needed to change, and how to effect that change. It's still a work in progress but we hope that this will be the Sofa's last year before it goes into the archives.

We can report – as you will all hopefully have noticed - that we now have a Members' Subgroup that has conducted a survey to give us a fuller picture of both what people want from and can do for our community. Also, council decided to employ a part-time administrator (funded initially from money saved during lockdown from premises -hire) and we have an Administrator Working Group implementing this. We have been proactive about finding new council members to fill gaps and replace people who are standing down; we've co-opted a new council member, Han Smith, during this year and have several people standing for council at this AGM.

We thank Lorraine Hershon and Rebecca Wober, who are standing down from council, for their contributions. We also thank Gillian Raab, who is no longer a co-chair, but continues to be a tireless council member.

It makes an enormous difference to a small community such as ours to be part of Liberal Judaism and to benefit from the its dynamic support and resources. We also greatly appreciate the support and generosity of The Ark (formerly Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue).

We give enormous thanks as ever to Rabbi Mark Solomon, whose energy, creativity, learning and spiritual leadership continue to inspire us.

Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin and Nick Silk

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Last year's report highlighted the different types of services – Zoom, in-person and hybrid - that we now conduct. Striking the right balance between the different services offered arguably remains our greatest challenge. While we hope that we have got the balance about right, we would always appreciate feedback if you think we haven't (or indeed if we have) so please do get in touch, be it on this or anything else in this report.

As in previous years, we held at least one service every Shabbat and we celebrated all the major festivals. We continue to be extremely lucky in having Rabbi Mark lead the majority of our services, be that when he visits us in person, leads Zoom services from his home or hybrid services from Leicester (and indeed when he is in Edinburgh too). We did though need to call on our lay leaders somewhat more than usual when Rabbi Mark was unavailable for some three months, and it was really encouraging to see the number of members who helped lead services. We were also able to conduct a hybrid service from St Marks – Solomon Duffy's bar mitzvah – where Rabbi Mark led the service from his home.

Other highlights during 2022 included:

- Rabbi David Schwerzoff visited us in May where he joined us for an evening of supper & songs and led a cheder-focused Shabbat morning service, attended by many adults and children. We also had a second cheder-focused Shabbat service in November with Rabbi Mark, and we have planned to have more of these in 2023
- We were really pleased to welcome Rabbi Pete Tobias back to Edinburgh in July, where he led both an erev Shabbat and Shabbat morning service. We look forward to joining with Rabbi Pete and members of Glasgow Reform Synagogue at services in 2023
- We welcomed Rabbi Danny Smith, the retired senior minister of Edgware & Hendon Reform synagogue, in leading our Rosh Hashanah services
- We celebrated the b'nei mitzvah of Solomon Duffy, Gabriel Potts and Abel Hershon
- Our members Jen Andreatchi and Han Smith were married at St Andrews in October by Rabbi Mark in what was the first same-sex Jewish wedding in Scotland
- We had our first meditative service for some time, led by Ceceley Chambers
- We celebrated the Liberal Judaism 120th anniversary with an on-line service, jointly held with the Leicester community, where we welcomed many friends from Liberal Judaism including the Chair of LJ, Ruth Seager
- We welcomed many new members to Judaism and our community who had joined via Rabbi Mark's Exploring Judaism class

As ever, thanks are due to everyone who helped during the year; Rabbi Mark, the many lay leaders, Charlie Raab our warden, Stew Green who co-ordinates our venue bookings, and also all those who have helped with security, setting up and clearing up after services. We are always looking for more volunteers, so if you would like to help, just let us know.

Nick Silk and Maurice Naftalin

CHEDER

Cheder continues to be co-chaired by Gila Holliman and Mor Kandlik-Eltanani and is being run in a hybrid format with roughly one session each month online and one in-person. This year continued with 3 classes: Aleph (taught by Lizzie Robertson and Ash Alexander), Bet (taught by Mor) and Gimel (taught by George Wilkes and Rabbi Pete Tobias).

Kitah Aleph has 11 children, ages 3-6 and focusses on holidays and Hebrew letters. The online sessions involve a discussion on an upcoming holiday, an activity and story time with PJ Library books on the topic of the week. The in-person sessions have crafts and songs on the theme as well. As the children are quite young, several only participate in the in-person sessions although there is one child in Germany who only participates online.

Kitah Bet has 9 children, ages 7-10 and focusses on Hebrew learning and stories from the Torah. The online sessions involve worksheets and reading practice, and in person this is expanded with Hebrew stories and craft projects.

Kitah Gimel has 6 children, ages 10-12 and focusses on discussion topics in preparation for B'nei Mitzvah prep with Rabbi Mark. George and Rabbi Pete lead a discussion and often incorporate an online quiz to reinforce the learning.

The sessions are run back to back online on Saturday afternoons, concurrently at Marchmont St Giles on a Saturday afternoon. As some of the sessions are celebrations for the major holidays (Chanukah, Tu Bsh'vat and Purim) there are times that the whole cheder is together for activities. For Chanukah the Cheder hosted a party and invited the whole community. It was lovely to welcome some families along with younger children – cheder students of the future. For Tu Bsh'vat Lizzie ran a seder with songs from Rabbi Pete and planning has begun for our Purim celebrations.

The cheder team has worked with the community to find more opportunities to be together – the end of year party in May 2022 was well attended and there are plans to repeat that in 2023. There have been two Shabbat services that specifically included the cheder children as well. The community and cheder leaders will be meeting shortly to discuss planning for future years and brainstorming ways to create more opportunities for co-led learning, services and celebrations.

Gila Holliman

MEMBERSHIP

At this year's AGM we can see a small increase in full members from the 125 we reported to last year's AGM to 127 as of 6/3/2023. However, this small increase of 2 members does not tell the whole story. We have had a total of 15 new members over this period, 6 of whom transferred from associate members to full membership after a visit to the Liberal Judaism Beth Din and a service of admission to Judaism in our community. The remaining 9 were either new to Edinburgh or decided to become members after having attended some of our services. Over the same period, there has been a small decrease in numbers of associate

members from 30 last year to 22 this year. All but two of the 22 are studying with Rabbi Mark and have registered with Liberal Judaism with the intention of converting. The 6 associates who became full members have, of course, contributed to this decline.

These numbers represent smaller increases than last year when full members increased by 16 and associate members by 11. As we commented last year, the rise in membership is most likely to be due to the provision of online services via Zoom. We are now committed to providing a mixture of online and in-person services. It is encouraging to see that this seems to have contributed to maintaining our membership numbers. Thanks are due to Rabbi Mark and to our lay service leaders for keeping our online services and events going.

During the year a small group of mostly younger members have been surveying the membership to see what members want, to put members in touch with each other and most importantly to get more members involved in the running of the community. We look forward to this initiative bearing fruit in future years.

Most members regularly pay their fees, whether full or reduced. The number of members that we have difficulty getting in touch with for the payments is getting smaller and smaller every year as a majority of our members have now decided to opt for our Direct Debit facility. We strongly recommend all members to switch to Direct Debit. This is particularly important for those who don't pay their fees in one single payment but split their subs into monthly or quarterly payments. Contacting an increasing number of members and sending out reminders is a time-consuming process for a community relying on volunteers. That's why the Direct Debit is our preferable option for members as it ensures that fees are promptly paid and that membership is automatically renewed every year. This method of payment is protected by the Direct Debit Guarantee and it's possible to change amount and frequency very easily, just by contacting us.

Stefano Giossi Treasurer and membership secretary
Gillian Raab Secretary

INTERFAITH

As a member of Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA), I attended the Holocaust Memorial Day event held in the Edinburgh City Chambers. This was one of two events that EIFA held, the other being an on-line pre-recorded film. Following a request from EIFA, I signed a letter on behalf of Sukkat Shalom supporting EIFA's proposal to develop an Interfaith centre. Representatives of other faith groups also signed similar letters. Many of EIFAs activities continue to be held on-line, and I attended a number of these during the year. They are

generally open to anyone who is interested, and more details can usually be found on the EIFA website (www.edinburghinterfaith.com)

Nick Silk

ECO-SYNAGOGUE PROJECT

Introduction

The [Eco-Synagogue](#) project, partnered by the Board of Deputies, brings together all parts of the UK Jewish Community to explore how environmental sustainability and activism can be promoted and embedded in all aspects of community life. Communities are invited to engage with the project and work towards bronze, silver or gold accreditation.

The project has developed an audit tool to help communities identify the strength of their commitment and activities to promote sustainability. The main thrust of the audit tool is, understandably and appropriately, on communities' premises. There is recognition that not all communities have their own properties, like Sukkat Shalom.

The ELJC Council expressed an interest in applying for Eco-Synagogue accreditation in early 2022 and a small working group was brought together of interested members to pursue this. The working group met online through spring and early summer 2022.

Working group membership

Claudia Falsetti

Dee Majerowska

Jonathan Staal

Nancy Lynner

Philip Wiltshire

Rolando Hernandez Trapero

Sandy Robertson

Activities

The working group's original objective, set by Council, had been to complete the EcoSynagogue audit. Given that the community was beginning from a very low level of activity around environmentalism and sustainability, a low score on the audit was a given. Instead, it was decided to review the community's annual accounts, explore how we spent our money and to what extent we supported a 'green Pound' in our activities.

After salaries, the community's only significant expenditure is on venue hire. Neither of the main venues the community uses - St Mark's and Marchmont St Giles – has a published sustainability strategy. Neither responded to requests for more information on any

sustainability measures they might have adopted or invitations to meet to discuss a common agenda.

With that avenue for investigation closed off, the group returned to the Eco-Synagogue audit (Appendix 1). Completing the questionnaire confirmed the original expectations that the community is starting from a very low threshold. However, it is hoped that the questionnaire can still be used, but more as a menu of options already being explored by other synagogues – and other faith communities – to stimulate greater activity in the year ahead.

Next steps

In its report to Council, the working group proposed key actions to be taken forward in the year ahead under each of the following headings:

- **Management:** ○ What is the Council's commitment to sustainability and environmentalism? ○ How will that commitment be expressed and communicated to the membership?
 - What action will the Council take to demonstrate that commitment?
- **Prayer & Teaching:** ○ How can Judaism's historic and contemporary approach to environmentalism be explored in services?
- **Lifestyle:** ○ How can members be encouraged to consider the environmental impact of their personal lives and to consider more sustainable practices?
- **Catering:** ○ How can the community consider the environmental impact of catering at communal events and move actively to more sustainable options?
- **Travel planning:**
 - How can the community plan its activities to help members to choose green travel options? And members be encouraged to make those choices?
- **Community & Global Activism:**
 - Can the community identify local, national and international projects to partner and encourage member involvement with?

Shavuot is traditionally marked by a night of study. Given its origins in marking the first of the year's harvests and our relationship to the natural world, perhaps that would be an ideal opportunity to bring the community together to study, consider and to plan.

Jonathan Staal

ADULT LEARNING

In a recent interview, Rabbi Mark said that he'd never come across a community with such a thirst for learning as Sukkat Shalom - a thirst that he encourages. His twice weekly classes this year have included continuing Talmud study, further studies of Maimonides and the new (to us) topic of 11th/12th Century Jewish poet and philosopher Judah Halevi. Rabbi Mark continues to offer his Exploring Judaism programme for people who are in the process of converting or thinking about doing so.

In addition, we benefit from the free Biblical Hebrew classes offered at four levels by Rabbis Aaron Goldstein and Lea Muhlstein at The Ark, the Leo Baek College diverse Lehrhaus programme and the extensive – and free - Liberal Judaism Education Hub programme. All these classes and programmes operate on Zoom (Exploring Judaism combines Zoom only and hybrid classes) with recordings available afterwards, making them accessible to many people.

Sue Bard

COMMUNICATIONS

Weekly Reminders

Our weekly reminders came into their own during lockdown and remain our most important vehicle of communication with our far-flung membership. Thank you to Gillian Raab who does most of the unremitting work involved in gathering information and getting it out, helped by Sue Bard, Rebekah Gronowski, Maurice Naftalin and Nick Silk.

Our newsletter, Etrog

Our bi-monthly newsletter, Etrog, like our reminders is produced and distributed online, using mailchimp, with print copies posted out to anyone who requests this.

This year we have documented our cycle of festival celebrations and the life events of our members, including memorable bnei mitzvah, admission ceremonies and baby-namings, and significantly the first same-sex Jewish marriage in Scotland of two of our members, conducted by our rabbi. Our own members, with their diverse histories and differing routes that have brought them to Sukkat Shalom are a source of fascination and interest. We have marked our members many creative achievements and written about aspects of our own Jewish history and the cultural and political context we live in.

Thank you to the other members of the newsletter team, Lexy Ray who brings her professional skills to the design and production of the electronic version of Etrog, to Gillian Raab who designs, produces and assembles the print version and to Charlie Raab and Rebekah Gronowski for their hawk-eyed editing and proofreading skills. Thank you also to our many members who've contributed, or contributed to articles, including bnei-mitzvah who have allowed us to publish their impressive *devarim*.

Sue Bard

Social Media

Important and necessary aims for the coming year are to commission a new website and to get our Facebook and twitter accounts fully functioning. We hope that the work that our Members' Subgroup is doing with their members' survey will identify people with the desire and skills to help with this work.

Our public Facebook page is not updated at present but should include information about services and events.

In addition we have two private 'members only' groups (members, associate members and known associates), including 'Sukkat Shalom Equalities Group'.

We are lucky to have a Liberal Judaism Board National Officer and York Liberal Jewish Community Deputy who posts very interesting information about LGBTQ+ activities nationally and Mitzvah Day activities. I thank him for his input which is so much appreciated. Thank you also to Helen Ford who maintained our social media accounts over a long period of time.

Rebekah Gronowski

CARE AND SUPPORT

A successful new initiative this year facilitated by Sukkat Shalom member, cheder teacher and psychiatrist Lizzie Robertson, was a 'Spaces for Listening' six session programme accessible on a one off or repeat basis. 'Spaces For Listening' offers a simple, structured process whereby each member of a small participating group has an equal opportunity to share thoughts and feelings and to experience an equality of listening. We're very grateful to Lizzie for introducing the idea, and for her time and effort in implementing it. Our WhatsApp group (ELJC Care and Support) offers informal mutual support and quick

communication to its members. Following problems encountered in 2021, it's now moderated.

The Care Team, consisting of Joe Goldblatt and Des Shanko continued to contact people experiencing illness or bereavement, and we'd like to thank Joe for his work in this area before he recently stepped down.

Sue Bard

