



THE JEWISH CONGREGATION OF NEW PALTZ KEHILLAT AHAVAT ACHIM

קהילת אהבת אחים

Congressional Information

Date: October 18, 2021

Synagogue Name: Jewish Congregation of New Paltz / Kehillat Ahavat Achim

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Websites candidates can review for more information for the general geographic area:

- <https://www.newpaltzchamber.org/>
- <https://www.iloveny.com/places-to-go/udson-valley/spotlight-new-paltz/>
- <https://hvmag.com/>

Rabbi Search Chairperson(s)

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Part I: JCNP Primary Mission

Who are we as a congregation?

Since our founding in 1964 and subsequent affiliation with the Reconstructionist Movement in 1984, Kehillat Ahavat Achim, the Jewish Congregation of New Paltz, has been a vibrant, egalitarian congregation. We are an intergenerational community, open to all Jews (by birth and by affiliation): singles, families, LGBTQ, interracial, interfaith couples, and interfaith families. Our congregation is also committed to maintaining a respectful attitude for other faiths.

We are a place of prayer where individuals with varied spiritual goals and leanings find a comfortable home, and we are committed to creative education and meaningful Jewish study for our children and adult members.

We view our Congregation as a place of gathering where we connect with others through social, religious, and social justice activities. We embrace Jewish culture and gather for Jewish-centered events. We have two buildings – a

sanctuary and a community center – to support the varied and vibrant opportunities we foster in our community above and beyond services.

With a deep respect for tradition, we seek to evolve as the world around us evolves. Together we learn, share lifecycle events, support each other, and commit to tikkun olam. We are heavily reliant on volunteers, and through numerous activities and functions, our members participate and add their experience and talent to the community.

Liberal in our Jewish Values

- We are a community that is largely (though hardly exclusively) liberal, progressive, and secular in its Judaism. We view ourselves as democratic and egalitarian.
- We view Judaism as a culture in addition to a religion, and although we are deeply committed to educating our children (and ourselves) in Jewish tradition and scholarship, we seek to bridge the gap between the religious, the cultural, and the current world we live in.
- While traditional in our services, we accept and encourage diverse ways of being Jewish.

Community and Social Justice Focused

- We have a strong sense of community and share a common cultural heritage.
- We are committed to social justice in our community and seek out ways to participate in this endeavor - we are proud of our affiliation with Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and contributions made to the organization.
- We have a strong commitment to women taking an equal part in Jewish rituals and life; women are deeply valued and model the way for the next generation.
- We recognize and respect all gender definitions and individual intersectionality.

Educational and Intellectual

- We are a place of learning and we believe in setting strong educational goals across the life cycle.
- We view Reconstructionism as a place to grow deeper into Judaism and where we can question our traditions.
- We place a premium on intellectual teaching and learning as well as spiritual growth.
- ***What is our mission?***
- The objective of this congregation shall be to maintain a synagogue for divine worship and religious observance in accordance with the precepts and tenets of Judaism; to maintain a school for instruction in religious doctrines and Jewish culture; to foster Jewish sentiments and strengthen Jewish consciousness by cultivating social relations and encourage social service and religious observance; to provide and maintain premises for the physical, moral and mental development of its members; to cultivate Jewish thought and action with a view toward uniting Jewry in bonds of fellowship and in appreciation of their common heritage; and for benevolent and charitable accomplishments.

In addition to leading religious services, what are the three next most important tasks/priorities/roles of the rabbi?

Teaching

- We believe deeply in Jewish education that begins at a young age and continues in myriad ways over the course of a lifetime.

- Our Hebrew School is the core of our youth education and b'nai mitzvah efforts. It requires attention and nurturing from our rabbi.
- Adult Jewish education takes many forms at the synagogue, some of which involve the rabbi others of which involve engagement between members and non-members.

Pastoral Congregational and Community Outreach

- Reaching out to our congregation and performing pastoral duties.
- Checking in on people's well-being and effectively responding to people.
- Performing Jewish rites; notably, B'Nai Mitzvah, funerals, weddings, baby-namings.
- Reaching out to other Jews and religious leaders in the community to foster communication and share social justice actions.

Congregational Engagement & Retention

- Engaging with congregational families and keeping them involved with the synagogue.
- Attracting younger families and retaining membership.

What are our congregation's strengths?

- We believe deeply in Jewish Education and welcoming our children into our community.
- We are an inclusive community who value the differences among us.
- We have built strong relationships over the years and exhibit true camaraderie; we take care of each other. We are introspective regarding rituals, how to run the shul, and about the values we support.
- The synagogue doesn't stand still –we evolve by talking through conflicts and coming up with solutions appropriate to our congregation and the broader community.
- There are meaningful and engaging roles for all that want to participate.

What are our congregation's challenges?

Attracting and Retaining Members

- Like many congregations who are losing members, this remains a challenge for us.

Community Engagement and Spiritual Inspiration

- We have a talented group of congregants and need to keep them actively engaged in volunteering for roles within our community
- We need to bridge generational divides and foster a vibrant inter-generational community.

What role do we want the rabbi to play in meeting these challenges?

- The rabbi will play a critical role in meeting these challenges. We seek a rabbi who is interested in sustaining and growing our congregation by actively engaging with existing members and attracting new ones. Although he/she will start out as a part-time rabbi, we would like to see the congregation grow large enough for the position to become full-time.

What is it about our synagogue that makes us particularly attractive to a rabbi?

- JCNP is in a vibrant community that leverages its proximity to a vast array of amenities to bolster the intellectual and spiritual life of congregation. These amenities include mountains, farms, nature preserves, and universities right in our backyard as well as New York City less than 90 miles away.

Part II: Demographics

Total households/memberships: approximately 100

Synagogue Facilities

- We own two buildings outright:
 - A Sanctuary building, which houses our sanctuary, a classroom, a small library, an oneg space, and small kitchen.
 - A Community Center with 2 kosher-style kitchens (1 large, 1 small), 2 classrooms, a library, an office for the rabbi, and a large open gathering space with room for 100-125 people. We hold our lunches and programs in this space.

Religious Life

- **Shabbat Services:** Shabbat services are typically held in our Sanctuary - This space can hold approximately 125 people. Pre- the majority of our services are Friday night/Kabbalat Shabbat services. Shabbat morning services are held monthly for Hebrew School classes; in a series for adult education and individually for all B'nai Mitzvahs.
- **Siddurs:** We have multiple siddurs for Friday night services, Saturday morning worship, the High Holidays and festivals such as Pesach. With the exception of the Torah, our siddur and liturgical texts are all curated from multiple texts and include original works from our current rabbi.
- **Goals for Shabbat and Festival Services:** To provide meaningful and familiar Jewish experiences that incorporate broad participation and engagement from the community (e.g. readers, singers, committee engagement).
- **Sermon or Torah discussion:** We generally have a sermon at Friday night services and Torah discussion on Saturday mornings. On most Saturdays, Torah study is in place of a morning service
- **Congregational Singing:** We have a choir "The Chai Notes" who sing monthly at Shabbat Services and at High Holidays and Festivals. In addition, the congregation sings along at every service, which is a well-loved part of our culture.
- **Balance of Hebrew and English:** 50/50 at Services; English elsewhere.

Torah Reading: Whenever possible, interested congregants can read Torah. We are very generous with the Bima and encourage maximum participation. Rabbi reads parts that he selects or when there is an absence of volunteers.

- **High Holy Day Services:** There are many moving parts to the High Holy Days with most members having some form of engagement. From leading a short contemplative pre-service, to running a children's service, to reading the Torah portions, singing, handing out booklets or planning luncheons, the Ritual committee works with the Rabbi to give out over 100 small tasks, which creates a cohesive and engaged experience.

Congregation's Current Approach to:

- **Music and Instrumental Music:** From vocals to guitars, drums to piano, music is an inherent and welcomed part of our rituals
- **Egalitarianism:** Each adult member of the congregation, defined as post b'nai mitzvah, has an equal and independent opportunity to fully participate in our rituals. The only distinctions are that non-Jewish members cannot have independent Torah honors (e.g. Aliyah, carrying the Torah or parsha to chant), but they can accompany Jewish family members who are partaking in those activities. There are no distinctions between genders in terms of participation in rituals.
- **Interfaith families:** We extend open arms to Interfaith families/singles.
- **Gay and lesbian families:** We extend open arms to gay and lesbian families/singles.

Programming - Key Examples

- **"Thursday Night Live":** This is a series of Thursday evening events open to all congregants (free of charge) and the broader community (small charge). The events range from Jewish-themed movies, to food events, to financial education, etc. The costs for these events are generally underwritten by community supporters (e.g. banks, insurance companies, restaurants) and it is one of our most successful programs.
- **Purimschpiel:** We have a talented group of performers in our congregation who put on plays and other events periodically; each year this group produces a Purim-themed evening for adults only which always draws a large crowd and is a highlight of the year.
- **Rosh Hashanah Luncheon:** Pre-Covid- we put on a large festive luncheon on Day 1 of Rosh Hashanah following Tashlich. We have had up to 125 people attend this no-cost event.
- **Current adult education program:** In addition to "Thursday Night Live, above and Torah study, our Rabbi holds various workshop during the year on Jewish-themed topics. He also runs "semester long" series' on topics that vary (Holocaust studies; biblical periods in history; Kabbalah). These are based on interest and time.
- **Current social justice programs**

What does our congregation do to reach out to the unaffiliated?

Not enough! We invite the broader surrounding area to our services/High Holidays as well as our Thursday Night Live series, and we partner with community interfaith leaders on specific initiatives (e.g. Social Justice and the environment) but we do not have any formal programs at this time for community outreach.

Other committees and programs the candidate should know about:

Our (all volunteer) synagogue committees include:

- Caring Committee
- Tikkun Olam
- Interfaith Earth Action Committee
- Finance Committee
- Fundraising Committee
- Hebrew School Committee

- Board of Trustees and Executive Committee
- Ritual Committee
- The Chai Notes (Choir)
- The Kitchen Committee/Festivals
- Adult Programming
- Temporary ad-hoc committees as needed and Publication of our monthly “Sh’ma”

Rabbi’s Role in Synagogue Governance: The Rabbi has a key role in Ritual and Hebrew School governance, and certainly has the opportunity to weigh in on all other synagogue matters brought to the Board of Trustees and/or Executive Committee.

The Rabbi is a non-voting member of the Board of Trustees who participates fully in non-executive session meetings.

Youth Education: We believe strongly in educating our children in Jewish religious theory and practices, and we have built a Hebrew School that ensures education from Pre-K (via our Chaverim Arts program) through B’Nai Mitzvah.

- In 2021 we have 16 students in grades K-8.
- We are especially proud to prepare each individual child to stretch themselves to run a complete Shabbat service. We do not group the children; our B’nai Mitzvahs are held one at a time, and students do readings and prayers on Friday night, they chant their Torah Portion and Maftir, read their Haftarah in English and give both their interpretation of their connection and a speech. Students are challenged to do as much as possible, with accommodation made for those who need them. This experience creates strong bonds among classmates and the B’nai Mitzvah families.