

WHAT IS OUTREACH? AND WHAT IS PROJECT WELCOME?

Outreach is a Jewish community effort to welcome those seeking a stronger connection to Judaism: Jews-by-Choice, interfaith couples and families, parents of interfaith married children, and everyone interested in knowing more about Judaism.

Project Welcome is an outreach program welcoming interfaith families, unaffiliated Jews and seekers into Independent, Renewal, Reconstructionist, Reform and Conservative synagogues.



Jewish Mosaic is the first national organization dedicated to helping the Jewish world become more open, accessible, and welcoming to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Jews and their families.

Need more info? Visit www.jewishmosaic.org

Project Welcome offers a new “gift” like this one each month.



CLICK ON THE GIFT at www.ProjectWelcome.org



PROJECT WELCOME

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Jewish Pride

Celebrating LGBT Voices in Our Community

“Who is honored and respected? One who honors and respects others.”
(Pirkey Avot 4:1)

Project Welcome and Jewish Mosaic bring you voices from the Bay Area LGBT community who have found inclusion and comfort in synagogue life.



Noach Dzmura
Berkeley, CA

“If you met me at Kiddush, you would see a chubby young man with a beard that hasn’t grown in yet. But I have 35 years of experience living as a woman, and eight as a man. The challenge then, is how much of that complicated past can I tell you before you choke on your *challah*?” Noach feels most welcome in a Jewish classroom, where students are expected to express diverse opinions, secure in the knowledge that their words will be valued by teacher and peers. A Jew-by-Choice, Noach had a Reform conversion, but feels very comfortable in Conservative and Renewal communities.

Noach was granted the Haas/Koshland Memorial Award in 2006, an annual grant that funds a year of study and personal development in Israel. He and his partner, Mycroft Holmes, recently celebrated their *tenaim*, pledging their commitment to each other while Noach studies in Jerusalem for a year.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“I look for educational opportunities, not just those taught by rabbis but also by members of the synagogue. I look for diversity in the regular services because diversity in services means diversity in the welcoming of different people. And I look for who’s there: does even one person in the congregation look like me?”



Andrew Ramer
San Francisco, CA

With a mother from a Communist family and a father from an Orthodox family, Andrew describes his Jewish experience as both spiritual (from the Communist side) and practical (from the Orthodox side). Andrew planned to go to rabbinic school, but changed his mind after coming out in 1973, saying he knew he couldn’t go back in the closet. He notes, “I never thought things would change as much as they have in my lifetime.” After exploring various spiritual paths, Andrew felt drawn back to Judaism. He found Congregation Sha’ar Zahav, where he says, “This is the first community where I’m able to be gay and Jewish under the same roof. I was accepted in other places, but I didn’t want to be accepted. I want to belong.”

Andrew works for the Jewish Community Library. His next book will be released in 2007, titled “Queering the Text: Biblical, Medieval, and Modern Jewish Stories.”

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“Someone who will come up to me in the oneg room and say, ‘Hi.’ As a gay man, I want to find a reflection of my gayness in the liturgy; an LGBT chavurah, classes, a recognition of Pride, an affiliation with a queer organization.”



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Naomi Fine
Palo Alto, CA

As a young woman, Naomi rejected her Jewish upbringing. After law school, she was introduced to the Renewal movement and came back to Judaism. She first got very involved in Kehilla Community Synagogue and then in Chochmat HaLev. After moving to the Peninsula with her wife, Kathy, they co-founded Mishkan HaLev, a Renewal community on the Peninsula. Naomi is deeply connected to the Jewish community. She says, “When I get called to help, I try to step up to do what needs to be done.”

Naomi and her wife, Kathy Levinson, have two children, Reade, 13, and Parker, 10. Today, both children attend Gideon Hausner Jewish Hebrew Day School where Kathy is President. Reade recently became Bat Mitzvah.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“Language. Are assumptions made about me being married? If so, do they assume I have a husband? I also look for activities like the South Bay series about homosexuality and Judaism, gay and lesbian events, discussions and groups.”



Kenny Altman
San Francisco, CA

The former president of Congregation Beth Sholom (and that congregation’s first openly gay president), Kenny started Keshet, a Gay and Lesbian *chavurah* and outreach program of Beth Sholom, in 1997. Kenny came back to Judaism in midlife, looking for support while caring for his friend with AIDS dementia. Always comfortable with Conservative Judaism, he wanted to join the synagogue, but did not want to “edit” himself. He found the congregation and Rabbi Lew to be very open to listening and to change.

Kenny has been the Administrative Manager for Parents Place at the Jewish Family and Children Services for the past eleven years. “I realize how incredibly lucky I am. I decided ten years ago I wanted join a Conservative Synagogue and I just ended up in the right place. I found community in my job and in my synagogue. I want people who are struggling with their identities to know that there are many places where they can belong as Jews.”

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

“I make sure there is a gay and lesbian presence by talking to the leadership, the clergy and looking through the marketing materials. Especially in Conservative congregations, it’s not only saying you have LGBT members, but having a special outreach program. It should be clear than anyone who wants Conservative Judaism is welcome here, not only at Congregation Beth Sholom, but at Conservative synagogues in general in San Francisco and the Bay Area.”



Sharon Papo
Santa Cruz, CA

Through youth group, camp, Israel trips and Hillel, Sharon has been actively involved in the Jewish community throughout her life. To her, family always meant community, gatherings and holiday celebrations. However, in college, Sharon says she felt fragmented, not sure what it meant to be fully out in the Jewish community and not sure what it meant to be a Jew in the LGBT community. Then, Sharon had the opportunity to plan the National Union of Jewish LGBTIQQ Students Conference, which she describes as a healing experience. Today, Sharon remains passionately involved in the community through her many jobs, working with queer youth, training Jewish organizations about diversity, teaching belly dancing to enhance self-esteem and coordinating workshops for Jewish non-profit interns.

Sharon lovingly describes her wife, Amber, as a Jew by Choice. They belong to Beth El (Reform) and Chadeish Yameinu (Renewal), where they have found welcoming and supportive communities. "A synagogue is a gathering place for learning and for prayer. It's so important that they are welcoming and inviting to everyone."

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

"I want to know that the members are comfortable with language that honors and acknowledges our relationship; to be able to say that Amber is my wife, not just my partner...It's not just the congregation saying that we are welcome, but really being proud to have us as members."



Bonnie Feinberg
San Francisco, CA

Bonnie, the director of the LGBT Alliance of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation, grew up attending a modern orthodox synagogue and for a short time, yeshiva, but was not comfortable with the strict observance and says she stopped attending synagogue as an adult. "But I always liked learning about the culture; interpreting what it means to be Jewish and making it your own." Bonnie's partner, Beth, brought her back to synagogue life, introducing her to Kehilla Community Synagogue. She found that Kehilla felt comfortable and welcoming in a way synagogues hadn't in the past. She loves the diversity at Kehilla. "It's a place where the expression of different Jewish perspectives is the rule rather than the exception."

As a Jewish professional, Bonnie feels she can best express her Judaism through her work. As the LGBT Alliance director Bonnie will be participating in a trip to Israel for World Pride, which hosts local and national non-Jewish LGBT leaders, in order to offer them a personal experience of Israel. Bonnie and Beth are planning their wedding for October 2006.

When you go to a new synagogue, what do you look for to feel welcome?

"Being welcomed at the door—verbally—by member/s of the congregation.

A synagogue member should call new comers as a follow up to see how they liked the service/have any questions; I need to know that the institution is open to newcomers, not just tolerant, but welcoming."