



BETH CHAI NEWS

The Greater Washington Jewish Humanist Congregation

Beth Chai's Lists: Stay in Touch and Informed

Is the summer, when school is out and Beth Chai activities are few, making you feel as if you're out of touch with the congregation and your friends there? Well, last fall Beth Chai launched a new electronic mailing list that has added to the opportunities for contact and community-building among members. Since we now have a number of online communications vehicles, it makes sense to provide this quick guide to their use:

bethchaiboard

In operation for some years, this mailing list (sometimes referred to as a listserv) is the Board's vehicle for disseminating notices and discussion of ongoing business and matters of governance.

Despite its name, **bethchaiboard** is open to all members of the congregation, many of whom consult it to stay on top of what the Board is doing. Appearing on this list, in addition to agendas and minutes of Board meetings, are exchanges on such topics as the congregation budget, the upcoming release of Rabbi Art Blecher's book, and the proposal for a quick vote on a resolution supporting action on Darfur. Activity on it is not brisk enough that anyone need be concerned about an overflowing inbox. If you wish to be added to this group, please get in touch with Ron Leve, whose contact info is to be found at the end of this article.

BethChai

BethChai is the name of the new list, which is circulated via Yahoo Groups. It can be used to disseminate announcements or carry on exchanges of general interest to Beth Chai members. Recent posts have ranged from notices of Jewish-related events in the community and

Annual Dues to Increase After Multi-Year Pause

The new Board, after long and thoughtful discussion, voted at its June meeting to raise congregational dues for the coming year. The increase, amounting to around 10 percent in each membership category, is Beth Chai's first in several years. The previous Board had held the line on dues at its last meeting. The new board reluctantly made the change upon seeing final projections of the congregation's 2007-08 expenditures – which will cover a professional cantor for all three High Holiday services, a Beth Chai first, as well as hikes in both rental fees and teacher salaries.

The dues levels for the coming year are set at: Individual Membership, \$385; Single-Parent Family, \$550; Family, \$635; and Benefactor, \$750. These increases are, in the Board's judgment, moderate yet indispensable to supporting the number, quality, and variety of Beth Chai's programs in the face of rising operating costs.



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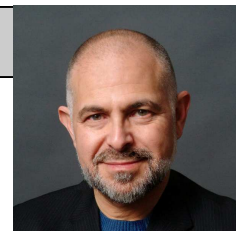
Beth Chai Directory

Position	Name (* = Board Member)	Telephone	Email
Rabbi	Dr. Arthur Blecher	202-462-5448	ablecher@starpower.net
Education Director	Rain Zohav	301-294-8849	rainzohav@earthlink.net
President	Andrew Strongin*	301-585-4428	astrongin@starpower.net
Vice President	David Elfin*	301-320-5646	ElfinD@verizon.net
Secretary/Past President	Deborah Signer Balaschak*	301-897-4909	balasig@verizon.net
Treasurer	Pat Lovenhart*	703-698-5012	pat@lovenhart.com
Community Building Chair	Shannon Rudisill*	703-752-5809	JMG_SLR@hotmail.com
Family School Chair	Susan Stewart*	703-288-6533	SStew@aol.com
Fundraising Chair	Ron Leve*	202-496-9292	theron@comcast.net
Liturgy Chair	Rob Weinstein*	301-215-6445	crobnlynn@earthlink.net
Membership Co-Chair	Reed Dewey*	301-718-0262	reed-dewey@verizon.net
Membership Co-Chair	Julie Zalkind	703-522-1023	juliehz@erols.com
Music Chair	Marji Ross*	703-917-0590	mross@eaglepub.com
Program Co-Chair	Ken Jacobson	301-920-2094	kenjacobson@hotmail.com
Program Co-Chair	Mike Wexler*	202-237-1216	ela.mike@verizon.net
Social Action Chair	Howie Feinstein*	301-564-9482	khfeinstein@us.net
Tot Shabbat Coordinator	Joe Gitchell	301-656-6124	jpgitchel@pinneyassociates.com
Bookkeeper/Accounts Payable	Diane Page	703-534-5839	dmpage1@comcast.net
Correspondent	Elizabeth Mumford	301-656-6124	eam222@verizon.net
Communications Chair	Julie Vigdor*	202-537-1001	julievigdor@yahoo.com
Newsletter Editor	Judy Gordon	301-230-0970	justplus3@comcast.net
Parent Council Coordinator	Lisa Spain	240-632-9239	pansi1213@yahoo.com
Sunday School Volunteer Coordinator	Lynn Weinstein	301-215-6445	crobnlynn@earthlink.net
Webmaster	Jules Aronson	301-229-9239	jparonson@speakeasy.net
Beth Chai Web Site	Beth Chai Answering Service/ Email	301-229-7400	www.bethchai.org; info@bethchai.org

Financial Need Policy: Beth Chai welcomes anyone to attend services, become a member, or have their children attend our Jewish Family School, regardless of ability to pay. Considerations available include extended payment plans, service exchange, and fee reduction. Financial aid determination will be made on a case by case basis. Please contact Pat Lovenhart for assistance.

 Community News 	
<p>Deepest Sympathies...</p> <p>...to Jim Clay, the partner of Rabbi Art Blecher, on the death of his father, James W. Clay, Sr.</p> <p>Get-Well Wishes...</p> <p>...to Sylvia Schneer, the daughter of Sara Duke and Matt Schneer, for a speedy recovery from her recent hospitalization.</p> <p>...to Laurie Dewey, the mother of Reed Dewey, for a rapid recovery from her recent surgery.</p>	<p>Congratulations...</p> <p>...to Karen and Howie Feinstein on the arrival of their first grandchild, Luca Eli Fierro-Feinstein, born on May 22 to Justin Feinstein and Julia Fierro.</p> <p>Announcing...</p> <p>...the startup of www.ArthurBlecher.com, a Web site honoring Rabbi Art Blecher's forthcoming book, <i>The New American Judaism</i>, and featuring Art's new blog.</p>

Rabbi's Message



Judaism in America Today — Part VI

The denominations of American Judaism are twentieth-century creations. As much as they claim to be the evolved form of Old World Judaism, the fact is that they are institutions copied from modern Christian practice. At the same time, Denominational Judaism meets an important historical need of Jews: to live within their own organized society. Denominational Judaism reflects the fact that the Jewish people see themselves as a nation. Nations have territories, capitals, armies. The Jewish people had all these at one time, and the modern State of Israel has them now. The Jews of the Diaspora, on the other hand, possessed none of these physical symbols of nationhood. Of course, they enjoyed many of the riches of a great civilization: literature, law, music, art, language, history, religion. But they had neither palaces nor kings because they had no country of their own. So when the denominations invented themselves in the beginning of the twentieth century as the shadow government of American Jewry, they filled a thousand-year-old longing for national legitimacy.

A century ago, the concept of a restored Jewish homeland in the ancestral territory was little more than a tentative hope. In its stead, each denomination offered American Jews the opportunity to belong to an organized civic body possessed of central and regional offices, laws and regulations, taxes and benefits, flags and insignia, national heads and world ambassadors, prestige and power. Even though in reality Denominational Judaism was as green as the immigrants themselves, the idea of a national Jewish establishment was very appealing.



Each of the denominations promised the immigrant generation that tradition would be preserved and reassured them that the innovations of American Judaism were necessary to keep Judaism alive. A hundred years ago the Jewish community quickly accepted the myth of denominational authority, and it continues to do so because the denominations' institutions have proved strong and enduring. American Jews trust the power and the stability of the denominational structure to safeguard their most sacred possession: the memory of their ancestors.

To the extent that rabbis function as the representatives of Denominational Judaism, the ministers of congregations, and the celebrants of Jewish ceremonies, the American rabbinate is a product of the twentieth century. Modern American rabbis also serve as exemplars of the Jewish people's love of ancient learning. Their leadership within the Jewish community derives from their expertise, their power to receive and transmit the knowledge of Jewish civilization.

Whether or not their claims of ancestral authority are justified in the light of history, rabbis represent the connection to Judaism's founding sages. Rabbis are respected because the ancient knowledge they possess is revered by the Jewish people. In some religions, clerics have power because they represent channels to God. The myth of rabbinic authority, on the other hand, is very powerful because rabbis represent channels to what American Judaism holds most sacred: its ancestors.

RABBI ARTHUR BLECHER

Letter from the Education Director - Summer 2007



Dear Congregants,

Things are shaping up nicely for the coming year. Most of the Sunday School staff is in place, and both Susan Stewart and Michele Sturm will be helping to update the curriculum over the summer.

We had a very well attended Parents' Council meeting at the beginning of the summer. At that meeting, we realized that because Passover and Montgomery County Spring Break will not coincide next year, our spring semester risked being very chopped up. So, in the interest of classroom continuity, we moved off April's calendar two events that have previously taken place during that month: Community Work Day is now scheduled for June 1, and the Beth Chai retreat is set for the second weekend of this October.

We are still in the process of deciding whether there is enough need for babysitting for pre-schoolers in the off weeks to rent a room and have several of our teens pitch in for community-service credit. If you are would like this option, please email me at rainzohav@earthlink.net.

We are also trying to gauge the interest in Hebrew for Mitzvah and, possibly, sixth-grade students in the 9:30-10 AM time slot. Those taking part would do so instead of attending music assembly. If you are interested in this for your student, please contact me.

I am pleased to report that the vast majority of this year's Mitzvah class has chosen to continue their Jewish education in our post-Mitzvah class. This is the second year we have been able to offer this class. It seems so important to me, as some of the deeper issues that we want our students to engage can really only be approached in an appropriate way after the age of 13.

I am thrilled that Beth Chai member, professional teacher, and mother Sandi Foster will be teaching pre-school this year. Ophra, Rella, Lonny, Danielle, Dave, and Jackie Hess will all be returning to teach, Jackie after a two year sabbatical. I am in the process of interviewing for the sixth-grade teacher and a teacher's aide for the fifth grade. Once again, if you know someone who might be interested, please have them contact me.

Thank you to the families that have already registered. This greatly enhances my ability to plan for the coming year. Please keep your eye out for school enrollment forms on the Beth Chai email events list and on the website. We will waive the registration fee for all whose forms we receive by August 15.

Over the coming year, I hope to find various ways to share what I brought back from the two weeks of Jewish learning in New Mexico that I took part in from July 1-16. Except for a short vacation at the beginning of August, I will spend most of the rest of the summer at home, working on ordering supplies and textbooks, and meeting with teachers as well. Please feel free to call or email me with any questions, suggestions, or concerns that you have about the school in general or your student in particular.

I hope you are all having a lovely summer.

*B'Shalom,
Rain Zohav*

First Dues Increase in Several Years

(continued from front page)

At the same time, they will help prevent the congregation's becoming overly reliant on fundraising activities. School fees are to remain unchanged for the coming year.

The Board asks those members who are able to consider becoming a "Benefactor" or otherwise supplementing their dues with a donation to help maintain our programmatic excellence. A space will be provided on the membership renewal form for indicating such a contribution. Beth Chai also has a Financial Need Policy, details of which may be found on page 2, beneath the Directory. In all cases, both dues and additional donations are tax deductible.

We count on your helping us continue to offer the unique programs for which Beth Chai has come to be known.

Farmer for a Day:

Help the Hungry by Joining the Harvest on Aug. 19

Don't have your own farm, but want to do a little farming this summer? Then come help pick produce for those in need! On **Sunday, August 19**, Beth Chai will join other volunteer organizations helping to harvest produce for Food for Others (www.foodforothers.org). Harvesting will take place from 10:00 AM-12:30 PM at the USDA Agricultural Research Center, a 7,000-acre facility in Beltsville, MD.

Food for Others is the primary safety net for residents of Northern Virginia who need food assistance when an emergency strikes, as well as for the growing number of working poor there who are unable to make ends meet.



There is no age limit for participants, but young children must be supervised. All volunteers may take some produce home to their own families. If you are going to be in town on August 19 and want to take part, please contact Julie Vigdor (julievigdor@yahoo.com or 202-537-1001) so we can let the farm know how many hands will be helping. Directions to the farm and release forms will follow in the summer email announcements.

Even though we live in one of the wealthiest areas of one of the wealthiest nations on earth, there are still families and individuals in our area who don't have the resources or the means to provide for themselves. We can help!



Staff and volunteers sort donations at the Food For Others warehouse in Fairfax, Virginia.

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The organization provides bulk food to community-based organizations and operates food distributions in low-income neighborhoods. Its food inventory comes from various bulk food donations, as well as a gleaning program that harvests fresh produce. Through the gleaning program volunteer families, community groups, and schools have an opportunity to learn about the prevalence of hunger and to help those in need.

Little of the produce at USDA's Beltsville site is sprayed with pesticides or herbicides, making it nearly organic. The harvest will be transported by Food for Others to its warehouse in Fairfax, VA, from which it will be distributed to thousands of hungry people in our area.



A scene from last year's harvesting program at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

Coming to Your Mailbox This Summer: Membership Renewal Packets

The Beth Chai membership renewal packets were scheduled to be mailed out sometime around the middle or end of July, so you should receive them soon if you haven't already. Please take the time to fill the forms out and return them to us – sooner is better than later. All Beth Chai operations and events tend to run more smoothly when we have an accurate member database to work with. If you renew by **August 15th**, we will mail your High Holiday tickets to you, and you can avoid the crowd at the “will call” desk picking up tickets on the day of services.

It's especially helpful to have registrations in early for Sunday school: Planning for classes goes so much better when we have all the information in hand before the start of the new school year. In addition, we will waive the registration fee for all school enrollment forms we receive by **August 15**.

This year the first day of Sunday school will be **September 9th**. Remember, you can also register your children for school by visiting our web site, <http://www.bethchai.org/school.html>, and clicking on the School Registration Form. Just print the form, fill it in, and send it to Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20817, along with your check for the tuition amount or your note about your online credit card payment. (To pay by credit card, scroll down the Beth Chai Sunday school page to find the PayPal credit card button, click on it, and follow the instructions you'll find there.)

We thank you for your support of the congregation and look forward to seeing you all at the next Beth Chai event!

~ Mark Your Calendars ~ High Holy Days at Beth Chai Congregation

Here's the schedule. Look for full details in September's newsletter and posted on www.BethChai.org.

Rosh Hashanah

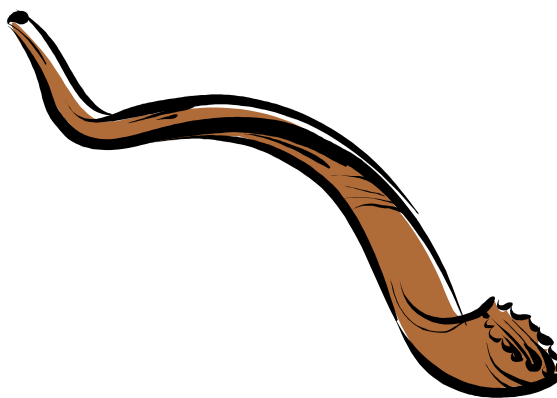
Thursday, September 13
9:30 AM Family Service
10:30 AM Adult Service
followed by Kiddush

Kol Nidre

Friday, September 21 at 7:30 PM

Yom Kippur

Saturday, September 22
9:30 AM Family Service
10:30 AM Adult Service
6:00 PM Break-the-Fast Potluck



All services at Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC
6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD
(Entrance to parking lot on Whittier Blvd.)

The Scoop on Beth Chai Electronic Mailing Lists

(continued from front page)

reading suggestions to a request for an item for a family in need – and there’s even the occasional giveaway. All are encouraged to contribute information or bring up topics they believe other members might like to discuss, but we ask that discretion be exercised so that the list can remain unmoderated. By the way, if you take photos at Beth Chai events, this would be the place to display them.

If you wish to join **BethChai**, its home is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BethChai> (or, if you need help, Ron Leve is available to provide it). Yahoo Groups has been upgraded with new capabilities, and it is suggested that you receive messages in the “fully featured” mode to take advantage of them. Activity is on the low side for this group as well.

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For the record, this is the congregation’s third list, but it is for the exclusive use of Board members for matters involving personnel or requiring privacy.

Please direct all questions, comments, or requests for help in gaining access to either of the two open lists to Ron Leve at TheRon@comcast.net or 202-496-9292.

Give the Gift of Beth Chai to Others

Part of what makes Beth Chai special is how we welcome guests and new members to our community. With the High Holidays around the corner, this is a great time to encourage your friends and acquaintances to check out Beth Chai. High Holiday services offer an excellent vantage on Beth Chai to those who are now looking for what you, too, were once looking for.

Since everyone gets something a little different from the Beth Chai experience, the most important thing is to tell your friends about what Beth Chai means to you. If we all reached out to one or two people, it would easily help us to continue attracting new members.

If you have any questions about membership, feel free to contact Membership Co-Chairs Julie Zalkind at (703) 522-1023 julie@hzmgt.com or Reed Dewey at (301) 718-0262 reed-dewey@verizon.net. Thanks in advance for your help in spreading the word!

Creek Cleanup In Silver Spring Set for August 5

Please join your environmentally conscious friends from Beth Chai in a park cleanup scheduled for Sunday, August 5, from 10:30 AM to noon – a potluck picnic to be held immediately afterwards will be your reward. The cleanup will take place at Silver Spring’s abidingly peaceful Sligo Creek at the intersection of Wayne Ave. and Sligo Creek Pkwy., not far from the newly bustling downtown Silver Spring.

Gardening gloves and trash bags will be provided courtesy of the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning. Mary Ellen Petrisko is coordinating this event. If you are able to join in, please call her at 301-920-2094 by Friday, August 3, so that she can give you further information and find out what you’ll be bringing to the picnic. Hope to see you there!



Calendar of Events

Date & Time	Event	Location
Sunday, August 5, 10:30 AM – early afternoon	Park cleanup from 10:30 AM – Noon, followed by pot-luck picnic. See story on page 7 for details; RSVP by August 3 to Mary Ellen Petrisko at 301-920-2094.	Sligo Creek at the intersection of Wayne Ave. and Sligo Creek Pkwy., Silver Spring, MD
Sunday, August 19, 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM	Harvesting project to benefit people in need. See story on page 5 for details; RSVP to Julie Vigdor at julievigdor@yahoo.com or 202-537-1001.	USDA Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, MD
Friday, September 7, Light supper at 7 PM, Service at 8 PM	First Shabbat of the 2007-08 year. Please watch announcements for program.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, Fireside Room on second floor. 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)
Sunday, September 9, Sunday School Assembly at 9:30 AM, Class and Adult Ed. at 10 AM	First day of 2007-08 school year. Parents' Meeting and Adult Ed. Please watch announcements for detailed schedule and Adult Ed. program.	Burning Tree Elementary School, 7900 Beech Tree Rd., Bethesda, MD
Thursday, September 13, Family Service at 9:30 AM, Adult Service at 10:30 AM followed by kiddush	Rosh Hashanah services.	Beth Chai Congregation at RRUC, 6301 River Rd., Bethesda, MD (entrance to parking lot on Whittier)



Beth Chai Congregation

River Road U.C.
6301 River Road
Bethesda, MD 20817

Answering service: 301-229-7400

Email: info@bethchai.org

Website: www.bethchai.org

Address Correction Requested

Inside this issue:

*Join Harvest for the
Hungry, Aug 19th!*

See page 5 for details