

Congregation Ahavas Achim

P.O. Box 334

Westfield, MA 01086

DEC / JAN / FEB 2025 NEWSLETTER

<http://www.congregationahavasachim.org/>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sat. 12/14 @ 10:00 am – Shabbat Morning Service

Sun. 12/29 @ 5:30 pm – Community Chanukah
Menorah Lighting at Elm Street Plaza

Fri. 1/10 @ 7:00pm – Shabbat Evening Service via
Google Meet

Sun. 1/26 - Adult Education – details to follow

Sat. 2/8 @ 10:00 am – Shabbat Morning Service via
Google Meet

Fri. 2/28 @ 7:00pm – Shabbat Evening Service via
Google Meet

Sat. 3/15 @ 6:00pm – Purim service – details to follow

Please contact us at ahavasachimquiry@gmail.com or
leave a voicemail message at (413) 642-1434 if you want to
say Kaddish or have any suggestions for us.

Board Meeting: Meetings are held via conference calls.
Our next meeting is scheduled for February 12th. All are
welcome to join. Please let us know if you are interested
so that we may include you in our call by
emailing ablumenthal@congregationahavasachim.org

Hebrew School:

Coordinator: Andy Blumenthal

(Please call him at (413) 569-8399 if you or another
member of our community has expressed interest.)

Yahrzeit

*With great sadness, we remember the following
people on the Yahrzeit of their passing:*

2024-2025

Ruth Krosnow	Kislev 3	12/4
Morris Pearl	Kislev 7	12/8
Herman Blumenthal	Kislev 9	12/10
Phyllis Mackler	Kislev 12	12/13
Lazare Temkin	Kislev 15	12/16
Paul Goldstein	Kislev 19	12/20
Richard Caplin	Kislev 29	12/30
Alvin Jacobs	Teveth 4	1/4
Ethel Levy	Teveth 5	1/5
Alan Tropp	Teveth 5	1/5
Irving Renninger	Teveth 12	1/12
Lillian Flax	Teveth 20	1/20
Abe Milstein	Teveth 24	1/24
Joseph Gubkin	Teveth 24	1/24
Milton Levy	Teveth 25	1/25
Herbert Silver	Teveth 26	1/26
Irving Stone	Shevat 2	1/31
Mildred Bowman	Shevat 8	2/6
Carl Stone	Shevat 9	2/7
Noah Nesin	Shevat 9	2/7
Samuel Garber	Shevat 15	2/13
Samuel Blumenthal	Shevat 16	2/14
Leah Brody	Shevat 20	2/18
Hilda Cooper	Shevat 24	2/22
Matthew L. Pearl	Shevat 27	2/25
Laura Rosenthal	Shevat 30	2/28
Honey Kaufman	Shevat 30	2/28

Congregation Ahavas Achim wishes to thank all its friends and members for their generous donations:

Barbara and Michael Davenport – in loving memory of Judith Schulman and Murray Sanders - General Fund

Sandy Mackler – in loving memory of Leah Ruth Chase – General Fund

Fran Eisenberg – in loving memory of her parents, Gail and Stanley Wertel - General Fund

Barbara Kronfeld – in loving memory of Samuel Blumenthal - General Fund

Geri Johnson – Torah Fund, Educational Development Fund and General Fund

Wendy and Bob Blondin – General Fund

Elsa Rosenak –General Fund

Carol and Nate Rosenthal – General Fund

Linda and Larry Friedman - General Fund

Alex Stessel – General Fund

**Donations received as of 11/30/24*

High Holidays:

Thank you to all who contributed to the High Holiday services: special thanks to Rabbinical Student Yitzi Gittelsohn for leading a wonderful and engaging service. Thanks to our many congregants who participated with Aliyah's and readings. Thank you also to Fran Eisenberg for coordinating the break-the-fast supper; and to all the adults and children who contributed to our services and helped make these services meaningful for us all.

Soup Kitchen:

In keeping with our longtime tradition, CAA will be serving Christmas dinner at Our Community Table Soup Kitchen in Westfield on Wednesday, December 25th. We are looking for volunteers to help cook the meal (in your own home is fine and then delivered), prepare, serve, and

clean-up. Judy and Bob Brown have once again volunteered to cook the beef roast. The meal will be served at 5:00 pm and volunteers are asked to arrive at the soup kitchen (101 Meadow St. Westfield) at 4:00 pm on 12/25/24.

As this is also the first night of Chanukah, volunteers are encouraged to bring their menorah and candles, so that we can light them together to celebrate the first night of Chanukah.

We will be putting together gift bags, as we have done in previous years. Items most needed include socks, hats, soap, shampoo, toothpaste and various toiletries. To donate items, contact Sandy at 413-262-4564 or email sandra.mackler@comcast.net

In addition to monetary donations for the purchase of the meat, cheesecakes, hats/gloves/socks, and toiletries for the gift bags; the following food items are needed to prepare the Christmas meal:

3 large boxes (24-26 oz) of unflavored instant mashed potatoes prepared in disposable aluminum pans; 10 one pound bags of frozen green beans; 8 jars or cans of beef gravy; blocks of cheese or cuts and crackers, vegetable crudite such as carrot sticks, pepper slices, sliced cucumbers (to serve approx 70.); blueberry and cherry canned pie filling, Christmas cookies, clementines (70) and mini candy canes. Please contact Fran at volleyfran@comcast.net with what you can bring and/or availability to volunteer.

Please mail donation checks payable to Congregation Ahavas Achim to Fran Eisenberg, 110 Big Wood Dr., Westfield, MA 01085.

Rabbi's Message:

Dear Ahavas Achim and Westfield Jewish Community,

I hope this message finds you warm and comfortable in this winter season.

Since I began working with this community, I have heard many stories about the experience of being Jewish in Westfield. A key theme that has come up is that Jews are such a minority- and this has led to several uncomfortable situations. One example of the ignorance about Judaism that I witnessed myself was when a TV crew showed up to film our Passover seder. We had welcomed friends and allies from other faith communities to join us. We meant for people to join us in the seder rituals and meal - which several people did, which was lovely! But we hadn't invited a TV crew to broadcast our ritual. A seder is not a performance. The TV crew left, and I sent a follow up email, offering to do another program for their Catholic audience about the meaning of Passover and seder practice. Learning about each other's traditions is absolutely vital to living in community with each other, and we need to learn to approach others with humility and curiosity.

In addition to these moments where it is clear that people don't know much about Jewish life and practice, I have heard from several people that antisemitism is a topic on your minds. As the proverb goes, "two Jews, three opinions." Like most things in the Jewish world, there is disagreement about how to define antisemitism and how to most effectively combat it. While every Jew I know cares about combating antisemitism, there is dispute about how to approach this difficult issue effectively. A key sticking point is around legitimate critique of the State of Israel, when Jewishness is so connected to Zionism, and all the many things that "Israel" can mean to Jews. I assume that we, like most American Jewish communities, have members who may feel a variety of ways about these issues. And still, together, we struggle with the reality of antisemitism in our world.

At our November shabbat service, I shared that there is a new State Commission on Antisemitism, that was created by a MA budget amendment this past summer. The commission has an ambitious and broad mandate:

1. Report on **trends and data** related to incidents of antisemitism in the commonwealth;
2. Make recommendations for the **implementation** of the United States national strategy to counter antisemitism;
3. **Identify and evaluate existing efforts** to combat antisemitism in the commonwealth
4. **Identify best practices** from efforts to combat antisemitism **in other states** and jurisdictions;
5. Evaluate the **commonwealth's hate crime statutes** and whether any amendments would better protect residents from antisemitism and other similar forms of hatred
6. **Recommend strategies, programs and legislation** to combat antisemitism in the commonwealth.

You can read more in this [letter from the commission co-chairs outlining what they hope to accomplish with the commission.](#)

Overall, the goals are admirable. And, in order for it to actually serve Jews and Jewish community, in all our diversity, our voices need to be involved in the process of governance discussions that are about us. There is significant diversity of practice, outlook, lifestyle and politics among Jews of Massachusetts. Indeed, for Ahavas Achim, as a community that is mostly if not entirely comprised of multi-heritage families, our Jewish community is deeply connected to people of many religious and cultural backgrounds. Our ability to function as a group that meets in an interfaith center underscores how our safety and wellbeing is intertwined with our neighbors of all backgrounds. This

reality makes me invested in sensitivity around how policies affect not only Jews, but other groups as well. This outlook is shared by [Truah](#), the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, (of which I am a member). Here is a [document that outlines this approach](#) in more depth, which was created to support conversations like this.

In addition to the Jewish people and organizations invested in this work, a coalition called Together for an Inclusive Massachusetts (TIM) has formed which is invested in having a fair and open commission process, as well as advocating that the work of the commission furthers the safety of all Massachusetts residents, including especially Palestinians and their allies. Often, in this time of war in Israel/Gaza, Jewish and Palestinian safety have been assumed to be mutually exclusive. This shouldn't be the case in Massachusetts. As TIM writes in this [fact sheet about the commission](#), "it is vitally important to address antisemitism and anti-Palestinian racism at the same time and ensure that the Commission... does not conflate legally protected free speech criticizing Israel or advocating for or teaching about Palestinian experience with antisemitism."

The commission is co-chaired by Westfield's own state senator, John Velis, whom many of you are familiar with from his work locally. Senator Velis is passionate about his work on the commission. On Dec. 18th, I will be meeting with Sen. Velis, to learn more about his orientation to the work, and share about my own orientation to fighting antisemitism, which aligns with the Truah document I shared above. In addition, I would love to bring in more perspectives from this community- I welcome the opportunity to speak with you by phone or zoom, or hear your thoughts via email. Please let me know if you'd like to talk!

I look forward to hearing from you, and seeing you at our next Shabbat service on Saturday morning Dec. 14th. Wishing each of you, and all in our communities, a peaceful shabbat.

Rabbi Shahar

Menorah Lighting Ceremony:

Congregation Ahavas Achim, together with Mayor Michael McCabe, and with the help of Westfield on Weekends, invite community members of all faiths and traditions to an evening of "Latkes and Lights." The festivities will begin at Elm Street Plaza on Sunday, December 29th at 5:30 PM on the fifth night of Chanukah. Rabbi Shahar Colt will lead attendees in prayer and song, and light the candle of the community menorah.

A special free Latkes and Lights party for all attendees, will be held after the lighting at the First United Methodist Church, 16 Court Street. We'd like to thank the Jewish Endowment Foundation of the Western Mass Jewish Foundation for their support.

The community menorah will be lit each evening of Chanukah, which begins at sundown on Wednesday, December 25, and continues through to nightfall of Thursday, January 2. Any residents who wish to volunteer to light the evening's candle on the community menorah on any day of the holiday may call the mayor's office at (413) 572-6201 for a schedule.

Happy Birthday!

Birthday wishes go out to the following:

Wendy Blondin	December 23 rd
Barbara Davenport	December 26 th
Rich O'Donnell	December 26 th
Jacob Blumenthal	January 3 rd
Ellie Wright	January 7 th
Susan Blumenthal	January 9 th
Faith Blondin	January 13 th
Andy Rosenthal	January 19 th
Sarah Eisenberg	January 30 th
Andrew Blumenthal	February 21 st

2024 Ride to Provide:

On September 29th, CAA participated in Ride to Provide, a fundraiser sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts. This event is designed to raise money for Federation members and its non-profit partners. 30% of the money raised by CAA returns to CAA for our unrestricted use. Participants from CAA included Sandy Mackler and Lynne Goldberg. Many thanks to our members and friends who supported CAA.

Facebook:

Congregation Ahavas Achim is now on Facebook!

Please click on the following link to find us:

<https://www.facebook.com/AhavasAchimWestfield/>

Once you find us, please “Like” our page. Feel free to post comments or any pictures that you would like to share with us. You will also be able to find announcements and listings for our services and events. If you have any questions, or would like us to post any announcements, events or pictures for you, please email them to: Carol and Nate Rosenthal - ncrose@comcast.net

Hebrew Free Loan Association:

The Hebrew Free Loan Association of Greater Springfield offers interest-free loans to Jewish individuals and families whose needs are urgent and who may not qualify for personal loans from a bank or other financial institution. For more information, go to:

<https://hebrewfreeloanassociation.org/>

Reminder:

Dues payment plans end in February unless special arrangements have been made. All membership dues should be paid in full by February 15, 2025. If you are having difficulty, please contact someone on the board to discuss an alternative payment plan.