Reviving Connections, Introducing Chaplaincy

By Dawn Berney, Executive Director

We are linked together and the Connections newsletter provides us an opportunity to demonstrate that link.

Those of you who have been part of the Madison Jewish community for a long time, likely remember the Jewish Social Services’ (JSS) newsletter. In 2001, Connections started as a labor of love for many of our staff and our volunteers. It gave us an opportunity to tell the stories of people here in Dane County who make up Jewish Social Services. Contributors included program participants, clients, volunteers, donors, our staff and board of directors.

As we revive our newsletter for the new millennium, we have revised the format to deepen our understanding and connectivity.

We have changed the structure of Connections. Each edition will have a theme and will highlight one or two JSS programs. This premier publication will focus on our Jewish chaplaincy program.

For many years Jewish Social Services recognized that there was a need for a Jewish community chaplaincy program in Madison. Distressed family members would request a rabbi to officiate at their loved one’s funeral. Sensitive hospice chaplains with Jewish patients would ask for a rabbi. Staff at continuing care facilities would look for our leadership at Jewish holiday programs and educational events.

Madison congregational rabbis asked JSS for more support for unaffiliated Jews in Madison and Dane County. With a leap of faith, the Irwin A. and Robert D. Goodman Foundation generously funded a three year pilot program for Madison’s first Jewish Community Chaplaincy program. JSS launched this new program in November 2016 with the hiring of Rabbi Renee Bauer.

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JSS’s chaplaincy program provides spiritual care, support and comfort for Jewish individuals and families who are coping with illness, aging, loss or other life challenges. Much of the support is provided through individual connections with Rabbi Bauer who visits clients in the community, at continuing care facilities, at in-patient hospice and in the hospital. Many older adults move to Madison and are unable to join a local synagogue for a variety of reasons. By having a rabbi on staff, JSS is able to meet the chaplaincy needs of these individuals and families. JSS provides Jewish funerals, memorial services and unveilings for people not currently connected to the organized Jewish community. To provide continuing connections to Jewish life, JSS hosts Shabbat and holiday celebrations at senior care facilities and delivers holiday baskets on Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah and Purim to homebound individuals. The chaplaincy program is also creating a scaffolding of spiritual support throughout the community by providing information and training to organizations and institutions working with Jews as well for members and professionals in the Jewish community.

Through its chaplaincy program JSS is opening pathways to spirituality to promote healing and well-being and enhancing the relationship between Jewish patients and the Jewish community. JSS is extremely grateful for the major gift from Tim and Kathy Mazur that will allow the program to continue to grow and flourish in 2019 and beyond. You can join the Mazurs by referring people who could use support to Rabbi Bauer at rabbi@jssmadison.org or 608.442.4088 or donating to the chaplaincy program.
Listening to the small voices  
The meaning of the Chaplaincy Program  
By Rabbi Renee Bauer, Chaplain

Recently, we celebrated Shavuot, the holiday celebrating the revelation of Torah at Mt. Sinai. The Shavuot morning Torah reading describes the popular image of revelation complete with fire, smoke, a trembling mountain and a transcendent G-d. There are rare moments in our life, such as the birth of a baby or the view of a natural wonder, when we are awe-struck, just as the Israelites must have been as Moses received the Torah in the cloud of smoke at the top of Mt. Sinai. But most, if not all the time, it can be hard to relate to this type of revelation. Fortunately, Jewish tradition provides us another, very different image of revelation in the first Book of Kings during the story of Elijah. There is a mountain, a fire, a great wind and an earthquake but G-d, the texts says, is not in the wind, nor the earthquake, but in the still small voice.

Chaplaincy is about listening for the still small voice in the stories, murmurs and silences of people who are facing life’s challenges. I meet with people who are suffering from the loss of a loved one, are struggling with the aging process, or are facing their own mortality. Chaplaincy is not about fixing problems but about accompanying people through them. It is about listening and being present rather than solving and doing.

Elijah first hears G-d’s call after he goes into a cave. While it can be difficult to witness so much pain, I love my job because when I enter the cave with people, I often experience a realness which is hard to find in our modern world that is filled with so many distractions and guarded interactions. It is in the cave that I, like Elijah, often experience holiness. I think about the woman that I visited on Purim, who is in her 90s and is progressively losing her strength, her ability to speak and her memory. As she tasted the hamantashen I brought her, she began to tell me about the hamantashen she used to bake. When I began to sing a Purim song, she joined in and finished the song. The still small voice emerged from the soul of this elderly woman.

After Elijah hears the still small voice, the text tells us that Elijah “went out and stood at the entrance of the cave” (I Kings 19:13). Chaplaincy is about being a spiritual companion with people who are struggling so that perhaps they can, even if momentarily, go the entrance of the cave and see some light. After visiting with a woman with terminal cancer, she wrote me an email, “Thank you for your visit today... It perks me up and I went out for a short walk and to Target after you left.” I could not fix her cancer, give her more time or take away her physical discomfort, but with compassionate attention, I could help her walk to the entrance of the cave. In a world that moves quickly, values results, and is uncomfortable with pain, I could help by simply stopping and listening.

Thanks to the generous support from the Irwin A. & Robert D. Goodman Foundation and Tim and Kathy Mazur, JSS has created Madison’s first Jewish chaplaincy program which gives people who are suffering comfort. It also provides the community with the opportunity to honor the still small voice that resonates when we listen.
Tim and I began searching for a spiritual community in 2005. I was born into an Irish Catholic home, and my husband’s family dabbled in the Episcopal denomination. When we were dating, Tim told me a story about his Jewish great aunts. I looked at him inquisitively and said: “you must have Jewish ancestors.” Of course Tim’s family did have Jewish roots and I, being the curious soul that I am, leapt like a leprechaun down that soul-searching path. In truth, my husband’s paternal grandparents were both Jewish; however, each had distanced themselves from the faith.

Fortunately, we have found a home at Temple Beth El. What drew me to Judaism, to conversion and to raising our daughter Jewish, was the beautiful concept of peoplehood, and its emphasis on community. As we search for an appreciation of the importance of community and absorb an awareness of our responsibilities, we come to realize that individuals are beautifully complex and in that spirit we grow. It is with this realization that we are motivated to give to the Chaplaincy program at Jewish Social Services led by Rabbi Renee Bauer. We were delighted to learn about a service that uniquely identifies with this community to fulfill a variety of needs. How we enter a Jewish life, and why and when we do so is one’s choice. As a peoplehood who celebrate Judaism, we are responsible for creating a space and carving out the time so that individuals can freely discover their Jewish connections. The Chaplaincy program of JSS is designed to nurture this milieu of spiritual growth, and we are so proud to sponsor this effort.

B’Shalom,

Tim & Kathy Mazur
Connect, Create, Contribute:
How we can empower seniors to do all three.
By Maya Garbuz and Caren Minkoff, Case Managers

The Administration for Community Living leads our nation’s observance of Older Americans Month and May marked this honor. The theme this year was Connect, Create, and Contribute, which encourages older adults and their communities to:

- **Connect** with friends, family, and services that support participation.
- **Create** by engaging in activities that promote learning, health, and personal enrichment.
- **Contribute** time, talent, and life experience to benefit others.

Communities that encourage the contributions of older adults are stronger! By engaging and supporting all community members, we recognize that older adults play a key role in the vitality of our neighborhoods, networks, and lives.

We all benefit when everyone participates. JSS encourages you to connect, create, and contribute for stronger and more diverse communities throughout the year.

Gary and Lori are a couple who have been volunteering with JSS for many years. They each support our clients from their exceptional skill set; Gary a retired IT worker and Lori a nurse. Gary visits clients in their homes and assists with computer, phone, and internet issues/questions. Lori attends Lechayim monthly to provide blood pressure checks and referral support for other health based concerns. These two amazing volunteers really are the model for connecting, creating, and contributing here in Madison.

To become a volunteer with JSS contact Paul at paul@jssmadison.org, 608-442-4083. We have a plethora of opportunities waiting for you. As a volunteer, you can provide rides to medical appointments and grocery stores, fix things around the house, tutor English, support JSS community events, and many more! Thank you to those who contribute time and resources to JSS, we succeed because of YOU.
Jewish Social Services receives financial support from individuals, foundations and organizations of many kinds. JSS would like to thank every one of our donors for their valuable contributions. Big or small—your gifts demonstrate caring to members of our community. Without your support, we could not do what we do. Thank you.

Please join us in thanking the following individuals, foundations, and organizations for their generous contributions last year. Donations are for January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018.

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In early March, JSS welcomed its 100th arrival in our current iteration of refugee resettlement. As we pass this milestone, we get to see families and individuals settle into Madison, thrive and reach their own milestones. These former clients have learned enough English to start working in the trades they practiced before they were displaced. Others are now engaged or married and this month several refugee clients will graduate from high school or from a high school equivalency course. These families come from Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Burundi, and Central African Republic. Together they speak well over a dozen languages but they all now are able to call Madison home.

Recently, leaders within the various ethnic communities are becoming integrated into our community in a very Madisonian way. They have become more civically active and engaged. Three of these new arrivals attended a Town Hall event with Congressman Mark Pocan and one new arrival made a special trip to Washington DC as HIAS’ only client representative to participate in a Refugee Council USA event. We always say that our ultimate goal is helping newcomers to become self-sufficient. Even more inspiring is seeing some clients, who might have been in the US for less than a year, start to advocate both for themselves as individuals as well as the refugee population in the US as a whole.

If you would like to get involved with resettlement in your community, consider forming a JSS CARA (Community Action for Refugee Arrivals) team. Our CARA teams are made of dedicated volunteers who have prepared homes, meals and basic necessities for our newly arriving families. Bring a team to help with this great opportunity! Email becca@jssmadison.org or call (608)442-4086 for more information.

We Did It
JSS and Volunteers Resettled 100 Refugees!

By Becca Schwartz, Refugee Resettlement Coordinator

Even more inspiring is seeing [refugees]... start to advocate both for themselves as individuals, as well as well as for the refugee population in the US as a whole.
Michael lost most of his vision in his right eye many years ago. An accident in 2017 left him completely blind. Michael and his volunteer, Stu, have no objection to the word, “disabled.” But, they both nod their heads in unison to insist that “disabled” should not be the first word in describing any person. And, certainly this would be inadequate in describing Michael.

Michael reminisces about his “eight great years” as a Madison alderperson for Marquette Neighborhood from 1973-1981. He enjoys talking politics and going to political events and presentations – and he has some first-hand experience and knowledge in local politics and law, and politics in general. For much of his working life he specialized in real estate, zoning and land use as an attorney at DeWitt, Ross and Stevens. Very soon after becoming blind, Michael offered his listening skills and life experience to be a “recovery coach”, (a mentor, friend and source of support to people working on healing from addictions), through the Connections Counseling program.

Michael is clearly pleased, comfortable and jovial sitting next to his volunteer, Stu. Michael teases Stu about having to help him out when Stu forgets where he parked the car. Stu shoots back and teases Michael about trusting him to get the correct cash back at the grocery store. They have done lots of grocery shopping together, learned how to use assistive devices on the computer and smart phone, and most importantly, met each other and became true friends.

Stu started as a friendly visitor with Jewish Social Services in 2016. He has a long history of volunteering, training in chaplaincy, and performing the mitzvah of Bikur Cholim – visiting the sick. Stu has been engaged in some type volunteering for 50 years. I spent a most enjoyable hour with Stu and Michael. Pleasant and wise; there was much to enjoy and learn from both Stu and Michael, as individuals and as friends.

In 2018, Michael self-published a book about his life entitled, *Listen to What I See: A Memoir.* In it he writes, “… losing eyesight for me does not mean that I’ve lost my vision for what my hopes, dreams, and goals are. I still have that vision. And seeing is not absolutely necessary in order for me to have that vision.”

Please contact me for information about volunteer program needs and opportunities: Paul Borowsky at (608) 442-4083 or paul@jssmadison.org
Rekindled little gestures, big hearts, and precious memories

By Judy Karofsky

When my mother left her dream retirement and her adopted shul in Florida, I promised our closest relatives that I would find “Yidishkeit” in Madison. That wasn’t difficult as long as my mom was in independent living. She became a regular participant at Lechayim, Shabbat services, and seders, and she even won the Beth Israel Purim spiel. Sadly, as she aged and required different surroundings, we traded familiar faces and customs for her health and safety.

As soon as I heard about the Jewish Social Services chaplaincy program from a hospice chaplain, I contacted Rabbi Renee Bauer. Our connection was instant. I’d been preoccupied with someone else’s care and lost in my own surroundings, and Rabbi Bauer offered a sense of belonging and Jewishness. Little gestures, big hearts, and precious memories were rekindled. I didn’t even know how to ask for those things, but I remain grateful the connection existed within the Madison community. A few months after my mom greeted Rabbi Bauer and offered her tea, my mom started to fail. Rabbi Bauer met me at the time of my mom’s passing and helped me make sense of the pain, the traditions, the memorial plans, and the tears. My mom and I both needed Rabbi Bauer’s guidance. My hope is that we will continue this caring program for other precious aging people and for their adult children.