

Ohef Sholom Temple reaffirms commitment to social justice work

Susan Feit

Jewish thought and Jewish life has been guided by a pledge to social justice (Tikkun Olam). But what does a commitment to social justice mean in today's context? In light of tremendous challenges and the increased polarization facing the nation and world, Ohef Sholom Temple decided that now is the time to explore that very question.

As a first step in deepening this commitment, Ohef Sholom joined 140 other congregations in signing the Reform Jewish movement's initiative to create Brit Olam congregations nationwide. By signing this pact, Ohef Sholom publicly reaffirms a commitment to meaningful social justice work, grounded in sacred and enduring Jewish values.

This is new ground for Ohef Sholom, and accordingly, congregants come with

different perspectives about how the social justice agenda should advance. Some ask why Ohef Sholom would enter into potentially controversial waters. The answer is that the congregation is willing to stand on the side of justice, even if the path is complicated—that it cannot afford to stand silently on the side. Common ground will allow Ohef Sholom to use a communal voice to speak out in the face of injustice and stand up for its neighbors when they are threatened.

To start on the path to find that common ground, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities led a workshop for congregants in December, offering tools for engaging in productive dialogue when people have different points of views.

Ohef Sholom operated full steam ahead during Justice January. Congregation members participated in Norfolk's MLK

march and ceremony, hosted the homeless through its annual participation in N.E.S.T. (Norfolk Emergency Shelter Team) and its monthly Soup Kitchen; and helped at Chesterfield Academy's Math Night.

Also this month, to further its work as a Brit Olam congregation, a workshop is planned to examine what it means for the congregation to delve deeper into the world of social justice. Building off of Ohef Sholom's long-term commitment to performing tikkun olam, the workshop will help form a congregational voice that can take stands in times of injustice.

Ohef Sholom realizes that the reward for sharpening a social justice focus will be rich and worth the bumps that might be encountered along its path. The congregation has decided that it is important to live up to Dr. Martin Luther King's advice in knowing that, "Our lives begin



Karen Fine, Chris Kraus, Alice Titus, Jim Dunn, Cantor Jennifer Rueben, and David Titus at MLK Day march.

to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Using its spiritual home as a force of even greater good in the community, Ohef Sholom hopes to realize the prophet Amos's vision when he declared, "Let justice roll on like an ever flowing river and righteousness like a mighty stream."