Ten adults become b’nai mitzvah in Bend

BY KATHY SCHINDEL
Special to the Jewish Review

Temple Beth Tikvah, Bend’s Reform Jewish congregation, celebrated the b’nai mitzvah of its first adult Hebrew class on June 26.

In May of 2009 two of Temple Beth Tikvah’s members, Lorraine Shapiro and Shari Winicki, began discussing the idea of becoming bar or bat mitzvah. They approached Rabbi Alan Berg with the idea, and then approached Evie Lerner, who was head of the Religious Committee, Berg, willingly agreed to mentor the class, explaining that what was normally a two-year process would be accomplished in one year.

The first b’nai mitzvah meeting with Berg was held last July, with 14 interested members in attendance. Berg gave information about how the program would work, each member shared their personal reasons for wanting to become bar or bat mitzvah, and the class was launched.

Hebrew studies began in earnest in August. Since the vast majority of the class had no Hebrew training, Religious Committee Chair Ann Rosenfeld offered to help with beginning Hebrew instructions. As a member of the class who had more Hebrew knowledge than other members, I provided additional coaching, guidance and motivation.

The class consisted of a Sunday morning Hebrew session throughout the year, practicing the prayers and beginning to read their Torah portions to each other. The group became cheerleaders for each other; each small milestone became a cause for praise, encouragement and celebratory hugs and high-fives.

B’nei mitzvah met with Berg each month to discuss the Jewish holidays, history, sacred books, Jewish legal development, the Prophets, Jewish ethics, writing a d’var Torah and much more. He encouraged members to journal the b’nai mitzvah journey, experience each holiday in a very personal way, and to continually reflect on the meaning of this personal passage.

The culmination of the year of study came on June 26 when 10 of the original members were called to the Torah. It has been a memorable year of studying and learning together. Class members worked hard, encouraged each other and laughed together along the way. Through the process they developed strong bonds with each other that will last as they continue learning together and participating fully in the congregation.

Rabbi Daniel Isaac, senior rabbi at Congregation Neveh Shalom, is soliciting personal statements from congregants on the topic: “This I Believe.”

The collected essays will be published and distributed during High Holy Day services and also as an on-line program. Pieces may engender thoughts on theology, ethics, philosophy, politics, Talmudic sources or stories of personal reflection, and will focus primarily on how the existence of evil works within a Torah philosophy.”

Brodkin said he will draw on scriptural as well as Talmudic sources for his discussion, but will focus primarily on how the Ramchal, Rav Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, explains the existence of evil and suffering.

“Will be presenting different ways of dealing with the emotional and philosophical questions,” he said.

Following the rabbi’s presentation, which runs from 10 to 10:40 a.m., Holocaust survivor and noted speaker Morris Engelsohn will speak, from 10:45 a.m. to noon, about the human capacity for evil, using the example of Heinrich Himmler, Hitler’s implementer of the Final Solution.

“The men who conceived, who planned and who carried out the Holocaust acted out of a sense of belief and conviction,” he said. “They were not beasts acting with the instinct of beasts—they were men acting knowingly as beasts—and it is precisely their being men that defines their evil. Himmler considered himself to be an absolutely honorable man.”

Engelsohn will also have copies of his talk last year about his and his family’s survival during the Holocaust available for free.

Lerner, in the day, also at Kesser Israel, Rabbi Tzvi Hollander will present “In-Depth Study of Yehoshua and Caleb—Role Models for Redemption.” That hour-long talk begins at 7:25 p.m.

All Kesser events are free of charge. For more information, call 503-222-1239.

Neveh Shalom to publish ‘This I Believe’ statements

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