

Bristol Jewish Center Celebrates 107 Years

Beginning in 1904, ten pious Jewish men, all recent immigrants from the pogroms and terrors of Eastern Europe, joined together in the rear room of a tailor shop on Mill Street in Bristol, Pa. to worship in freedom. In establishing Congregation Ahavath Achim, they fulfilled the legacy of Bucks County's patron and founder, William Penn, for everyone to worship God in their own way.

As more immigrants came to Bristol following further unrest in Europe and the aftermath of World War I, the Congregation grew. In 1916, they purchased a building at 129 Pond Street, where they established a Synagogue in which to worship. It was an unpretentious building, where the Rabbi lived on the first floor and taught Hebrew school to young children (mostly boys) on the second floor. The Sanctuary was located on the third floor of the building.

After World War II, when family life was reestablished with men who had served their country in the armed forces of the United States, the Congregation grew larger. A larger building was needed to accommodate the burgeoning Jewish population.

Through the generosity of several members, a plot of land was acquired, and a new, larger Synagogue building was built. This building contained four classrooms, the Rabbi's study, a Sanctuary seating over 100 people, and a basement recreation area complete with basketball hoops and a stage. The Bristol Jewish Center is considered as belonging to the "Conservative" branch of Judaism, but in reality the congregation has taken bold steps to include everyone in the religious activities. The Congregation has decided to become an ADULT synagogue; to include women's participation in the services; to join the Reconstructionist movement of Judaism and to accept students from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) in Wyncote, PA. to serve as spiritual leaders. In fact, BJC was one of the first Jewish Congregations to accept a female Rabbi to conduct services; to include women to constitute a minyan (10 people) needed to pray in the Synagogue); to call women to the Torah (Five Books of Moses) during religious services and to elect a woman as President of the Congregation. RRC students are admitted to the college only after they have earned an advanced degree in another discipline. RRC students are required to spend a year of study in Hebrew and Philosophy in Israel before they graduate as Ordained Rabbis.

While celebrating our rich past, BJC's Congregation is dedicated to ensuring its future by providing a warm, inviting, friendly and down-to-earth atmosphere as an "adult" Congregation. We encourage a diverse Jewish community to worship with us as we continue to maintain the Synagogue building as our spiritual home in Bristol. Interfaith families welcome.

Several years ago, The Bristol Jewish Center became handicap accessible both inside and outside, so those with disabilities can come into the Synagogue by means of a ramp, and approach the bema (altar) with a ramp.

www.bristoljewishcenter.org