

## **New Inclusion Committee Begins Its Work**

Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg, Chairperson, Inclusion Committee

Early this summer, the Board approved the formation of a Board-level Inclusion Committee that would work on situations that make people feel anything less than fully included and welcomed at Or Hadash. The committee, which already has six members (but, of course, welcomes more), is holding a “large umbrella,” that covers people with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning; people who are in interfaith relationships; and people of different races and ethnic backgrounds.

The Inclusion Committee was invited to begin its work by partnering with the Education Steering Committee to look at policies and procedures within our school. This was an extremely important and significant place to start, since the education of our children impacts on the future of Judaism and of our community. As expected, we found that while Or Hadash has always been a place that welcomed everyone, there were tangible things we could and need to do to be certain that everyone would recognize that welcome.

Some of those things are fairly easy. In addition to outlining a working procedure, we have already made changes and additions to our website to include statements of inclusion in various places. I invite you to take a look at our homepage, “Who We Are,” the Membership section, and soon, the school section. We will be suggesting changes in school and membership forms, and will be coordinating a Shabbat Presents program on inclusion. On December 13, we’re hosting JFCS and Equality PA for a program on “Synagogues Supporting Trans Communities.” You are welcome to come. We are also working on a survey that will invite all of you to let us know how you think Or Hadash is doing as an inclusive and welcoming place and to give us suggestions on how we can get better. This is just for starters.

From our founding, we were determined that all members of the Jewish community could find a place within our walls. When those walls no longer belonged to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, our “founding home,” and became our beloved, historic, and beautiful walls of the former Fairwold in Ft. Washington, we were especially happy that our building was wheel chair accessible. Throughout the intervening years, the building hasn’t changed, but wheel chairs and standards for accessibility have. Thus, we’ve found that we are no longer as accessible as we thought we were. The bimah and our wheel chair accessible bathroom are two places where this is true. We’re looking into how to remedy these situations, with the help of the Building Committee. Obviously, this involves money, which is always a challenge. We have some ideas (more info to follow), but for now, I’m making JPEGs of photos from my Staircase Gallery Exhibit available for purchase with all proceeds going to the Building Fund, earmarked for Inclusion projects. (Please contact me for information.) Three photos have already been sold in this way.

I was recently told that while larger and more affluent congregations can easily make the physical accommodations with which we struggle, members of Or Hadash are once again showing that we care. And, I was told, “That goes a long way.” It does, but it isn’t sufficient. We will continue to try to improve.