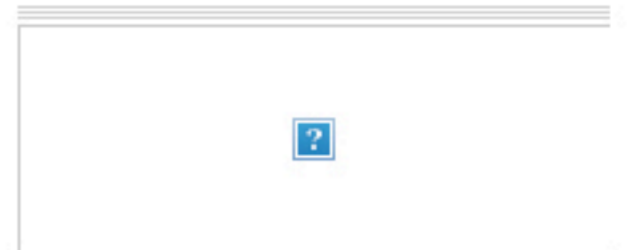


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Reconstructionist synagogue opens

First In Toronto

Ashley Spigel, National Post
 Published: Monday, January 28, 2008

Toronto's first reconstructionist Jewish synagogue opened yesterday, as members of Congregation **Darchei Noam** marched with their five Torahs down Sheppard Avenue to their new homes.

"Every community has birth, growth and a peak of glory in its time, and now we've come of age," Rabbi Tina Grimberg said.

The reconstruction-ist stream of liberal Judaism preaches egalitarianism among all people of all backgrounds and rejects the notion that Jews are God's chosen people. Its ideology stems from the 19th-century's conservative Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, who saw Judaism not as a religion but as a civilization characterized by beliefs and practices, as well as culture, the arts and social organization.

Darchei Noam's teachings guide its members -- and those considering joining its congregation -- to find themselves in Judaism by merging spirituality and ritual. Following with Rabbi Kaplan's moral, the synagogue synthesizes religious prayer into study programs, drama, dance, song and yoga, which appeals to its young membership of 613, including 370 families.

"Other synagogues have a formal, choreographed feel but here we support ourselves on tradition and accessibility," said Rabbi Grimberg, noting her congregation has grown 40% in the last six years. She attributes the increase to the synagogue's relatable, modern approach to Judaism and its gender neutral prayers and religious practicing.

"Our mandate is to impart Judaism that's meaningful, open and vibrant to all with the profound belief of tradition."

Darchei Noam began in the 1970s in borrowed space at B'Nai Brith's Canadian headquarters near Bathurst Street and Sheppard Avenue. Once the congregation decided it needed its own space, it bought the nearby Adath Sholom synagogue at 864 Sheppard Ave., tore most of the old one down and built anew.

"Our capital campaigners visited everyone [in our congregation] to find out what their vision [for the new synagogue] was," said Lisa Charendoff, president of **Darchei Noam**. "The values of the community are what built this building."

The new \$8-million building includes interpretations of traditional synagogue forms using unique materials, including Jerusalem stone and Jatoba wood, and follows the Jewish principles of Bal Taschit (do not waste) and Tikkun Olam(healing the world).

"Every piece of material was looked at for environmental reasons," said Ms. Charendoff, adding her temple was constructed with green building materials, sustainable heating, cooling and water systems.

Also used were materials from Adath Sholom, by building levels on top of the temple's foundation and salvaging its stained glass windows and using them as art.

Darchei Noam is very different from other congregations in Toronto, not just in its practices and teachings of Judaism, but in the way it welcomes a diverse community, including same-sex couples and people of mixed races.

"People respond to our invitations, whether they are secular or modern orthodox, and this house is for all people," Rabbi Grimberg said.

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