



Congregation Etz Chaim

Community, Spirituality, and You

Andrea J. Cosnowsky, Senior Rabbi
Frederick Kamil, Associate Rabbi
Carol Meyer, Executive Director
Marla Friedman, Religious School Principal
Steven M. Bob, Rabbi Emeritus
Anne Stein, Educator Emerita
Rachel Wood, Inclusion Specialist



Welcome to Congregation Etz Chaim

Congregation Etz Chaim is a community of 500 Reform Jewish families and individuals; our door is open to all seeking a spiritual Jewish home.

Our building is handicap accessible and our philosophy is welcoming and inclusive. At Etz Chaim interfaith families can find paths to religious cohesion. We are supportive of the LGBTQIA2+ community. Our religious school faculty includes a professional inclusion specialist.

Founded in 1960, the congregation is led by Senior Rabbi Andrea Cosnowsky. Rabbi Cosnowsky came to Etz Chaim in 2005 as Assistant Rabbi, working with now Rabbi Emeritus Steven M. Bob. Associate Rabbi Frederick Kamil joined the congregation in 2016.

Our congregation is affiliated with both the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) and the Community Foundation for Jewish Education, giving us access to a broad range of services and interactions with the larger Jewish community.





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Rabbi Andrea Cosnowsky, Senior Rabbi

Rabbi Andrea Cosnowsky was ordained in 2004 at Hebrew Union College and was hired by Congregation Etz Chaim. She served as the Assistant Rabbi from 2005 to 2008, promoted to Associate Rabbi serving from 2008 to 2016 and became the Senior Rabbi in July of 2016.

Rabbi Cosnowsky is committed to strengthening Etz Chaim's presence as the center of Jewish life in the western suburbs. She believes strongly in building community by connecting people to each other and to the traditions of Judaism, as well as by participating in outreach activities in the larger community. Rabbi Cosnowsky actively works to build bridges between people of all faiths and is active in DuPage United and in the Glen Ellyn Religious Leaders group. She also teaches an Intro to Judaism course at Elmhurst College as an adjunct professor.

Rabbi Cosnowsky utilizes her passion for music, teaching, and learning to help others see the world through a lens of spirituality. Her warmth and engaging presence, along with her willingness to embrace families and individuals including interfaith families, opens the door to Judaism in an accessible manner and invites others to explore their spiritual path.

Born and raised in Ardsley, New York, Rabbi Cosnowsky earned her BA in English Literature at SUNY Empire State College. Rabbi Cosnowsky also holds a Master's Degree in Education from Xavier University as well as a Master's in Hebrew Letters from the Hebrew Union College.



Rabbi Frederick Kamil, Associate Rabbi

Rabbi Frederick Kamil grew up within Temple Israel of West Bloomfield, Michigan and was a camper and counselor at Michigan's Tamarack Jewish Summer Camp. A graduate of Michigan State University, Rabbi Kamil was president of the campus Hillel and, after graduating, served as a program associate at the Hillel of Eastern Michigan University. From 2010-2015, Rabbi Kamil studied at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati where he received a Master's in Hebrew Letters and was ordained in the spring of 2015. Rabbi Kamil was a rabbinic intern and rabbi at Adath Israel in Cincinnati under the direction of Rabbi Irvin Wise. In 2016, Rabbi

Kamil joined Congregation Etz Chaim as an Assistant Rabbi and was promoted to Associate Rabbi in 2019.

Rabbi Kamil's wife, Rabbi Rebecca Kamil, is an Advanced Directive Specialist and Chaplain at the University of Illinois Chicago hospital. The two met over a Shabbat dinner in the summer of 2012 and married in August 2014. Rabbi Kamil enjoys running, backpacking, sailing, playing music, reading, and watching movies.



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Marla Friedman, Religious School Principal

Marla Friedman became the principal of our religious school in 2018 after teaching Hebrew to both children and adults in the religious school for 18 years. Providing engaging, meaningful and fun Jewish education has been Marla's top priority since joining our staff.

Marla is originally from Glenview and attended Washington University in St. Louis for her Bachelor's Degree and the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration for her Master's Degree. Marla lives in Glen Ellyn with her husband, Steve, and their three daughters, Emily, Molly, and Naomi. Marla loves being a part of the Etz Chaim community and is passionate about educating our youth. She welcomes your input and invites you to stop by anytime. Her door is always open.

Carol Meyer, Executive Director

Carol Meyer joined the Etz Chaim family in December 2007. Born and raised in Chicago, in West Rogers Park, she attended Armstrong and Stone Elementary Schools, Senn High School, and the University of Illinois-Chicago. She is married to Howard and has three children: Amanda Meyer (Dan) Radman (former regional NFTY director), Sarah Meyer (Chris) Mann, and Brad (Tracy) Meyer, all of whom are OSRUI alumni, and four grandchildren, Julie and Scott Radman and Sam and June Meyer.

Prior to coming to Etz Chaim she professionally taught physical education at a private Jewish day school. Being part of a Jewish community has always been a priority for her and for the past 35 years she has been an active member, past Sisterhood President, and past Temple President of Beth Tikvah Congregation in Hoffman Estates. She hopes you will stop in to visit with her anytime you are at the synagogue.

Mike Sawyer, President

Mike Sawyer and his wife, Cynde, joined Congregation Etz Chaim in 1985. Their four children attended Etz Chaim's religious school, and they had their B'nai Mitzvahs here. Three of their seven grandchildren currently attend our religious school. Mike and Cynde grew up in Chicago's south suburbs. They moved to Downers Grove in 1979 and in 2001 they moved to DeKalb County. Although they moved away from the immediate area, they did not move away from the congregation where they raised their children and made so many friends.

Mike is retired from AT&T. He is a member of the Jewish War Veterans (JWV), and a life member of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). Mike is also a hospice visiting volunteer and an 11th Hour volunteer. Mike recognizes his success as president at Etz Chaim depends on the many leaders and volunteers who make up the committees and are committed to keeping this congregation an active, positive Jewish presence in the community.



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Rachel Wood, Inclusion Specialist

Rachel Wood has been a member of Congregation Etz Chaim since 1979. She began teaching in our religious school shortly after becoming a member, initially teaching Judaica but then quickly becoming part of our Hebrew faculty. Rachel has taught 3rd grade Hebrew, developed a language lab class for learners with differences, and taught 6th grade Hebrew for 28 years. She has also been our B'nai Mitzvah tutor for over 28 years. Rachel is currently working as a mentor with Matan that supports Jewish institutions to provide inclusion opportunities for their students.

By profession, Rachel is a licensed Speech/Language Pathologist with an emphasis in child development and learning styles. She has worked in a variety of settings including public schools, private practice and early intervention programs. Rachel works with students who have learning challenges as our inclusion specialist. She supports teachers and teaching assistants who have children in their classes with diagnosed learning disabilities. She offers suggestions and materials for children who need to approach learning in a non-traditional manner. Learning opportunities are available for children within the context of their class as well as on an individual basis. Her ultimate goal is to provide an environment where all children have the opportunity to be successful learners in our religious school.

Rachel also helps our adult community in meeting their needs including, but not limited to, providing a sign language interpreter as well as use of a CART system (closed captioning).



Carol Meyer
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Mike Sawyer
PRESIDENT



Marla Friedman
RELIGIOUS SCHOOL PRINCIPAL



Rachel Wood
INCLUSION SPECIALIST





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Worship

Religious services at Congregation Etz Chaim reflect our commitment to cohesion and community. In our sanctuary the seats are arranged so that we see not only the front of the sanctuary, but also each other. Ascending our bima requires only one step, enhancing the sense of community and encouraging participation throughout our worship services. We experience our worship services not as isolated individuals, but as part of a worshiping community.

Shabbat services are held year-round. In a given month there are a variety of services. The time of our Shabbat evening services varies based on the type of service that is held that week. With the exception of Tot Shabbat, ***Mourner's Kaddish is recited at every Shabbat Service.***

Please check the calendar on our website at congetzchaim.org for our Shabbat service times and Torah study schedule

ALTERNATIVE SHABBAT SERVICES begin at 6:45pm on Friday evenings. These alternative services have a theme, are family friendly and offer the opportunity to explore different variations of worship. The music is led by the rabbis and guests and there is no Torah service. There is no babysitting provided, but we encourage families to worship together in this more casual and laid-back setting.

TRADITIONAL SHABBAT SERVICES begin at 8:15pm. Free babysitting is provided.

FAMILY SHABBAT SERVICES begin at 7:30pm. Lasting no more than an hour, they feature the junior choir led by Terry Shapiro and the congregational song leader Cindy Michelassi. A story is told in place of a sermon. Free babysitting is provided.

RAMBLER SHABBAT SERVICES featuring the Life Tree Ramblers, begin at 7:30pm. These musical services are comprised of a band of musician-congregants under the direction of Cindy Michelassi. The congregation is encouraged to sing, dance, and worship in this lively and spiritual service. Free babysitting is provided.

TOT SHABBAT begins at 9:30am on SATURDAY MORNINGS and is held once a month for infants, toddlers, preschoolers through 6 years old and their parents. This brief service introduces young children to Sabbath rituals and communal prayer with songs and stories they can understand and enjoy.

AN ONEG SHABBAT (Joy of Sabbath reception) follows the evening services except for the 8:15pm service where the Oneg Shabbat happens before the service.

SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES are held at 10:30am throughout the year whenever a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is scheduled. The congregation is invited to join in Shabbat worship during any Bar or Bat Mitzvah service. Kaddish is always recited.

TORAH STUDY led by Rabbi Cosnowsky or Rabbi Kamil begins at 9:00am (9:30am in summer) on Saturday mornings.





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Religious School Programs

Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons are exceptionally busy and exciting times at Etz Chaim. Our religious school, serving preschool through 10th grade students, meets on Sundays from 9:15am - 11:45am to study Torah, ethics, holidays, life-cycle events, history, and Hebrew. Students in grades 3-7 also attend midweek Hebrew classes on Wednesdays from 5:00pm - 6:30pm.



Our curriculum has been recognized by the Community Foundation for Jewish Education as one of the finest in the Chicago area.

Our religious school fosters an abiding commitment to and love for Judaism exemplified by our dedicated volunteer Judaica staff. Our curriculum gives our children a positive feeling about their heritage and lays the foundation for understanding God, Torah, Israel, and tikkun olam (repairing the world).

Through the classes in our religious school, we help our students develop a mastery of Jewish tradition, history, Hebrew language, Bible, and Jewish thought. Because we believe strongly that a curriculum and teachers can only do part of the job, we have made family learning a priority in the school.

Each year we have a variety of programs involving the parents, so that the seeds we plant at school can be nurtured at home. When children see their parents actively involved, they see that lifelong Jewish education is important and does not end with Bar/Bat Mitzvah or Confirmation.

Recognized nationally for our retention of our students through 10th grade Confirmation, Congregation Etz Chaim is also proud of our many post-confirmation students who return to teach in our school.

Jewish youth who know that they are Jewish and know what that means are prepared to take the Torah and hold it close. For them the Torah can truly be an Etz Chaim - a Tree of Life.





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Member Involvement in the Community

Congregation Etz Chaim's distinctive culture of volunteerism helps make our community vibrant and relevant. Together with the rabbis, principal, and staff, Congregation Etz Chaim members supervise and perform the work of the congregation through various committees and special interest groups:

- **The Budget Committee** oversees the synagogue's annual budgeting process which projects operating income and expenses for the coming year. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Caring Committee** provides support for and assistance to Congregation Etz Chaim members in times of need. They aid congregants in several important ways; arranging rides, providing meals in times of illness, assistance with shiva arrangements etc. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Facilities Committee** is guided by the need to economically provide facilities that are safe, secure, functionally attractive, maintainable and energy efficient. The committee is responsible for all the infrastructure of the synagogue facility as well as the outdoor landscaping. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Inclusion Committee** guides and helps coordinate adaptations and accessibility options such as deaf interpreters, closed captioning, assisted devices, magnifying glasses, large print materials, along with any other needs that may arise.
- **The Library Committee** staffs the library and oversees purchases for the collections, as well as leads the book discussion group. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Lifelong Learning Committee** develops learning programs for our adult congregants who wish to expand their knowledge. The committee collaborates with several other committees to present various programs including Library, Social Action, and the Seniors group. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Membership Committee** communicates with all prospective and new members. They also do various programming for our current membership. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Retreat Committee** oversees the planning of our congregational retreat to OSRUI. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Ritual and Religious (R&R) Committee** reviews and guides the congregation in worship and ritual observances. The committee discusses current practices to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the congregation. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Religious School Committee** is a group of dedicated parents, teachers and volunteers that meets once a month to support the religious school staff in accomplishing their mission, as outlined in the religious school handbook. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Social Action Committee** plans activities to engage the congregation in tikkun olam (repairing the world). View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Ways and Means Committee** holds the primary fundraising responsibility for Congregation Etz Chaim. View the committee guide for more information.
- **The Youth Committee** oversees our four youth groups and college outreach. View the committee guide for more information.

Information about committees and groups and meeting dates can be found on our website at congetzchaim.org



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Celebrating Together

A highlight of Etz Chaim membership is participating in our varied congregational celebrations, most of which are centered around the Jewish holidays.

SHABBAT CHAVERIM Held on Friday mornings at 10:00am once a month to put the youngest family members in the Shabbat spirit.

SELICHOT Begins the High Holidays with learning, worship and the blowing of the Shofar.

ROSH HASHANAH Jewish New Year falls on the 1st and 2nd days of Tishrei, followed by the Days of Awe.

YOM KIPPUR The Day of Atonement is the holiest day in the Jewish Year.

SUKKOT Children bring “Pretty Paper Packages” which are donated to PADS and members shake the lulav and etrog in our congregational sukkah.

SIMCHAT TORAH Includes a joyous procession carrying Torahs and flags. Religious school consecration of all kindergarteners and new first and second grade students is included in this service.

HANUKKAH DINNER AND SERVICE Educational games, entertainment, community lighting of menorahs, and eating latkes in celebration of the Festival of Lights.

PURIM We are the “Purim Capitol of North America” and celebrate by masquerading, reading the Megillah, and eating hamentaschen. In addition, a Purim Carnival provides an opportunity for children to engage in this merry-making holiday.

PASSOVER COMMUNITY SEDER Held on the second night of Passover.

SHAVUOT SERVICE AND DAIRY BRUNCH A celebration to honor the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai

CONGREGATIONAL RETREAT This popular annual program fosters intergenerational closeness among members. We gather off-site for a weekend of informal study and educational activities on a theme.





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Join Us

Congregation Etz Chaim warmly welcomes new members to our congregational family. We encourage you to visit us, tour the synagogue and school facilities, meet our rabbis, principal, and members, and worship with us. Our membership dues structure is based on a “fair share” of income; however, no one is turned away because of financial circumstances.

We look forward to welcoming you to
Congregation Etz Chaim!



If you would like to visit our synagogue or religious school, or if you have any questions about membership, please call Carol Meyer, our Executive Director at 630-627-3912 or email her at cec.executivedirector@congetzchaim.org

Please visit our website at congetzchaim.org

