

Kol Ami Congregational Policies

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Inclusiveness/ Role of Non-Jewish Kol Ami Members

As a Reconstructionist congregation that embraces inclusiveness and radical welcoming, we offer services that are egalitarian, interactive, traditional and modern. We see God’s face in everyone: Jews by birth, Jews by choice, interfaith families; male, female, transgender, or non-binary; all races and ethnic backgrounds; single, married, divorced, separated, or partnered; straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual; babies, seniors, and any age in between; fully-abled, disabled, and persons of differing abilities. In 2017, our congregation unanimously affirmed our ritual and prayer services as being open equally and fully to both our Jewish and non-Jewish members. We are one of only a few congregations to affirm this practice.

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Dues Policies and Membership Benefits

Membership dues are the financial backbone of the Kol Ami community. With them, we keep the congregation solvent and functional. Dues are how we pay the salaries for our rabbi and community coordinator, rent for the space where we meet, our website, etc. We keep our expenses and thus our dues low through substantial volunteer service. At the same time, it is a key value of our congregation that no one should be turned away due to inability to pay. We have therefore adopted the following policies.

1. Dues are payable in advance, just like mortgages, rents, and utility bills. Our fiscal year begins on July 1; membership dues are billed shortly thereafter and are due upon receipt. Dues levels are set as part of the annual budget process and are approved at the June community meeting. Current dues levels are posted on the Kol Ami website.
2. If paying the full amount in July causes financial hardship, a member can choose to pay in installments by sending a written installment plan to the Treasurer within 30 days of being billed. The plan should indicate how much (give dollar amounts) will be paid in each installment and when (give dates).
3. When a member cannot afford to pay full membership dues, the member should submit a written request for dues reductions and an installment plan to the Treasurer within 30 days of billing. The plan should indicate how much (give dollar amounts) will be paid in each installment and when (give dates). We use an honor system in handling requests for dues reductions, and do not require members to submit tax returns or paystubs. We expect that members will not take advantage of this and will contribute as much as they can. Confidentiality will be strictly observed and information regarding dues waivers shared only with the President and Treasurer.
4. A new member will be billed upon the member's statement of intent to join. Membership is on a fiscal year basis. Members joining after January 1 will be charged half the regular amount. Payments for High Holiday services may be applied to the current year's dues. A new member may pay on an installment basis or request a dues reduction, following the same procedure described above.

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5. To maintain good standing, members must pay dues in a timely fashion as described above. Membership privileges include:
 - a) Being part of a vibrant and caring community
 - b) Attend High Holiday services at no additional cost
 - c) Enroll a child or children in JCEP
 - d) Vote in congregational elections and on important community decisions
 - e) Celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah service at Kol Ami
 - f) Attend adult education classes and participate in holiday celebrations
 - g) Have access to the Listserv and all Kol Ami announcements
 - h) Serve as an Officer
 - i) Serve on the Steering Committee
6. A member is no longer in good standing if, within 45 days of being billed, the member has not paid dues in full, nor submitted an installment plan. A member who is not in good standing loses all membership privileges.
7. There are three categories of membership: Family, Individual, and Friend. The last classification is reserved for former members who have moved out of the area but wish to stay in touch with and support the community. Friends of Kol Ami have access to the listserv and all community announcements.
8. These policies will be effective immediately upon approval by the community on January 10, 2016.

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Members Participation Policy:

Kol Ami is a participatory congregation. Volunteering is one of the core values that guide the goals and mission of our community. Giving our talents, passion and time to Kol Ami every year is not only a responsibility shared by all members but is also a crucial part of what defines our community. In order to ensure that members have a clear idea of this responsibility and that Kol Ami has the volunteers it needs, the community has agreed, as a policy, that each adult member who is capable should contribute every year, at a minimum, the following or its equivalent:

1. hosting of at least two Shabbat services (Friday evening or Saturday morning) and
2. helping with two High Holiday or other holiday service or congregation events.

The minimum participation required by each member may be adjusted by the Community at its annual meeting to meet the needs of the Community. Accommodations will be offered to members with disabilities.

We also need (but do not require from every member every year) people who are willing to make a year-long commitment to participate in one of Kol Ami's committees or service needs. Every member is urged to share their talents with the community at least once each year by participating in a Tikkun Olam project or other community activity, teaching a class or helping lead a service.

We are all grateful for the contributions of our members, which are crucial to the vitality of our community.

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Kashrut:

Food brought to an Kol Ami event should be vegetarian/dairy or pareve. Any foods that may be an issue with vegetarians (i.e. fish) should be clearly marked so people can make informed choices. We assume that kashrut is determined by ingredients and that a hekhshe by a rabbinic authority is not necessary. In addition, we assume that food offerings are not required to be prepared in dishes considered ritually fit (i.e., one set for meat, one set for dairy/pareve [includes foods which are not considered milk or meat e.g. vegetables, fruits, eggs, etc.]). Folks in our community who are concerned about these issues should determine which food dishes were prepared by those of similar kashrut observance level and then restrict themselves to those food dishes.

For Passover, we are not to eat "chometz", which includes grains (wheat, spelt, barley, oats, and rye) that have come into contact with water for more than 18 minutes. Loosely translated, this means no noodles, bread, and the like. In addition, Ashkenazi Jews do not eat legumes, including rice, corn, beans, peas, peanuts, and seeds. However, quinoa is allowed since it is technically a grass, not a grain.

Please keep in mind that the food we serve is offered with love and should be accepted with love.

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Jewish Children's Education Program (JCEP) Policies & Procedures

1. The Kol Ami Jewish Children's Education Program (JCEP) conveys to students that it is cool to be Jewish – through a mix of instruction and activities balancing a deep respect for our people's past with a lively sense of values, culture, and identity as American Jews. Knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish traditions can help children become members of our community. JCEP provides opportunities for children to make friends, whom they are then excited to see at other Kol Ami events.
2. JCEP is divided into two parts, Hebrew and Jewish Studies. The JCEP teachers decide on placement of students in class sections. The teachers continually assess student placement and may move children to a different class section during the year based on their proficiency.
3. JCEP meets one time per week, from 5:00-6:30 on Sunday evenings. There are approximately 28 classes per year. The class schedule considers Jewish holidays and Fairfax, Arlington, and Alexandria Public School calendars. The class schedule is distributed to parents over the summer preceding the start of class.
4. JCEP students must be enrolled in the program by parents, guardians or other family members (e.g., grandparents) who are members of Kol Ami in good standing. (See "Kol Ami Dues Policies and Membership Benefits" for more information.)
5. JCEP tuition is kept extremely low as compared with other Jewish children's education programs because the teachers are Kol Ami parents who volunteer their time. JCEP tuition covers basic costs including UUCA room rental, books and supplies. JCEP tuition must be paid within 30 days of enrollment in the program. There are two categories of tuition based on whether a family enrolls one student, or two or more students in the program. Tuition is reduced in half if a student is enrolled for only Hebrew or only Jewish Studies. Tuition is waived for children of JCEP teachers.
6. All JCEP students and their parents are expected to sign a class constitution or contract at the beginning of the year, which includes the expectation that all students will complete their homework each week. Each week when JCEP classes are held, class highlights and homework are posted on the Kol Ami website and emailed to JCEP parents on the listserv.

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7. Families are invited to visit and participate in up to three JCEP classes in advance of joining the program. These visits must be coordinated in advance by emailing the Kol Ami Children and Family Program Coordinator at children@kolamivirginia.org or directly emailing one of the JCEP teachers.
8. These policies will be effective immediately upon approval by the community on January 10, 2016.

Youth B'nai Mitzvah:

[Click here](#) to download Kol Ami's Youth B'nai Mitzvah Policy and Expectations (2013 update). You can also download the [FAQs for Kol Ami B'nai Mitzvah Service and Celebration](#). If you are interested in a Bar or Bat Mitzvah for your child, please contact Rabbi Langner and our Hebrew School (JCEP) coordinator. Contact the chair of Children & Family Program & Services at children@kolamivirginia.org for more information. Learn more about our [Children's Education and Programs](#).

Adult B'nai Mitzvah:

[Click here](#) to download Kol Ami's Adult B'nai Mitzvah Guidelines.

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Use of Torah:

1. Service leaders are encouraged to use the Torah. Service leaders will decide whether and how the Torah will be read.
2. Reading from the Torah is a privilege to be conducted with joy and dignity. Anyone who reads from the Torah must do so proficiently. To read from the Torah proficiently requires not only skill but practice of the specific sections that will be read. To learn how to read from the Torah, please contact Rabbi Langner.
3. If we do not have a Torah reader for a given service, instead of chanting (leyning), someone can read the portion in Hebrew or in English.
4. Anyone is welcome to participate in a group aliyah.
5. Non-Jewish members are welcome to take an individual aliyah if they are sufficiently prepared, and are welcome to jointly participate in an aliyah with a Jew at a significant family life cycle event, e.g. a bar/bat mitzvah.
6. Care should be taken as to who handles the Torah for honors such as lifting and dressing the Torah as some physical strength is required.
7. In extraordinary circumstances, a Torah may be borrowed or rented as long as the borrower obtains appropriate insurance and the steering committee approves.

Service Cancellation Policy

When it becomes necessary for Kol Ami to cancel a service or activity due to inclement weather or emergency the congregation's president, vice president and/or the service/event leader has the responsibility of informing the community at least three hours in advance of the activity. The cancellation shall be posted on the Kol Ami website and emailed via the Kol Ami list-serve. [Shabbat hosts](#) will be called by the individual cancelling the event.

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Shabbat Babayit Policy

Kol Ami has implemented a revised policy with regard to home hosting, which will be called SHABBAT BABAYIT. This replaces what were previously known as alternative services. This policy formalizes some of the procedures surrounding the program and explains in more detail how it will work.

A number of services throughout the month are formally held at the UUAC, but sometimes to provide a more personalized approach to prayer/spirituality members will host less formal prayer/ritual services in their homes, usually followed by a potluck meal. Each host will be responsible for planning the service, either a Friday evening service preparing for Shabbat, a Saturday morning service celebrating the Shabbat or a Havdalah service, which is the connector between the end of Shabbat and the rest of the week. The Shabbat Babayit Coordinator will work with the host to ensure that the information about the event is posted on the Kol Ami website. In addition, the host will provide a description of the event/service to the community and will include information about any special logistic issues such as parking, accessibility and pets.

If you are commemorating a special occasion or you want to host such an event, members should contact the Shabbat Babayit Coordinator ASAP in order that your desired date can be accommodated. Members and their friends, who wish to attend a specific Shabbat Babayit, should notify the host no later than 48 hours prior to the service of their desire to attend and what they intend to bring for the potluck. Anyone who attends should inquire as to what the host's dietary requirements are. Depending on the size of their homes, hosts may have a maximum number of people they can accommodate, so we ask that the 48-hour rule be followed.

It should also be noted that Shabbat Babayit services may be less formal than a Kol Ami service. This means that there may be components of the service that as an attendee you need to include...saying of Kaddish for a loved one, for example, but may not be part of the service. Such issues should be communicated to the host in advance to determine if your needs can be accommodated.

Should you have any questions or want to volunteer to host, you may contact Mark G at Babayit@kolamivirginia.org or phone him. This policy will be implemented in January 2011.

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Tikkun Olam Policy:

As moral human beings, as Reconstructionist Jews, and as members of the Kol Ami community and congregation, we believe that it is our duty to incorporate acts of Tikkun Olam into our daily lives and into the fabric of our communal activities. We hold to fundamental beliefs about the needs of all people to be treated with basic human dignity, to be entitled to basic human rights and to be able to live a life encompassing the "Four Freedoms:" Freedom of speech and expression, Freedom of every person to worship God in his or her own way, Freedom from want, and, above all, Freedom from fear.

To these ends we endorse and adopt this Policy for Tikkun Olam and Social Action. In doing so, our goal is to provide a framework that encourages and enables Kol Ami members to act individually, collectively with other members of Kol Ami, or organizationally as a part of the formally-organized Kol Ami body. This last category includes measures of physical assistance, education, and, when necessary, political action that further our commitments to our fellow human beings, are consistent with our consciences, and are in line with Kol Ami's obligations as a 501(c)(3) organization under US tax law. We do so in full knowledge that we are also members of multiple other concentric communities, including our cities, counties, states, country and world. As such we recognize our obligation to strive for social justice and harmony. But we are also cognizant of our varied commitments to, and comfort with, actively participating in the political processes and balancing the sometimes competing needs of the various communities to which we belong. We strive to foster an environment of open-mindedness, education, and dialog to reach decisions that reflect the collective values of our congregation.

Goals:

TO ANIMATE the Kol Ami congregation and community with the spirit of Tikkun Olam, so that social action becomes a part of our culture, not just a part of our agenda.

TO EDUCATE ourselves, our families, our congregation, and our communities about the social and political issues of the day.

TO FACILITATE opportunities for members of the congregation to perform maasim tovim (good deeds), acting either individually or collectively.

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TO ACT as a corporate body, when absolutely necessary and after due and careful deliberation, upon political and social issues that are found to be in clear and flagrant violation of our fundamental principles of social justice and human dignity.

Action Guidelines:

Administratively, Tikkun Olam programs fall into three categories: (1) maasim tovim (good deeds) outside the congregation where the name of the Kol Ami is known only to those directly involved; (2) educational activities, usually about the social and political issues of the day; and (3) activities that represent Kol Ami as a unified community outside the congregation.

The congregation does not intend to pursue its obligation to Tikkun Olam through collective political action, except, perhaps, in extraordinary circumstances involving clear violations of our fundamental principles of human rights and dignity. Such cases will, by definition, be rare, and action in the name of Kol Ami shall not be taken without Steering committee and congregation-wide approval.

Responsibilities for Tikkun Olam:

To encourage Tikkun Olam within the Kol Ami community, the Tikkun Olam committee will facilitate the scheduling of at least one formal event per quarter, alternating between a communally-encouraged Maasim Tovim project (e.g., a food or clothing drive) and an educational activity focused on some social or political issue of interest to the community. This goal should, in no way, discourage members from coordinating or publicizing and encouraging participation in other events, but should represent a baseline commitment of the community. It is expected that congregants will generate ideas for programs and take the lead in organizing individual events.

The Tikkun Olam committee will assist congregants by

- Ensuring all programs have sufficient time for planning, education, action, reflection, and evaluation;
- Coordinating and scheduling Tikkun Olam programs;
- Communicating about Tikkun Olam programs to the congregation; and

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- Ensuring that we respect and acknowledge the opinions of the minority.

Committee Structure:

The Tikkun Olam committee shall consist of no less than three people and follow the standards for committees outlined in the Kol Ami by-laws. The committee shall meet at least once per quarter and shall have an annual budget as approved by the Kol Ami Steering committee and by-laws.

Decisions:

A structured approach will be used for decision-making, based on how controversial or expensive the topic is.

A. For decisions of routine business nature and requiring less than \$100 in expenditures: a simple majority (50% +1) of Tikkun Olam committee members present at the time the vote is taken.

B. For decisions of routine business nature and requiring over \$100 in expenditures: The Tikkun Olam committee sends a recommendation, agreed to by a simple majority (50% +1) of Tikkun Olam committee members present at the time of the vote, to the Steering Committee for its determination.

C. For decisions on whether to support an action on an issue as a corporate body, a process that typically will take about a month:

- a. The Tikkun Olam committee sends a request to the Steering committee to consider whether the congregation as a whole should take a stance on an issue. The request must be approved by a simple majority (50% +1) of Tikkun Olam committee members present at the time the vote is taken.
- b. The Steering committee considers the impact of taking a stance on the issue by considering the following questions:
 - i. Is this an issue that we believe is a violation of fundamental human rights?

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- ii. Is this an issue about which we are willing to split the congregation if necessary and risk losing membership?
 - iii. Is this an issue that will place the reputation of the congregation at risk, and is the issue worth that risk?
 - iv. Is there sufficient time for the issue to be discussed and properly considered by the congregation?
- c. If a two-thirds majority of the Steering committee answers the questions as “yes” and agrees to take a stance on the issue, the issue is put to the congregation for a vote.
- d. The issue is then introduced to the entire congregation. The Tikkun Olam committee will organize at least one event to educate members on both sides of the issue. Following which, a period of discussion will last for no less than one week, with discussion forums being made available either formally through meetings or informally through e-mail, web-based services, or other direct communication.
- e. The decision to take a position as a congregation must pass by a super-majority of two-thirds of ballots cast by eligible members of the congregation.

Eligibility to Vote:

To vote in Tikkun Olam committee meetings, voters must be members in good standing with Kol Ami and must be recognized to be a member of the Tikkun Olam committee. A quorum of members of the committee must be present at meetings to vote.

To vote in Congregation-wide initiatives, voters must be members in good standing with Kol Ami, as defined in the Kol Ami by-laws. Members do not need to be present at a meeting to vote. Votes can be submitted by e-mail or in writing.