

For Immediate Release:

**Still Evolving After 120 Years:  
Congregation Kneseth Israel Approves New Vision For Improved Community  
Service**

September 5, 2011, Elgin, Illinois

On the cusp of their 120th year, Congregation Kneseth Israel's (CKI's) membership approved a series of new initiatives aimed at better serving the Jewish Community of the Greater Fox Valley area. Following a nine month visioning process, the congregation voted on August 22nd to transform itself into a non-denominational, "community" synagogue based on four pillars: Lifelong Learning; Embracing Diversity; Building Community, and Meaningful Observance.

According to Sue Johnson, who along with Gale Jacoby co-chaired the process, "I have been a member of this congregation all of my life, and I have seen CKI transform itself over the years in response to the needs of the Jewish population in the area. We have been affiliated with the Orthodox branch of Judaism, with the Conservative branch, and we have been unaffiliated. Going forward we feel that being unaffiliated with any major movement is currently the best way to serve our community." Jacoby adds, "We serve not just a large geographic area, but also a very diverse population of Jews. We have members who were raised in Orthodox households as well as those raised in non-observant homes. We also have a significant number of members in which one of the adults in the household was not born into the faith. In some of these homes conversion has taken place, and in others the adult partner remains active in their religion of birth. Finally, we have a large number of people who feel attracted to Judaism and come to CKI seeking information about our religion and history."

The visioning process began in September of last year. The committee conducted more than a dozen focus groups within the congregation, interviewed individuals knowledgeable about congregational issues, and performed a thorough literature review. The committee did not limit itself to Jewish sources for information. According to Johnson, "There is a significant shift in the Christian community from affiliated churches to non-denominational congregations. We came to believe that a similar transition is occurring in the Jewish community. People are less interested in labels than they are in a sense of community and meaningful religious experience. We found Rick Warren's book, [The Purpose Driven Church](#), as well as our visits with Christian congregational leaders to be fascinating." Jacoby states, "For the most part, people look to religion for a sense of community. They want to be part of something that is

religious in nature, but also accepting of their personal practices. Successful religious institutions have found a way of conveying an atmosphere of acceptance while providing a sense of community within an overall religious purpose."

One of the immediate impacts of the visioning process will be a special, two hour Rosh Hashanah service on Friday, September 30th starting at 9:00 a.m.. This service is open to anyone who wants to attend. No tickets will be required.

Congregation Kneseth Israel (CKI) is a non-denominational synagogue serving the diverse Jewish Community of the Greater Fox Valley area. We offer weekly services, a religious school, observance of all lifecycle events, and a variety of additional programming . CKI is located at 330 Division Street in Elgin, Illinois. For more information contact the synagogue at 847-741-5656, or visit us at [www.ckielgin.org](http://www.ckielgin.org).

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