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Temple Emanuel Revives Religious School in Gastonia

Temple Emanuel, a Reform community that dates back to 1913, serves 60+ Jewish families in and around Gastonia. The small – but very vibrant and welcoming – community has prided itself on its Religious School for decades. Temple families, many of whom are interfaith, have always ensured that their children learn to read and write Hebrew, lead both Friday night and Saturday morning tefillot (prayers), study weekly Torah portions, celebrate all of the Jewish holidays, and feel very prepared for their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

Last year, Temple Emanuel hired a new Religious School Director. Morah Rochelle Wilensky, who lives in Charlotte and has over 20 years of experience in domestic, international arts and Jewish/Hebrew education, began leading the school and teaching all students. She brings renewed energy and creativity to the School and adores all of the Temple families and children. With the small student population, Morah Rochelle teaches Hebrew with a “one-room schoolhouse” model, where students learn together in two groups and receive a lot of individual attention to excel. Last year, students ranged in age from 6-16, with some parents opting to accompany their children and learn Hebrew alongside them. By the end of her first year of teaching, all pre Bar/Bat Mitzvah students had made significant progress with their Hebrew and were learning new prayers easily and confidently. Younger students worked with a volunteer teacher – who specializes in Hebrew education for young children – and

learned their Aleph Bet and vowels. All students came together to learn and study Torah, celebrate Jewish holidays, and discuss Jewish ethics with art projects, games, plays/stories, and celebrations. Older students mentored younger ones, with high-schoolers volunteering each week to assist Morah Rochelle with set-up and clean-up all of her art projects. Families enjoyed using holiday packets that Morah Rochelle created to fully celebrate all of the Jewish holidays at home. Favorite events included a Sukkot family dinner under Morah Rochelle’s Sukkah in Charlotte, Chanukah party, Tu biShevat Seder, Purim Party at the JCC in Charlotte, Pesach Seder, and Shabbaton Weekend in Charlotte for older students.

This year, Temple Emanuel Religious School is very excited to welcome some new families to its school. School families hail from Belmont, Shelby, Bessemer City, Lowell, Clover, SC, and even Charlotte. Members relay that they enjoy the warm, welcoming and relaxed environment created by the Temple families. Students receive a lot of one-on-one attention – not only from the Director/Teacher, but also during Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. All Bar/Bat Mitzvah students receive free weekly tutoring from the Director for one year prior to their B’nai Mitzvah at Temple

Emanuel. The Religious School meets on Sundays from 10 AM-12:30 PM following the Gaston County School calendar, with Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutoring occurring before/after school. Families are very committed to their children’s Jewish education and enjoy volunteering during school hours for special events, holiday celebrations, etc.

Morah Rochelle is also starting a new Gastonia Jewish Youth Group for middle/high school students that will be based at Temple Emanuel (but is open to any Jewish student in the Gastonia surrounding area). Youth group participants will plan their own activities to have fun together and meet Jewish peers.

The only requirement for Religious School enrollment is: 1) Temple Emanuel Membership; and 2) Child is age 5+. Member families ensure that religious school tuition is kept at a very reasonable cost. If you are interested in learning more about Temple Emanuel’s Religious School and enrolling your child, or in the youth group, please contact the Religious School Director (Rochelle Wilensky, Rochelle.rrr@gmail.com). Temple Emanuel Religious School looks forward to another great school year with our 1st day beginning Sunday, September 8. ✨



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Temple Emanuel