

ANN ARBOR RECONSTRUCTIONIST CONGREGATION

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Holidays and several Shabbatonim)
Clare Kinberg, event/communications coordinator
and Beit Sefer director*

The AARC is an open and welcoming Jewish community. Its membership is diverse and inclusive. They are Jewish and interfaith families, couples and individuals all from a wide variety of Jewish traditions, as well as non-Jews exploring Judaism. Members have a variety of racial and ethnic heritages and sexual orientations.

Community and participation define the spirit of the congregation – as members, they all share responsibility for nourishing it. In the coming year (2015/2016) the congregation will be assisted by several rabbis, who will work with them to offer spirited musical services, and cultural and educational events. There will also be some Shabbat dinners and events in members' homes, to foster deeper conversation and connection. (The group will be conducting a search for a permanent, part-time Rabbi this year, as well.)

AARC's culture encourages an open minded approach to Judaism. A core tenet of Reconstructionism is that "the past has a vote, not a veto." AARC members actively explore and debate Jewish beliefs and practices, balancing a respect for traditional Jewish teachings with the responsibility to interpret them in the light of our contemporary values. The group is affiliated with Jewish Reconstructionist Communities.

The Jewish teaching of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) infuses their intentions and practices. It is reflected in the social and environmental action projects as well as in the mitzvah opportunities.

SHABBAT SERVICES

AARC meets formally on the second Saturday and fourth Friday each month for Shabbat services. Services are typically held at the Jewish Community Center

of Greater Ann Arbor, the group's home base. Communal dinners, Torah study, and informal prayer services held in members' homes supplement these Shabbat observances.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

AARC hosts creative and multigenerational holiday celebrations as well as programs for families with young children. The holiday observances are open to all community members and include ticketless services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a weekend retreat for Sukkot, and creative celebrations for all ages for Chanukah, Purim and Passover.

BEIT SEFER (RELIGIOUS SCHOOL)

The Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation's Religious School provides an innovative and engaging education for K-7th graders, focusing on Jewish values and ethics, history, diversity, prayer, and Hebrew language. Emphasizing critical inquiry and self-expression, the school uses a project-based learning approach to stimulate students' creativity and involvement in Jewish community.

Reconstructionist Jewish education is dedicated to intellectually honest inquiry combined with knowledge of tradition and commitment to the continuity of the Jewish people. The school believes this happens best in a caring, challenging, and supportive learning environment. Students are taught to actively participate in the evolution of Jewish religious culture.

Classes are held at the Jewish Community Center on Sundays mornings, 9:30–11:30 a.m., from September through May. Students learn in three multi-age classrooms. The youngest class, the Ketanim ("little ones") — K through 1st or 2nd grades — focuses on Torah stories, mitzvot, and learning the Hebrew aleph-bet (alphabet). Emphasis is also placed on creativity, joy in learning and forming friendships in community. The middle class, the Yeladim ("children") — middle-elementary school-age — will focus on Jewish time, the yearly cycle of holidays and the cycle of life rituals. The Hebrew curriculum continues using basic prayer vocabulary, poetry, song and movement to encourage a comfortable familiarity with the language. The oldest class, the Gedolim ("big ones") — upper-elementary up to bar / bat mitzvah age — centers on Jewish place: homes; communities around the world, including Israel; and houses of prayer. The students will learn about the development of Jewish civilization in diverse localities and about ethical dilemmas we face as individuals and communities. The students will continue Hebrew including mastery of prayers and beginning conversational Hebrew. Madrichim ("Guides") Program. High School students interested in helping out their younger compatriots can also serve as helpers in the Beit Sefer.

