

ANN ARBOR RECONSTRUCTIONIST CONGREGATION

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AARC is an open and welcoming congregation of over 80 Jewish and interfaith families, couples, and individuals, from a wide variety of Jewish traditions, as well as non-Jews exploring Judaism. The congregation includes WLGBT and interracial households. AARC is Reconstructionist, part of a progressive movement within Judaism founded by Mordechai Kaplan in the early 20th century that fuses tradition with modernity. 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 contemporary values. The Jewish teaching of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) infuses their intentions and practices, and is reflected in social and environmental action projects as well as in mitzvah opportunities. Community and participation define the spirit of the congregation—all members share responsibility for nourishing it.

SHABBAT SERVICES

AARC meets formally on the second Saturday and fourth Friday each month for Shabbat services. Fourth Friday services are preceded by a Tot Shabbat for families with young children. Services are 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 ticket-



less services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and celebrations for all ages for Hannukah, Purim, and Passover.

BEIT SEFER (RELIGIOUS SCHOOL)

The Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation's religious school, the Beit Sefer, 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. We believe 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.

Beit Sefer 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 Hebrew using the Hebrew through Movement approach. Emphasis is also placed on creativity, joy in learning, and forming friendships in community. The middle class, the *Yeladim* ("children")—middle-elementary school-age—focuses 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 learn about the development of Jewish civilization in diverse localities and about ethical dilemmas we face as individuals and communities. The students continue Hebrew—including learning prayers—in preparation for becoming b'nai mitzvah