ABOVE AND BEYOND NEW BEGINNINGS

Name of Congregation: Temple Emanuel of Tempe
Address: 5801 South Rural Road
          Tempe, AZ 85283
Phone Number: (480) 838-1414
Number Member Units: 500
UAHC Region: Pacific Southwest Council
Rabbi: Andrew Straus
Outreach Chairperson: Meryl Briscoe

This application is submitted by Fonda Christopher, trained Outreach Fellow (summer class of 1998) and former Outreach Chairperson 1992-1998.

Brief Description: "Above and Beyond New Beginnings" consists of (a) field trips to Jewish resources in the greater Phoenix area, and (b) workshops focused on building Jewish identity for those going through conversion or new Jews-by-choice. These field trips and workshops are an optional add-on to "New Beginnings" groups for those who are converting as well as for new Jews-by-choice.

The field trips and workshops reinforce the bonding that takes place within the "New Beginnings" group. Thus, these activities make participants feel welcome and more comfortable with a Jewish way of life. The most important aspects of the program are to expose conversion students and new Jews-by-choice to the Jewish resources in the greater Phoenix area, give them additional cultural experiences, and provide them with a sense of belonging to the worldwide Jewish community. The field trips have included a visit to a Judaica book and gift store, a Jewish museum, a Sephardic restaurant, and a Jewish-themed movie. Workshops have included sessions on how to bake challah and learning common Yiddish expressions and words.

For many this experience is the first time conversion candidates and new Jews-by-choice have an occasion to see ritual objects that are also art objects. The collection of books at the Judaica store gives them an opportunity to build their own Jewish library. The Jewish museum contains a replica of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Visitors can put their own personal notes in the cracks and the museum then takes these notes to Israel. The Sephardic restaurant gives them a chance to sample different Jewish foods. The Yiddish session makes students and new Jews-by-choice feel more comfortable with phrases and words they are likely to hear and may eventually use. The challah baking helps them feel their Shabbat is authentic.

Considering these activities as a whole, the program expands participants' views of the Jewish world beyond that of Temple Emanuel of Tempe. It makes them feel welcome, and part of a worldwide Jewish community.
Program Goal: Tempe, Arizona is located in the southeast valley of the greater Phoenix area. It is a distance from most of the metropolitan area's Jewish community resources. The goal of "Above and Beyond New Beginnings" is to help conversion candidates and new Jews-by-choice explore and experience Jewish resources in the greater Phoenix area as a group through field trips and participation in workshops. Sharing Jewish experiences and visiting Jewish sites contribute to a sense of mastery in Jewish life. Participants learn how to help meet their Jewish needs and reinforce their sense of Jewish identity.

Target Population: Conversion candidates and new Jews-by-choice

Number of Participants: Approximately 10-15 new participants each year.

Number and Length of Session: Over the two years mentioned above, six field trips and workshops were held. Sessions varied in length depending on the activity.

Staffing Required: "New Beginnings" facilitator and guest speakers when appropriate.

Total Cost of Program: No cost.

Fee for Attendees: Some activities require a minimal charge (i.e., cost of restaurant meal or donation to museum). Selected volunteers conduct workshops free.

Logistics: First, the facilitator plans the schedule for the "New Beginnings" group. This person should take into account feedback solicited from conversion students and new Jews-by-choice on what field trips and workshops they would be interested in during one of the first "New Beginnings" sessions or as a carry over from the previous year's "New Beginnings" group. Children are welcome as long as the activity is age-appropriate. Next, the facilitator telephones the contact person at field trip sites and the volunteers for the workshops, scheduling the dates and times. As the time nears, the facilitator distributes directions for field trips, coordinates workshop sites (i.e., the temple), sends letters of confirmation, and confirms the trip or workshop by phone. Thank you notes to destinations and workshop presenters are sent within a week after the event.

Instructions to Facilitator: Consider these field trips and workshops as suggestions. Their content and focus will vary according to your location, the resources in your community, and the needs of your students and new Jews-by-choice. The workshops should focus on Jewish culture or enriched Jewish life. For example, if you live in an area with several Judaica shops, find something your group has not yet done, such as attending a Jewish play or an Israeli festival. Always consider the feedback of the participants in order to plan events for the next "New Beginnings" group.

Evaluation of Program: Immediately following the field trip or workshop (i.e. while having a meal or coffee afterwards) and at the next "New Beginnings" group session, the facilitator discusses how the event went and gets feedback from the participants.
The field trips and workshops:
1. Expose group members to the types of Jewish experiences that can become a part of their lives.
2. Give students an opportunity to purchase Judaica.
3. Offer students the occasion to purchase books to make Jewish practice and learning possible.
4. Give students tools to make them feel comfortable with Jewish life.
5. Help create a sense of loyalty to the congregation.

Participants do not want the "New Beginnings" group or the trips and workshops to end! Conversion students and new Jews-by-choice seem comfortable attending Shabbat and holiday services as well as participating in numerous programs offered by Temple Emanuel of Tempe.

Follow-up: Since we have experienced two successful years of "New Beginnings Groups" and the option of "Above and Beyond New Beginnings" (field trips and workshops), Temple Emanuel of Tempe's Outreach Committee has scheduled "Conversion Mentor Training" as the next step. A team of trained conversion mentors will be assigned individually to those conversion candidates and Jews-by-choice that have participated in the "New Beginnings" groups in the past two years. Conversion students and new Jews-by-choice will be given the option of having a mentor as needed. The facilitator and Outreach Committee will stay in close contact with these individuals to make sure their needs are being met.
"Discovering Judaism" – October 8, 1998
Description of "New Beginnings" group

Hello. Thank you Rabbi _______ for letting me spend a few minutes with you tonight. My name is Fonda Christopher. This past summer I was most fortunate to have the opportunity to be trained in Cincinnati at Hebrew Union College to become an Outreach Fellow along with 33 other people from across the country and Costa Rica. I want to talk to you about an exciting group, called "New Beginnings". We will be starting it in several weeks to coincide with the "Discovering Judaism" course and it will continue a few weeks after the class ends. It is the first time both Temple Beth Sholom and Temple Emanuel are able to offer this group here, although it has been a very successful program across the country.

The purpose of it is to provide an emotional support group as well as a resource for those of you that are in the process of conversion or seriously considering conversion. Those who have converted in the last year or so are also invited to attend. It is not for individuals that are taking "Discovering Judaism" as strictly an adult education class and not considering conversion.

The "New Beginnings" group will focus on the personal journey you will be going through and not on the factual information about Judaism you will be learning from Rabbi _______. All of us embark on a journey in Judaism whether we are born Jewish or choose to become Jewish. This journey is exciting. We can rejoice together during it; there are also times we may need help with the challenges our journey brings. An example of questions we may cover are, "When will I really feel Jewish?" or "How do I tell my parents I am thinking about converting?" or "If I convert, does that mean I erase all of my religious childhood memories and start over?" If you have a partner, they are more than welcome to attend and in fact are encouraged to do so.

It is an honor and privilege for me to facilitate this group that will meet either monthly or every 6 weeks right after your class for about an hour or so. Sometimes we may not meet as a class but instead go on a field trip (i.e., Jewish gift shop, Jewish museum) or even Shabbat dinner at the end! The group will be very flexible. Since many of you come straight from work, we will figure out something in terms of food for that evening! My role is both as a professional in with those who have gone through conversion as well as personally since my husband converted 7 years ago. Both Rabbis ______ (as well as me) strongly encourage you to take this group in conjunction with the "Discovering Judaism" course. I will be working out the starting date in the next week and will get the schedule to you through one of the rabbis. It will begin either ___ or ___.

Our experience in working with those going through or seriously considering conversion to Judaism is that individuals need more than the basic course, "Discovering Judaism". It does not mean you cannot meet with your sponsoring rabbi privately. People need to come together and share in a non-threatening group to discuss their feelings, and that is what the "New Beginnings group" will do. We will be following in the footsteps from the Book of Ruth, of Naomi who helped Ruth on her journey to Judaism.

I will pass around a piece of paper for those of you that are interested in participating and will be in touch with you. I’ll also be available for a few minutes if you want to talk to me privately after class or you can call me at home for more info. My number is 892-5924. Thank you again _____ and I hope to see some of you soon!
The “New Beginnings” Group (Fall, 1998 – Spring, 1999)

Upcoming Meetings and Events

January 28, 1999 – 7:10 p.m., brief meeting at Temple Beth Sholom after Discovering Judaism class to plan future events

February 4, 1999 – 7:10 p.m., group meets at Temple Emanuel after Discovering Judaism class

February 7, 1999 – Field Trip #1 – Sylvia Plotkin Judaica Museum (Temple Beth Israel) (1:00 p.m., donation $2 at door)

February 25, 1999 – 7:10 p.m., group meets at Temple Emanuel after Discovering Judaism class

February 28, 1999 – Field Trip #2 – Israel Connection (Jewish Gift & Book Store) (1:00 p.m.)

March 11, 1999 – 7:10 p.m., group meets at Temple Emanuel after Discovering Judaism class

April 15, 1999 – 7:00 p.m. – Challah Baking Workshop – Meet in Social Hall

** Other dates will be announced as events are scheduled (We will be meeting after Discovering Judaism class ends (3/11) and before the Mikvah and Bet din (4/21) as well as after conversion takes place)

** Facilitator – Fonda Christopher, M.S. Child Development and Family Studies
Phone #: 892-5924
E-mail address: fonda.christopher@juno.com
The “New Beginnings” Group (Fall, 1998 – Spring, 1999)

Sunday, February 7, 1999

Field Trip #1 – Sylvia Plotkin Judaica Museum
(located at Temple Beth Israel)

* The address for the museum is: Temple Beth Israel
10460 N. 56th Street
Scottsdale, AZ 85253
(951-0323)

* We will meet the docent (Bruce) outside in their parking lot **promptly at 1:00 p.m.**
(We are scheduled to be there no later than 3:00 p.m.)

* Since the museum is self-supporting, a donation box is at the museum, and $2 is the suggested amount for adults.

* We will be attending with the “New Beginnings” group from Temple Solel.

* Dress is casual.

* Please let Fonda know if your partners will be coming – the tour will be adult-oriented but older school-age children are welcome.

* For those who are carpooling, we will meet at Temple Emanuel at **12:15 p.m.** in the parking lot facing Rural Road. Please let Fonda know no later than Friday, Feb. 5th if you are interested (892-5924).

* Fonda will hand out directions in class Feb. 4th as well at Temple Emanuel’s parking lot on Sunday, Feb. 7th.

ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL FONDA!!!

I HOPE YOU WILL FIND THIS TRIP INFORMATIVE AS WELL AS ENJOYABLE!