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An Introduction to Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound

Secular Jewish Circle's mission is to bring people together to celebrate Jewish culture and heritage in a non-religious, humanistic setting. We recognize our Jewish roots through non-theistic celebrations of holidays, life-cycle events and traditions, greater community awareness and involvement, and diverse educational programs for all ages.

We take pride in the values and culture developed by Jews throughout history. We seek to preserve and strengthen our connection with this heritage, and further develop a secular identity for Jewish historical and cultural traditions in the modern world.

History of SJC

Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound was established in 1994 to provide a non-theistic community for people who identify with the history, culture and future of the Jewish people. SJC's philosophy is based on Humanistic Judaism; a movement established 45 years ago that defines Judaism as the historical and cultural experience of the Jewish people, rooted in a belief that people possess the power and responsibility to shape life independent of supernatural authority.

Now in its 16th year, SJC is a growing community over 50 households. Our members live throughout the Puget Sound region. Members of the intergenerational community include Jewish individuals and couples both with and without children, mixed-cultural families, gay men and lesbians. Members come from widely varied backgrounds and influences, but all share the desire to explore Jewish identity, history, and culture in a thoughtful, non-theistic way.

Affiliation

SJC is an affiliate of the Society for Humanistic Judaism which provides information and support for members in 32 communities and congregations across 20 states, and international affiliates on 5 continents. SJC membership dues include SHJ membership benefits such as SHJ's quarterly newsletter, *The Humanorah* and the journal, *Humanistic Judaism*. SHJ also provides technical assistance to affiliate communities and national advocacy with the Secular Coalition of America. Also see SHJ's web site: www.shj.org

Our Beliefs

There are many ways to be a secular Jew. Some of us enjoy Shabbat rituals that include non-theistic blessings and others choose to participate in a study group or social action event. While SJC provides opportunities for a variety of secular Jewish expressions, our community is based on the following shared principles:

- Judaism is the evolving culture and civilization of the Jewish people. It draws its strength from a wide variety of cultural roots and social movements.
- We have the power and the responsibility to shape our lives according to our evolving individual beliefs and values independent of divine authority.
- Community is integral to Judaism.
- Jewish culture and education are essential to the continuity of our community.
- Social action is an important and necessary expression of our Jewish values and traditions.

SJC Events and Activities

High Holidays – Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur - SJC offers non-theistic programs to welcome the Jewish New Year led by trained lay leaders. Our secular, humanistic Rosh Hashanah ceremony is open to the public. Smaller, more intimate gatherings are held for Tashlich, Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur.

Shabbat - SJC members and guests gather one Friday evening per month to celebrate Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest and renewal. Shabbat begins with a brief member-led ritual with candles, wine and challah, and is followed by a potluck dinner and program. The programs are arranged by our volunteer Programming committee based on member input, and often have a guest speaker. Diverse topics have included Jewish cultural differences, philosophy and ethics, and Israeli folk dancing. Supervised childcare is available.

Passover - SJC celebrates Passover with a Seder and potluck dinner open to members as well as the public.

Other Holidays - The SJC community celebrates Sukkot, Chanukah, Tu b'Shevat and Purim. These celebrations are open to all, and are a great opportunity for intergenerational community building.

Social Action – The Social Action Committee functions from the principle that, while we each take responsibility for our own behavior, we must also take collective responsibility for our community and world. The Social Action committee represents SJC's belief that such action is a necessary expression of Jewish values. Currently, the Social Action committee supports homelessness initiatives in Seattle through the King County Coalition for the Homeless, and actively supports efforts towards the separation of Church and State.

Community Service - SJC participates in regularly scheduled community service projects. Community members have taken an active role with Jewish Family Services doing special projects for individual clients, participating in the Morris Polack Food Bank annual food sorting event and also delivering donations of food and toiletries collected at monthly Shabbat gatherings. SJC also hosts at least one annual environmental service project, typically associated with TuB'Shevat.

Book Group - SJC holds a monthly book group, reading a variety of books by Jewish authors or on Jewish topics.

Adult Discussion Group - SJC's adult discussion group is held monthly on Sunday mornings during the Shalom Sunday school time

Dine-out - Monthly, adult SJC members are invited to socialize and dine out at various restaurants each month

Mitzvah Corps - The Mitzvah Corps helps make SJC a community. It functions like a help line, to lend assistance to SJC members in need. This has included assistance with grocery shopping and meals, rides to doctors appointments, emergency child care, emotional support following the death of someone close or TLC after surgery. Arrangements are made with sensitivity and respect for privacy.

Shalom Sunday

The Shalom Sunday School curriculum for K-7 focuses on Jewish history, culture, traditions, holidays, and community. Children learn about and strengthen their connection to their Jewish heritage and the world around them, while Jewish values and ethical choices are modeled. Bi-monthly classes are coupled with community service, holiday celebrations, and B'nai Mitzvah preparation.

SJC Volunteerism

SJC is a volunteer-run organization that encourages and relies on its members to be active, engaged participants in the community. There are many volunteer opportunities for members of all ages, skills, and interests including helping with Shabbats, holidays, the Shalom Sunday school, phoning, administrative activities, and leadership on the Steering Committee.

Communications

SJC publishes a bi-monthly electronic newsletter including reports from the SJC Steering Committee, the Shalom Sunday school, recent events, committee news and meetings, upcoming gatherings, and information from our national affiliate (Society for Humanistic Judaism). SJC also sends out information 2-4 times per month about upcoming events via e-mail lists supported by IContact. In addition, members may choose to join SJC's yahoo group listserve which provides information about non-SJC community events that may be of interest (e.g., Jewish films or entertainment, social action and service opportunities, etc.)