

Dr. Ron Carter to Deliver Temple Beth El's Martin Luther King Shabbat Sermon

Each January, Temple Beth El partners with a local and vibrant African American Church for a celebration of the Shabbat preceding Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. On January 15, Dr. Ron Carter of Johnson C. Smith University will offer the MLK sermon, challenging us to create healing in our city not just on the days we celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but also throughout the year.

Dr. Ron Carter is a rising star on the landscape of Charlotte's leadership. He received his BA from Morehouse College and his Master of Theology and PhD in Philosophy of Religion from Boston University. In 1981, he became the youngest dean of students of Boston University. At University of the Witwatersrand in

Johannesburg, South Africa, he defied the status quo by becoming the school's dean of students — and one of the first black administrators at the traditionally white institution. Prior to coming here, Dr. Carter served as provost and dean of faculty at Coker College in Hartsville, SC.

Lifting the words of the service will be the joint music of two choirs, East Stonewall's AME Zion Church and Temple Beth El's adult choir. Bill Ward, Co-Music Director for East Stonewall AME Zion and Temple Beth El's organist, will work closely with Cantor Bernard to orchestrate the moving music of the MLK Shabbat experience.

This year's event will also mark the start of a new Johnson C.

Smith Spring Semester course entitled "African American-Jewish Relations." Jewish leaders will partner with Johnson C. Smith and other area faculty to reflect on the history of our two peoples. On one hand, this history has involved deep and painful struggles, and on the other, it has witnessed the deepest levels of trust and true partnership. The course will explore commonalities and differences, from our interpretation of Biblical texts to our respective experiences of slavery and the Holocaust. It will also highlight historical partnerships from the founding of the NAACP to fighting for civil rights. Guest instructors will include Rabbi Murray Ezring, Mariashi Groner and other Jewish community clergy, scholars and leaders.

Dr. Ron Carter's speaking at Temple Beth El and Rabbi Schindler's subsequent lectures at Johnson C. Smith University are part of a citywide sermon exchange created by Crossroads Charlotte and Mecklenburg Ministries. From January 15 through Black History Month in February, religious leaders across our city will be engaged in sermon exchanges that bring them to congregations racially, and perhaps religiously, different from their own.

Temple Beth El's MLK Shabbat Service will be held Friday, January 15, at 7 PM in the Sam Lerner Center of Cultural Arts. An overflow sanctuary with video and sound connection will be set up in Gorelick Hall. ☆

Music Plays a Starring Role at Temple Or Olam

At Temple Or Olam, the first and only synagogue in Cabarrus County, music is an integral part of the Jewish experience. And the music is as eclectic as the membership itself.

Where else would you find the Rabbi leading the congregation in melodies that come from Yemen, Poland, Germany, Israel and America, playing guitar and singing, while her husband accompanies her on such unusual instruments as the udu and the darbouka, along with keyboards, tambourines and other percussion devices?

For Rabbi Barbara Thiede, song and prayer work together and are critical components to the Shabbat services, especially in a congregation that didn't grow up with Hebrew as its native language.

"The way that the music will frame the emotional and spiritual message of the text of the liturgy is critical," says Thiede. "Maybe they only know the word 'shalom' and they know no other words in 'Oseh Shalom,' but if the melody and music provides a setting for that kind of expression of longing, then the message of the liturgy will come through."

Rabbi Thiede provides a diverse collection of songs and melodies that reflect the worldliness of Jewish culture.

"How do I select music? I select mostly by listening," says Thiede. "I try to have as much diversity as I can find. Listen to Ashkenazi music, but also listen to Sephardi music and Mizrahi music. I think another ingredient in all of this is recognizing that whatever congregation you have, no matter what

size, Jews have been all over the world. Even those who think they've been straight Ashkenazi, at one point or another there were probably Spanish or Portuguese Jews, Yemenite Jews, North African Jews somewhere in the mix, because there's been so much traveling around."

All of that figures into the musical selections Thiede makes. "What we've got is an attempt on my part both to listen and then to transmit the diversity of this experience through the music the people are hearing," says Thiede.

And one of the real joys for Thiede and the rest of the congregation is how music draws children into prayer. "There is nothing as infectious as music for children," says Thiede. "What you want more than anything as a spiritual leader is for children to delight in their expression of their Jewishness. We have a wide range of music that they can move to, that they can clap to, that they can play a little tambourine to."

That only serves to reinforce their faith.

"Their association with services will be the association of joy and enthusiasm," says Thiede. "And what are they really doing? They're experiencing thousands of years later something like what people must have experienced at the time Levites made the music at the Temple. We've been playing music and singing at worship ever since."

To learn more about Temple Or Olam, an independent and fully egalitarian congregation, check out our website at www.or-olam.org. ☆

Fundamentals of Judaism Courses at Temple Beth El

Taste of Judaism, 7-9 PM, January 13, 20 and 27

A three-part course on the foundations of Jewish traditions for those who want to reconnect or find an entrée into Jewish life. Our clergy will use traditional and modern Jewish texts to cover the Jewish perspective on spirituality, values and community. Free, but registration is required by calling Shari Hackman, Membership and Outreach Director, at 704-749-3051.

Introduction to Judaism, 8-9 PM, February 3, 10, 17, 24; March 3, 10, 17 and 24. Cost: \$65/person

or \$115/couple (members), \$75/person or \$125/couple (non-members).

An eight-week course designed to give a basic understanding of Judaism — its beliefs, values and practices. You will explore fundamental Jewish beliefs, Jewish history, Jewish holidays, lifecycles, liturgy and sacred texts, the Commandments, Israel, philosophy and Judaism and Christianity. Register at www.beth-el.com/rsvp or 704-749-3070. ☆

Friday Night Shabbaton on January 29 in Honor of Tu B'shevat at Ohr HaTorah

The last Shabbat in January of 2010 marks the festive day of Tu B'shevat, also known as the New Year for Trees. The theme of Tu B'shevat is to celebrate God's gift to us with the splendid trees and delicious fruits He has given to us, especially in the Land of Israel.

There are many beautiful traditions associated with this special day, including the tasting of the five fruits that Israel was blessed with in the Torah. They are the fig, date, pomegranate, olive, and wine grape.

On Friday night, January 29, the eve of Shabbat Tu B'shevat, Ohr HaTorah will host an exciting Tu B'shevat family Shabbaton open to the community. The Shabbaton at Ohr HaTorah will present fruits that are uniquely described in the Torah as being associated with the Land of Israel and will also feature an extravagant wine tasting of some of the greatest wines from Israel.

The celebration of the bounty was a major event in ancient Israel, and it involved all the people with many ceremonial obser-

vances and rituals as commanded by the Torah. The trees have a special place in Judaism, as the Torah says that we humans are likened to the tree in the field. There are many rules regarding how to treat trees, care for them, and not cut down fruit-producing trees. Judaism learns many teachings about Jewish life from how we treat the trees.

The Sephardic community is known to hold a special Tu B'shevat Seder with four cups of wine and a display of dazzling exotic fruits in celebration of this day. In Israel they plant new trees on Tu B'shevat, although this year they will be planting on Sunday in respect for Shabbat.

The evening will begin with a candle lighting ceremony at 5:30 PM, followed by a joyous Friday night service. The holiday Shabbat dinner will begin at 6:45 PM. There will be an array of Tu B'shevat activities for adults and children during the dinner. For more information please visit our website at ohrhatorahnc.org or call our office at 704-366-3984. ☆

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