

Published December 21st, 2011

Winter Nights and High Holidays at Temple Isaiah

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From left: Carol K, Carrie Paulus, Jill Jacobson Photo
Michael Fox Photography

temple for two weeks, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. weekdays and around the clock on weekends and holidays. That means preparing some 3500 meals and filling 700 volunteer job slots. And they'll do it in true interfaith style.

Winter Nights meal standards call for only cold breakfasts (plus a sack lunch and hot dinner), but Temple Isaiah provides hot breakfasts. All meals are served on temple dishes and flatware, making each occasion an oneg (joyful meal). Program participants will take outings to the San Francisco Exploratorium and the Oakland Zoo. There are Hanukkah and Christmas celebrations too -- December 23 (Hanukkah) and December 24 and 25. Christmas celebrations include a gift "shop" and Santa Claus himself. "You rarely see a synagogue celebrating Christmas in this way," says Phillips.

At the end, there's a New Year's Eve party featuring kosher catered food donated by a Lafayette owned catering business.

Rabbi Judy Shanks and her colleague Rabbi Roberto Graetz are both active members of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County (<http://interfaithccc.org/>). The Winter Nights rotating family shelter is a project of the Council's social justice alliance. Rabbi Shanks explains that helping the homeless helps fulfill the Jewish tenant of Tikkun Olam, which is the Hebrew phrase for healing the world one broken piece at a time.

Calahan-Klein says working with the Winter Nights program allows volunteers and clients alike to experience being "in a sacred space." She says "we forget how simple and essential this [food and shelter] is."

Winter Nights Hosts in Lamorinda

Nine Lamorinda faith communities are part of Winter Nights this year:

- St. Anselm's Episcopal Church, Lafayette
(co-hosts: Lafayette United Methodist Church and Lafayette Christian Church)
October 10-24, 2011
- Our Savior's Lutheran of Lafayette
(co-hosted at Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, Pleasant Hill).
October 24-November 7, 2011
- Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church
November 21-December 5, 2011
- Temple Isaiah, Lafayette
December 19, 2011-January 2, 2012
- St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Orinda,
(co-hosted at St. John Vianney Catholic Church, Walnut Creek)
January 23- January 30, 2012

Strength. Inspiration. Renewal. Those words are often bandied about in December. Yet while many of us frantically scrounge for "the perfect gift," Lafayette's Temple Isaiah taps hundreds of volunteers to care for homeless families through the Contra Costa Interfaith Alliance's Winter Nights program.

The temple is hosting families for the eighth year, December 20 through January 1. While many local churches also volunteer for this event, Communications Director Deb Phillips says, "Temple Isaiah traditionally hosts during the Christmas holiday because it is a less busy time here than it is in the local churches." Their congregation is so committed to the program they'll do it even though all eight nights of Hanukkah fall within their obligation this year. Hanukkah began at sundown December 20th.

Not to worry, says temple Winter Nights coordinator Rebecca Calahan-Klein. Admittedly, "it's gonna be a busy time," but she says temple members observe their major celebrations (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) in the fall. Calahan-Klein, along with husband Jonathan Klein, and Jeff and Tina Goodfriend work to house, feed and support nearly three dozen visitors, more than half of them children, at the

- Santa Maria Catholic Church, Orinda
(with co-host Orinda Community Church)
February 27-March 12, 2012

For program information e-mail eye4cee@aol.com or call (925) 933-6030.

Source:

Gwen Watson, Executive Director, Winter Nights Shelter
Homelessness Prevention at Shelter, Inc.

After Winter Nights, what next? The answer might be Shelter, Inc. a homelessness prevention program, which aims to support and empower its clients. "It is a hand up, not a hand out," explains Executive Director and Lafayette resident Tim O'Keefe. Shelter, Inc. collaborates with Winter Nights and their clients first by offering transitional housing - normally apartments where the displaced pay a portion of their income toward rent-and then moving families into affordable permanent housing. The program teaches people to navigate the network of social services and requires each family to develop their own, individualized plan. O'Keefe says it is cost-effective: "Servicing homeless families [costs] \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year, [whereas] homeless prevention [costs] an average of under \$1,100 per household."

Only a very few Shelter Inc. inquiries originate in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, but O'Keefe says "the community has very generously supported Shelter, Inc.'s programs for more than 25 years," and "most of our financial support, in-kind donations and volunteer commitments are from the Lamorinda area." Nevertheless, O'Keefe warns, "homelessness is in our community." To learn about Shelter, Inc. go online to <http://shelterincofcccorg.presencehost.net/>.

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