

T'Shuvah and Reconciliation

For over forty years there has been a Progressive Jewish congregation in Brisbane, Queensland, growing over just a few years from a small group meeting in homes and then halls, to a group large enough to purchase a property and create a synagogue from an old church building. Part of the purchase of this property was funded by the sale of donated coins, which had been rescued by a Holocaust survivor after the war.

Over the years this congregation saw many ups and downs in its activity. At one time there was only one Erev Shabbat (Shabbat welcome-Friday evening) service per month, then it grew in activity and numbers so that there was a regular Shabbat service and many other functions.

About fifteen years ago the congregation split into two congregations. A new congregation split away and they met in halls in different parts of the city. This group did grow to an active congregation for some time, while the original congregation sat and existed or at least that is how it seems. During this time the Synagogue building fell into a state of disrepair due to lack of funds and people to keep it going.

About three years ago the leaders of the two congregations met together and started talks between the two congregations re uniting - 'returning' to one another, or reconciling. I was privileged to be part of the committee involved in these talks.

As a result, in 2017 the reunification was finalized when a memorandum of understanding was signed.

This reunification of the congregations has enabled the congregation to grow, providing an environment for more people to return to their Jewish roots or to experience Judaism for the first time in their lives, including the opportunity for them to 'repent' and 'return' to a life renewed – the concept of 't'shuvah'.

The congregation is now gathering funding to repair and renovate the building. Some of these repairs have been done by volunteers and some by employing professionals. During this time we continue to grow together as a community, sharing a space and lives and experiences with one another.

How has Covid-19 affected the community? During the initial lockdown, no services were conducted from the Synagogue, however, I along with the president managed to keep in contact with the people via email, phone, messaging and on our private Facebook. Early in June we were able to restart services, although with limited numbers, which have been very well attended. Interest in attending services, in some ways, has grown even more than before the lockdown. Recently we started Zooming our services for those who are unable to attend in person – a COVID change that will continue for those who need it. This has been well received.

We are living in a difficult time however we will survive and grow. As a result of the reunification of this congregation in Brisbane, the congregation has earned the reputation of being a warm, welcoming, inclusive nurturing family. People come first for the religion/spirituality and return for the relationships.



MAVIS RUDD

Mavis Rudd is Treasurer of NCJWA Brisbane Section and Secretary and former Treasurer of Beit Or v'Shalom Inc.

Mavis, is a wife, mother, grandmother and great grandmother. Mavis is a retired, Herbalist, Naturopath and Bowen Therapist.

She operated her own health food store along with her husband for some years in Bundaberg and later worked with other Natural practitioners and Health Food Stores.

Mavis is also a carer for her 102 year old Mother-in-law.

ABOUT THE ELUL PROJECT

An initiative aiming to share stories and teachings from Jewish women leaders in our community. Whilst many of us are stuck at home, or isolated from family over Elul and the High Holy Days, we hope this project will serve to inspire, nurture, and uplift during this difficult time.