



Photos: Bnai Keshet's Red Gables Sanctuary gets a fresh coat of paint

[Bnai Keshet](#) announced in a press release that repairs to the third floor of Red Gables have been largely completed, paving the way for the 19th-century building to provide sanctuary under the auspices of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance, should the need arise, in the near future. The synagogue painted the building on Feb. 3-4. Red Gables was home to Bnai Keshet until 2000, when their facility at 99 S. Fullerton Avenue was built.

Bnai Keshet Sanctuary Project

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The Montclair Sanctuary Project at Bnai Keshet, a team of about a dozen volunteers from a variety of religious institutions complete repairs and painting Saturday Feb. 3 to the third floor of "Red Gables" at Bnai Keshet, a shelter for immigrants in danger of deportation. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



One of the storage rooms that will probably not be renovated, in existing condition at the sanctuary in Red Gables. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Jordan Sklar of Bnai Keshet cleans paint from the fireplace in the living room in Red Gables on Saturday Feb. 3. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Tim Duhamel of First Congregational Church paints the hallway in Red Gables. ADAM ANIK/FR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Dick Thomas of First Congregational Church paints a bedroom as Andrew Gelman and Ari, 10 of Bnai Keshet prime the walls on the third floor of Red Gables. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Rabbi Elliot Tepperman of Bnai Keshet and his son Akiva, 15, attend to details in the living room. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Rabbi Elliot Tepperman cleans the mullions of the windows in the living room as The Montclair Sanctuary Project at Bnai Keshet. A team of about a dozen volunteers from a variety of religious institutions complete repairs and painting Saturday Feb. 3 to the third floor of Red Gables at Bnai Keshet. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Co-organizer Melissa Polaner of Bnai Keshet mixes paint to be used for the third floor of Red Gables, a shelter for immigrants in danger of deportation. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LCOAL



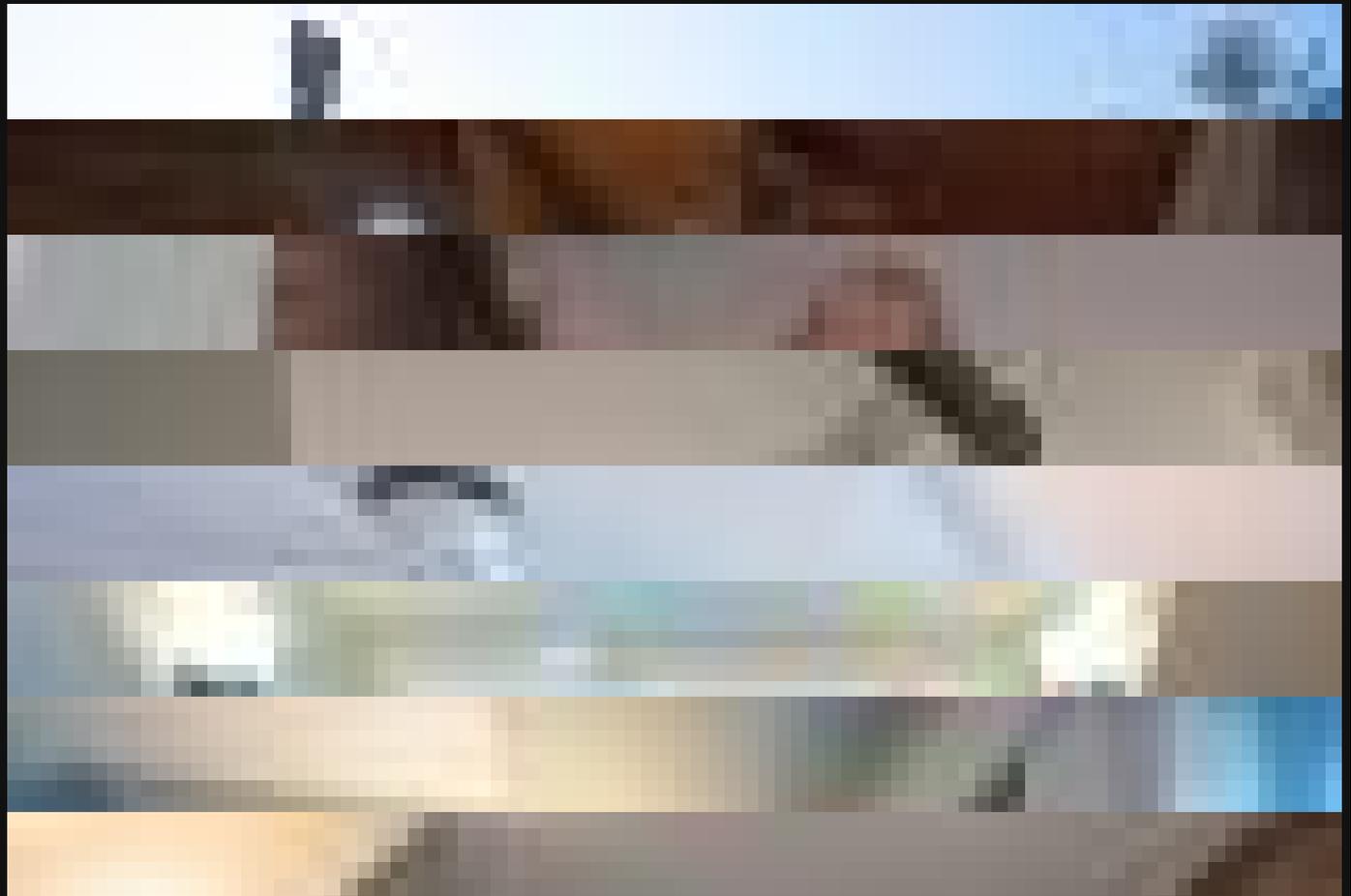
A room previously used as a kitchen awaits plans for Red Gables renovations are underway. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

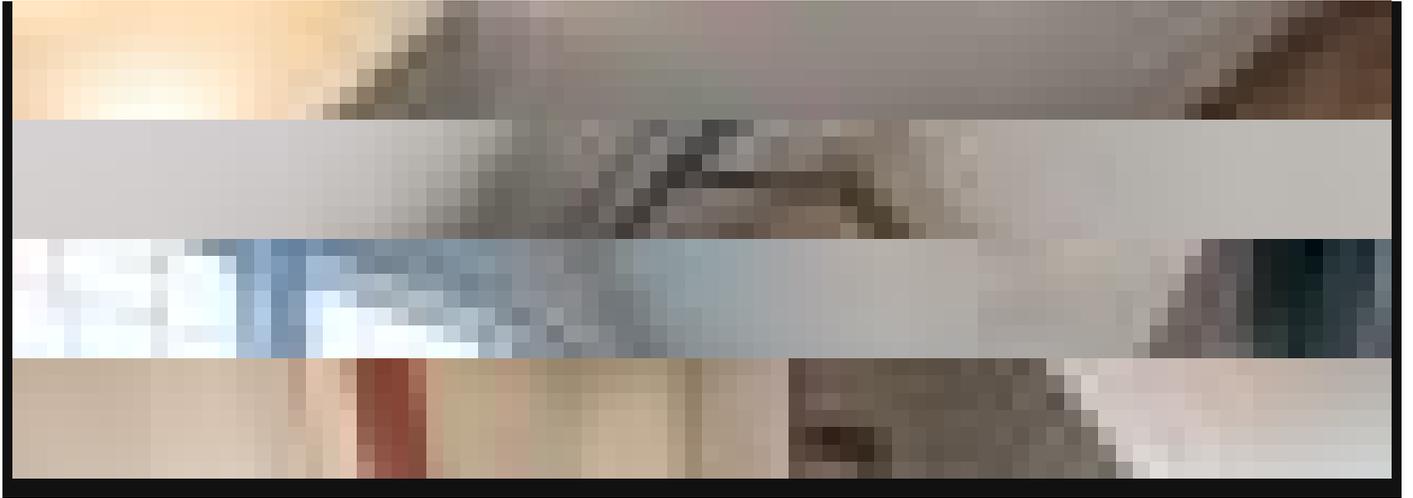


Dick Thomas of First Congregational Church paints a bedroom. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



A second bathroom in Red Gables awaits renovation as The Montclair Sanctuary Project at Bnai Keshet, a team of about a dozen volunteers from a variety of religious institutions complete repairs and painting Saturday Feb. 3. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL





Montclair Sanctuary Alliance holds dedication service



Participants gather at Bnai Keshet. NEIL GRABOWSKY/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

By GWEN OREL

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About 80 people gathered at Bnai Keshet on Thursday, Dec. 14, to celebrate the third night of Hanukkah and the formation of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance.

On the corner by the synagogue at South Fullerton Avenue, on a freezing cold evening, Rabbi Elliott Tepperman played guitar and led songs as Hanukkah candles were lit and those assembled lit their own from

the menorah.

Tepperman said that Hanukkah, and the time before the solstice, is “the darkest time of the year.” The MSA provides light and brings out the light in one another, he said.

The Montclair Sanctuary Alliance is formed of Bnai Keshet, First Congregational Church, and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair. Individual clergy are also members: Rabbi David Greenstein, of Shomrei Emunah, read aloud the prayer in Hebrew. Tepperman told the crowd that the Rev. Mennell of St. Luke’s Episcopal called him up to say “count me in!”

The MSA will host undocumented immigrants on the third floor of Red Gables, Bnai Keshet’s original home, on its property on South Fullerton. Those in the MSA will accompany immigrants to their meetings with ICE (Immigrants and Customs Enforcement), and provide a rapid response team for those who are arrested suddenly.

When Tepperman said there would be a blessing in Hebrew, in English, in Spanish and in Creole, Bnai Keshet’s Marshall Kolba joked, “how about a reader inside?”



Participants walk with their candles back inside Bnai Keshet. NEIL GRABOWSKY/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

After the candles were lit, the service moved inside, to the lobby of Bnai Keshet, where a variety of speakers talked about the need for MSA.

Horacio Campos, of Newark, spoke on behalf of the Mexican community. Bnai Keshet’s Carmen Correles translated. “People are trying to do everything to live,” Campos said. “We should all work together.”

The Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael, of UUCM, asked the audience if they had ever lost someone, and received help, or been scared, and received love. To see an immigrant as someone as human as you are, “this is how you provide sanctuary,” she said. A candle in the dark and cold provides light to your own face, and to those around you, she added. UUCM will continue giving a percentage of its collection plate to MSA through January.

The Rev. Ann Ralosky, of FCC, marvelled at the large number in attendance. “Many of us are feeling that we alone can do so little,” Ralosky said, and that “voices are getting lost in the cacophony.” But in every faith tradition, “God shows up in the vulnerable.” Jesus was a refugee child in an occupied territory, and GOD showed up, she said.



A large crowd attended the dedication of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance on Thursday, Dec. 14. NEIL GRABOWSKY/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

She also asked those not from Bnai Keshet to recruit others from their own communities towards this effort.

“Other congregations joining makes a statement: this is something we value as people of faith.”

Rabbi Ariann Weitzman of Bnai Keshet said that most of the people in the room were descended from immigrants, and that many Torah stories, including that of Adam and Eve leaving the garden, are about people leaving the place where they were born.

Archange Antoine, from Faith in New Jersey, a multi-faith network of faith leaders, which partnered with the churches of MSA, also spoke, saying that he was “unapologetic about faith, and applying to push for justice in the state of New Jersey.”



Letters to the governor were preprinted and signed by participants. NEIL GRABOWSKY/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

Tepperman again led those assembled in “I will build this world from love (Olam Chesed Yibaneh)” in English and in Hebrew.

Inside, there were doughnuts, in honor of Hanukkah, and letters waiting to be signed by those assembled, to the new governor. It was a letter drafted by MSA, with 36 signatures from area clergy, and space for people to write their own notes.

The letter, which includes quotations from the Torah, the New Testament, and the Koran, states that “We as New Jersey faith leaders declare ourselves adherents of the moral command to love and protect the stranger.”



A sign outside Bnai Keshet in three languages. NEIL GRABOWSKY/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Rabbi Elliott Tepperman leads participants in “I will Build this World from Love.” NEIL GRABOWSKY/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL



Montclair Sanctuary Alliance to hold dedication ceremony Thursday



The Rev. Ann Ralosky, of First Congregational Church, believes that she is commanded to help "the least of these." DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

By GWEN OREL

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On the third night of Hanukkah, Thursday, Dec. 14, an interfaith celebration will be held at Bnai Keshet and will also mark the formation of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance. Bnai Keshet, First Congregational Church and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair put together the alliance with the help of Faith in New Jersey, a group that works on social and economic justice issues at the local, state and federal level. The celebration will be held at Bnai Keshet, 99 South Fullerton Ave., at 7:30 p.m.

The word "Hanukkah" means dedication, and the holiday commemorates the rededication of the Temple sanctuary after the Maccabean uprising against Greek colonization. "We will dedicate ourselves to the project," Bnai Keshet's Rabbi Ariann Weitzman said of Thursday's gathering, which will be the first interfaith Hanukkah celebration at the synagogue.

"Hanukkah is a holiday that at its very core is about bringing light into moments of darkness," said Rabbi Elliott Tepperman of Bnai Keshet, who spearheaded the project.

Members of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance will accompany immigrants to their check-ins with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE, and form rapid-response teams to help document arrests.

The third floor of Red Gables, a 19th-century building that was Bnai Keshet's home until a new synagogue was built in 2000, has room to house a family in what was the custodian's residence.

Laypeople will do some of the work to ready the space. "It's an incredible community building effort," Weitzman said.

UUCM is devoting 20 percent of its Sunday collection plate in December to the project. The UUCM newsletter states the doing so is "consistent with our Principles and Covenant." The first principle, the Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael said, is "to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every human being."

The Bnai Keshet space can afford a family some privacy, said the Rev. Ann Ralosky, of First



Stained glass over the landing of the second floor of Red Gables. The home for immigrants will be on the third floor. DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

Congregational Church.

Ralosky's congregation, like UUCM, is taking up a collection for a reserve fund for immigrants. While it can be anticipated that a family would need meals, and someone to do laundry, there might also be a need for a quick legal response, she said.

First Congregational Church is often thought of as the LGBTQ church, Ralosky said, because it holds many LGBTQ events, and because of the huge rainbow sign on its lawn.

But really, the congregation is about being "open and affirming of others," she said. People who are marginalized within their community, due to ethnicity, age or gender, are welcome at FCC.

"We are radically inclusive," Ralosky said.

"Our values are prompting us to bear witness to what's happening.

"There's still a veneer of decency. They do not want the bad optics of knocking on the door, and dragging someone out of a church." Housing an undocumented immigrant can buy time, she said.

There are undocumented people living in Montclair, as well as in Newark, Irvington and Union. "We have a team of about 30, ready to go," she said.

FAITH AND HISTORY



RABBI ELLIOTT TEPPERMAN

Tepperman said the effort was "important to me personally because I come from a family that needed a place

that would be safe to live.

“I’m grateful that America was that place. It’s important to me personally because I know that for many generations, Jews have lived in countries where they did not have full legal rights as citizens.”

His grandfather and great aunt came to the United States from Eastern Europe as teenagers, he said, and had to “sneak out of the country because they couldn’t afford any of the fees.” Weitzman said that when many Jews came to this country, the laws were different. They didn’t have to deal with the same stringencies to immigrate

Protecting the stranger is also important theologically, Tepperman said: “We are



Rabbi Ariann Weitzman of Bnai Keshet knows that immigration was easier at the turn of the century. DEBORAH ANN TRIPOLDI/STAFF

commanded once to love our neighbors, in the Torah, twice to love God, and the commandment to love the stranger is backed up over 36 times. The Torah is obsessed with making sure that we protect the stranger.”

In a sermon, he quoted the passage in Deuteronomy that says God upholds the fatherless and the widow, “and loves the stranger, providing food and clothing. You too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Sammler-Michael said, “We are bound together in society in such a way that equality is not manifest unless we respect one another’s dignity.

“We have laws in this nation that we need to uphold, but we also have laws in this nation



REV. ANYA SAMMLER-MICHAEL

that are more fair for some than they are for others. All of our members have a deep inclination to serve immigrants. How is different from individual to individual.”

Ralosky said she saw what was going on “with Christian lenses.”

“Christ is in the least of these,” she said. “Our undocumented brothers and sisters are among our most vulnerable. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it’s the stranger in a strange land.”

Christ as a baby was a political refugee, she said: “His family fled to Egypt for their lives. They stayed for two years.” That fact gets brushed under the hay,” she said.

Ultimately, Tepperman said, “what we would really like to see is a more inclusive and navigable immigration policy from our country. As long as that’s not there, we feel morally compelled to offer opportunities for individuals being potentially deported to resist that deportation and seek safe sanctuary with us as they try to come to a resolution.” It’s a political act, he said, but not a partisan one.

Sammler-Michael said, “Right now our country is engaged in a culture war of sorts, where we are asking ourselves, ‘What does it mean to be an American?’” Her congregation is dedicated to developing a larger vision of what that should be.

“People in need are bearing Christ within them,” Ralosky said.

“It’s not theologically challenging at all. It’s an act of holy resistance.”



Montclair Sanctuary Alliance forms, Hanukkah celebration Thursday

By **GWEN OREL**

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On Thursday, Dec. 14, at 7:30 p.m., there will be an interfaith gathering at Bnai Keshet, 99 South Fullerton Ave., to celebrate the formation of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance. Bnai Keshet’s Red Gables building is in the process of being renovated so it can hold undocumented individuals facing deportation.

The event is co-sponsored by Bnai Keshet, First Congregational Church, The Unitarian Universalist

Congregation at Montclair and the faith-organizing group Faith in NJ. The event will have a ceremony of songs, prayers and words of welcome, coinciding with Hanukkah.

Rabbi Elliott Tepperman and Rabbi Ariann Weitzman of Bnai Keshet, the Rev. Ann Ralosky of First Congregational Church, and the Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael of Unitarian Universalist Congregation are spearheading the project.



ELLIOTT TEPPERMAN

Tepperman said that sanctuary is a “really broad term,” and it can include having members accompany people to ICE check-ins, or have rapid response teams show up if ICE arrests someone in the middle of the night.

It can also mean physical sanctuary, which is where the third floor of Red Gables, Bnai Keshet’s original home, comes in. For Tepperman, being a sanctuary congregation is political, but not partisan: “The desire is to change the fabric of the community in order to change a policy. It’s a political act that faith requires of us.”