



## **DISTANCE WORKSHOP**

### ***Planting Your Sisterhood's Vineyard***

**A year of innovative programming**

**August 19, 2015**

**Ellen Kaner Bresnick, Program Activities Team Chair**

The following programs highlighting the WLCJ and Torah Fund theme for 2015-16, *Nat'ah Karem* (she plants a vineyard) were introduced. Additional material will be available on the website under the Nat'ah Karem icon.

This theme has many levels of accessibility for your members. Each of these approaches can offer engaging, creative and enriching programmatic opportunities.

- It recognizes **women's productivity**; how women are able to multi-task and can focus on many different kinds of activities and exercises at one time.
- The **symbol of the vineyard is a rich one** – reflecting both women's productivity in the present and the benefits for future generations.
- Another way to look at the **vineyard is as a legacy** to future generations. How do we want to be remembered?
- How can our **productivity improve the world** and/or the people around us?

**Some things to remember as you create new programs:**

- If theme related, don't be afraid to engage in a brief discussion about it – that "*nata'ah karem*" comes from the Eishet Chayil poem in the Book of Proverbs, depicting a woman who is industrious, accomplished and adroit.

- Don't be afraid to try something new and different. Remember that people internalize and enjoy things in different ways.
- These programming suggestions can be adjusted to a variety of groups, both large and small: Rosh Hodesh groups; beginning of the year; Back to Shul or Sisterhood programs; Education Day for sisterhood or Region
- All of these activities can be part of a Region Education Day at which many sisterhoods are represented.
- Finally, keep any programs you already have and love and just tweak them, perhaps allowing you to link it to the theme. Don't discard what is successful with your sisterhood - Know what works but also be willing to try new things.

### **The program categories for which we provide guidelines**

- Jewish Holiday and Cultural Programs
- Social Programs, including Intergenerational Programs
- Social Action
- Art and Creative Jewish Arts
- Personal Enrichment, including Wellness and Learning
- Books and Films

### **Holiday and Cultural Programming**

**Legacies:** What women are part of your past or present who created a legacy for you? Are you crating a legacy?

Bring pictures of significant women in your lives into your sukkah as decorations

At Passover, convert them into placemats or decorations for the table. Set places for these women at the seder table. They can be women who created a legacy for you or for whom you are trying to create a legacy.

Paper bag dramatics: bring in mementoes or that represent the women you want to honor. Create imaginary conversations with them. In their voices, speak about the meaning of the holiday you are celebrating.

Host a tea, luncheon or dinner honoring women from your past. Have the program reflect a different time in women's history. Imagine yourselves as a sisterhood from the past.

#### **Social Action**

The above skits, discussions and projects could be presented as a program for residents of an independent living or assisted living facility. Bring these teas and luncheons to them or invite them to your teas, luncheons, dinners, or holiday observances where you honor those who provided a legacy.

Invite the residents in these homes talk about the women who came before them, and ask them to bring an object that the woman left them or a picture or two of the women to your program. Copy down their stories, combine them with pictures and create a scrap book page

for them. Invite them to present their own memoirs in an exposition or at that the tea party or luncheon you host in their honor.

Sponsor a movie program suggested from WoFlix and discuss the message as part of a social action program.

Other venues could be food banks or shelters. Assemble bags or backpacks that might help women and especially young women to think about what tools they might need for future success.

Plant a garden that at your synagogue. Donate part of the produce to a shelter or food donation site.

Design some social or holiday activities and invite members of group homes to participate.

Connect with military organizations and invite female soldiers -- Jewish and otherwise -- to some of your programs. Encourage them to talk about their legacies. Assemble packages for soldiers --male and female, Jewish and non Jewish. Write personal letters/notes. This can be an intergenerational program as well as a social action one. Develop social action activities specific to holiday/celebration. Host parties for children whose parents are overseas

Pair up women with some of the young women (teenagers, girls, etc) in your community who need a support system. Have your sisterhood members sign up to tutor.

Create a "Make a Difference Activities Calendar" or a "Create a Legacy Calendar" and publicize it in your sisterhood. Create a list of social action activities. Do one each month as a sisterhood or even more frequently. Publicize them.

### **The Arts and Creative Jewish Arts**

- Arrange a visit to a local cultural or art museum. Bring in speakers, authors, poets or other specialists on the Jewish past. Charge an admission fee and donate the money. Invite groups – especially seniors.
- Illustrate memoirs and family stories. They can be posters, scrapbooks, yearbooks, etc. Have a public display of this. This is also a great PR tool for your sisterhood. You can also have a designated space in your sisterhood to present these displays.
- Have a session in the kitchen teaching how to make grape jam and/or dolmades (stuffed grape leaves) with Israeli couscous.
- For Sukkot, do rubbings of grape leaves on napkins or flags for decoration. Use it again for Tu B'Shevat or Passover.
- Make a memoir quilt or other kind of quilt—either individually or collectively. It can reflect the history and legacy of the sisterhood; particularly good if your sisterhood or synagogue has a significant anniversary coming up. Always arrange for a presentation of these materials in a public setting.
- Host art appreciation activities. Find paintings, photographs or other images by Jewish artists and discuss their legacies. Create imitations of their art forms.

- Make New Year's cards or other objects for the holidays. For directions on some possible projects, see *Hiddur Mizvah*
- Recommended WoFlix movie: *"The Woman in Gold"*

### **Current events**

During this election time, invite speakers to discuss current social and political issues.

Present biographical and autobiographical writings about famous Jewish women and analyze the voices, issues and pressures that these women faced.

Assemble news articles with themes related to Nat'ahKarem materials. How are these issues reflective of the major social issues of the time?

### **Intergenerational Programs**

*Nat'ah Karem* is particularly suited to intergenerational programming.

- Invite different generations from your family to write or create a family memoir together.
- Pair sisterhood members with members of USY or students in the religious school or any other child, teenagers, etc. and invite them to share stories about their family stories. Do collages or artwork together. Perhaps these collaborative works can be presented on a Shabbat morning or during a Kiddush or other planned event.
- Cooking lends itself to intergenerational activities, especially if the food is based upon family recipes or traditional Jewish recipes from around the world.
- Work at food banks together. Take the children to supermarkets and have them shop for food to donate to the food bank. This is particularly important during Jewish holidays for those in the community who either cannot get out to shop or who need this food. The food can be arranged together in food baskets and delivered.
- If you could leave a time capsule that contained in it all of the objects that would suggest your legacy, what would be in that time capsule?. Have the different generations work together on creating that time capsule and filling it and burying it. Everyone could label and bury their together on the synagogue grounds or in some other place. This lends itself to solid story-telling as well.
- Recommended WoFlix movie: "Places in the Heart" and "Baby Boom"

### **Personal Enrichment with a Focus on Wellness and Learning**

This is such a complex area because we often tend to think of this in terms of physical wellness only, when in fact, as many of us know, this can also relate to emotional or personal wellness. Many of these following programs related to the theme relate to emotional wellness.

One significant personal wellness program can connect with the act of personal storytelling. Ask women to keep a journal or write down memories or stories that they want to pass on. Encourage them to just write and not worry about how things sound.

One of the easiest writing experiences that new writers can have is writing a memoir or a story of one's life. The **BookMarks** issue from WLCJ, Summer 2015, provides explanation of what a memoir is and how it might be used effectively. This genre of writing works well with the theme "Nat'ahKarem.

### **Questions for memoir writing**

*[These are only suggestions. There are certainly many more prompts that you and your writing group can develop. But, once you have these initial suggestions, you can brainstorm many others that will pique your interest and get you going on your memoir writing or your shorter personal narrative writing.]*

A good way to begin the writing is to start with writing prompts which are smaller topics that provide entries into the theme:

- What matters most to you in this world?
- What kinds of experiences have you had in which you did something totally new for you?
- When did you start something new or create a new experience for others?
- What kind of legacy would you like to leave?
- Have you ever created something really beautiful? What was it? What effect did it have on you? Or on someone else?
- Has Women's League or sisterhood provided you with opportunities to leave a legacy?
- What kind of skills and talents do you need to achieve success?
- What new rituals do you create that help you and others around you to go on so that you are psychologically and emotionally equipped to "plant vineyards"?
- What obstacles impede success?
- What have you learned about others as they attempted to achieve?
- How can we make the world better?
- What is not right about the society in which we live as we attempt to plant vineyards?
- What object do you have in your possessions that suggests or relates to your symbolic vineyard?
- For whom are you planting these vineyards?

Create ethical wills or even personal belonging wills, of personal things to be given to whom and why? WLCJ has guidelines for how to create ethical wills.

Create new rituals and ways to observe, celebrate holidays and rites of passage.

Look for programs that get your people moving and out of the synagogue. Think nature, field trips...near things that grow. These are solid supports for facilitating good emotional wellness that can help them to clarify what kind of legacy they want to leave, especially one that relates to the environment.

Suggested WoFlix movies: "Wild"; "Cake"; "Under the Tuscan Sun"; "Still Alice".

You can find additional programming in the Jewels in the Crown awards booklet for 2014 ([www.wlcj.org](http://www.wlcj.org)). For example:

- “Forgive Yourself” (Sisterhood of Congregation Beth Shalom, Clearwater , FL) Rosh Hodesh or before High Holidays—write cards to be forgiving of ourselves for mistakes we have made.-Extend this to or write cards in which we identify goals for ourselves.
- We have mentoring for women in the conversion class (Women’s Connection of Beth El, La Jolla, Ca)

For Rosh Hodesh: SKYPE with Israeli MasortiKehillot.

Make honey cakes for community with no kosher bakery or for fundraising to support some cause.

Send packages and notes to military overseas

If you don’t find exactly what you are looking, let us know.

Lisa Kogen, Director of Education ([lkogen@wlcj.org](mailto:lkogen@wlcj.org)),

Ellen Kaner Bresnick, PAT Teamleader ([ebresnick@wlcj.org](mailto:ebresnick@wlcj.org))

---