



Q's and A's about Fabringen

Welcome to Fabringen. These questions and answers can help you know what to expect as a new member of our community and how to get involved.

WHAT IS FABRANGEN?

Fabringen, meaning “bringing together in joy” is a participatory, egalitarian havurah (lay-led spiritual community) that has been in existence since 1971. Our community is clearly a volunteer effort and exists only because of the efforts and energies of its members. This guide is a volunteer effort, prepared in response to a member’s question, “How do things work in Fabringen?”

Like the oral law, which the Jewish sages were reluctant to codify, we have some reluctance in putting things in writing for fear that this could result in their being cast in stone. This community has evolved and continues to do so. Therefore no procedure or rule is unchangeable.

HOW IS FABRANGEN ORGANIZED?

Fabringen is an “open” havurah. This means that we do not limit our membership to a set number of people or families. Anyone can join and existing members do not vote on whether someone can become a new member.

DOES FABRANGEN HAVE A RABBI OR CANTOR?

No, Fabringen does not have a Rabbi or Cantor as spiritual leaders of our community. However, we do have members who are rabbis and cantors or who are studying to be rabbis.

WHO “GOVERNS” FABRANGEN? IS THERE A BOARD OF DIRECTORS? WHAT IS THE STEERING COMMITTEE?

As an outgrowth of the 1970s, it's hard to say that Fabrangen is organized. However, we do have some structure. Fabrangen handles its day-to-day issues at monthly steering committee (SC) meetings. The steering committee consists of 8-10 community members and is headed by two co-chairs. We try to achieve a representative gender balance of steering committee members. All members of the SC are volunteers, except for our coordinator who is an ex officio member, who is a paid, part-time employee. Anyone can serve on the SC committee. While terms of office are nominally one to two years in length, in practice people often stay on longer.

SC meetings are announced in advance and open to all members of the community. Anyone wishing to present an idea to the SC should contact either the coordinator (who prepares the agenda) or one of the co-chairs. You don't need to be present to submit an item for discussion. Generally, a tentative agenda will be circulated on the Fabrangen Listserve. If a proposal, e.g., sponsoring of an event, is not controversial, the SC can adopt it. More ambitious items – such a deciding on a venue for Shabbat services, selecting a prayer book or machzor, reviewing the budget – are presented to a community meeting. The SC sets the agenda for the community meetings.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY MEETINGS FOR?

The community makes decisions governing policy, budget, observance, and other matters at community meetings, which are held periodically on an as-needed basis. Community decisions are made (if they are made at all) using the rules of consensus. It might not be surprising, but there have from time to time been disagreements on what constitutes consensus. In general for purposes of Fabrangen, consensus means a nearly unanimous agreement by all individuals present at a community meeting. Consensus does not require complete agreement, but any individual with strong feelings about an issue can block consensus. This makes decision making a complex process, but it reinforces the need for individual involvement and participation. Since blocking a consensus is a significant act, a sense of community cohesiveness discourages this type of action by one or two individuals. On the other hand, the need to achieve consensus hopefully results in community decisions taking into account all perspectives within the community.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE COORDINATOR?

Fabrangen employs a “coordinator” whose function is to facilitate community business, handle administrative functions, and help channel the energy of the community on ideas that the community’s members have expressed interest in pursuing. The coordinator is also the point of contact for dealing with Fabrangen’s business matters. The coordinator’s duties include being the point of contact with our landlord (currently the Washington Ethical Society (WES), scheduling special events at Fabrangen (b’nai mitzvot, special birthdays or anniversaries, etc.), sending out dues notices and making special arrangements for dues payments, authorizing the treasurer to pay bills, maintaining the membership list, preparing the agenda for and attending SC meetings, collecting the mail, and responding to Fabrangen voicemail and email.

The coordinator’s job is not to actually do all of the wonderful things that members believe should be done, but are unwilling to do themselves. We are a community of volunteers and when we decided after a very long community meeting to hire a coordinator, the community decided that it did not want the coordinator to assume the role of a paid synagogue executive director. The community wanted to make clear that it was not abdicating its own responsibilities by turning them over to a professional.

With this limitation in mind, the coordinator is the person to whom members of the community should contact if they need information about Fabrangen or if they wish to coordinate an activity.

WHERE AND WHEN ARE SHABBAT SERVICES?

Although Fabrangen is more than a davening collective (a group whose sole purpose is to get together to hold Shabbat and holiday services), our most recognizable and constant activities are our Shabbat and holiday services. Fabrangen holds weekly Shabbat services beginning at 9:30 am at the Washington Ethical Society building, 7750 16th Street, NW, near the corner of 16th and Kalmia. Services generally end between 12:00 – 12:15 pm.

Our services are egalitarian with full participation of men and women. Most weeks, we use the *Kol Haneshamah* prayerbook, a Reconstructionist Prayerbook, even though our community is not affiliated with the Reconstructionist movement. One reason we selected this siddur is that both Hebrew and English prayers are gender neutral. It also contains ample transliteration, explanations, and thoughtful readings. Approximately one Shabbat each month (generally the 3rd Shabbat), we use an alternative siddur -- *Siddur Eit Ratzon* by Joe Rosenstein. This siddur provides a four-column layout -- the Hebrew text, translation, transliteration, and commentary – all on the same page.

DO YOU HAVE KIDDUSH AFTER SHABBAT SERVICES?

Yes, we have Kiddush and a light snack after Shabbat services. Two members are assigned Kiddush duty each week to ensure that there is food and drink for the community. Each member is responsible for providing Kiddush about once each year.

See Tab 7 for more information about what is required and the calendar for 2009.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN? DO YOU HAVE A HEBREW SCHOOL?

Children are an important part of our community and are invited to participate in all of our activities. We encourage children to be present during services to the extent that they do not disrupt the services. While we do not impose an absolute code of silence on the children, we expect their parents to exercise appropriate discretion when a child interferes with the service. As an alternative, childcare and children's education programs run during services. See Tab 6 for additional information about children's programming.

Fabrangen does not have a Hebrew school. Some Fabrangen children go to Jewish day school, including the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville and the Jewish Primary Day School of the National Capital Area in Washington, DC. Some Fabrangen children enroll in religious schools in other congregations. These include Ohr Kodesh in Chevy Chase, MD, Adat Shalom in Potomac, MD, Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, DC, Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC, Tifereth Israel in Washington, DC, and Temple Micah in Washington, DC.

WHAT ABOUT BAR/BAT MITZVAH? IS THERE A ROLE FOR A NON-JEWISH PARENT IN A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

Yes, children can have their B'nai Mitzvah at Fabrangen. In fact, Fabrangen B'nai Mitzvah are extraordinarily special and may be different from a regular service. (For example, while Fabrangen normally does not include the Haftorah in its service, a bar or bat mitzvah may chose to include it.) However, the community decided that a bar or bat mitzvah at Fabrangen is to be a regular Fabrangen service in which the bar or bat mitzvah child participates. At least one aliyah must be reserved for members of the community not connected with the celebration.

Unlike traditional congregations, each family can generally select the date for their child's B'nai Mitzvah and structure a service that is appropriate for each child. Many members can assist you in locating tutors, dealing with logistics, and helping your plan this special day! Fabrangen expects families planning to have a bar or bat mitzvah to

attend services for a period of time prior to the event and for the child to become familiar with the service. We do not make Fabrangen available to host a bar or bat mitzvah when that service is the only contact that the child or family has with the community.

Yes, non-Jewish parents may participate in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of their child. Fabrangen has developed a special blessing for a non-Jewish parent to recite in lieu of the traditional blessing when called to the Torah for an *aliyah*.

DO YOU HAVE FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICES?

Generally, we do not have Friday night services. We encourage our members to attend local community havurot which hold Kabbalat Shabbat services followed by a vegetarian/dairy potluck meal at a Fabrangen member's home one Friday evening a month. These dinners are generally held in northwest DC, Bethesda, or Silver Spring but are open to everyone. Newcomers, visitors, and guests are warmly welcomed. These dinners are announced on the Fabrangen listserve, and are posted on the Fabrangen website calendar.

WHAT IS FABRANGEN WEST?

In 2003, when Fabrangen moved from the George Washington University Hillel to the Washington Ethical Society, several members who live in Virginia started a monthly minyan. The minyan usually meets in the home of Bracha and John Laster, generally on the 2nd Shabbat of the month.

See tab 6 for additional information about Fabrangen West.

HIGH HOLIDAY SERVICES

Fabrangen provides a full schedule of High Holiday services each year. As with Shabbat services, they are led by members of the community. Generally, 2 or 3 members lead each part of the service. We recently selected the *Hadesh Yameinu* machzor for our High Holiday prayerbook. It is gender neutral and, together with the High Holiday Companion written by Fabrangen, provides ample transliterations and explanations.

WHAT ARE FABRANGEN'S RULES CONCERNING SHABBAT OBSERVANCE?

The community reached consensus on the following guidelines: When participating in a Fabrangen Shabbat service or activity, there is no writing, drawing, or coloring. There should be no cooking or use of electrical appliances, including electronics such as "gameboys," at WES on Shabbat or chag. Cell phones should be turned off while in the building.

WHAT ARE FABRANGEN'S RULES ABOUT KASHRUT?

All food at any Fabrangen service or activity should be dairy/vegetarian/fish whether the venue is WES, a private home, or another venue.

WHAT DO I DO IF SOMEONE CLOSE TO ME DIES AND I NEED SUPPORT WITH SHIVA? DOES FABRANGEN MAINTAIN A YAHRZEIT CALENDAR?

If someone close to you dies and you need assistance with bereavement or shiva, please contact Bob Rovinsky or Diane Tepfer. If requested by the mourner, Fabrangen will help with funeral plans, organizing shomrim, organizing shiva, finding service leaders, and providing the prayer books.

Fabrangen does not yet maintain a yahrzeit calendar. We are in the process of collecting the information. Several members have volunteered to maintain the yahrzeit calendar and notify members annually of upcoming yahrzeit dates.

Each year for Yom Kippur, Fabrangen publishes a "Yizkor Memorial Booklet" to honor the memory of those loved ones who died within the past year.

WHAT ARE FABRANGEN DUES?

Members pay annual dues of \$460 per person or \$920 per family. Special arrangements for reduced dues based on need may be made through confidential discussion with the coordinator.

SINCE FABRANGEN DOES NOT HAVE A RABBI, CANTOR OR BUILDING -- WHAT DO MY DUES PAY FOR?

Fabrangen's budget includes expenses for a part-time coordinator, childcare and teachers on Shabbat and holidays, rent to WES for Shabbat and to New York Avenue Presbyterian Church for High Holidays, wine/juice/challah for Shabbat, and other operating expenses. Dues cover approximately half of Fabrangen's budget; the remainder comes from High Holiday donations and other contributions.

ARE MY DUES AND DONATIONS TAX DEDUCTIBLE?

Yes. Your dues and all contributions to Fabrangen are tax deductible. At the end of each year, Fabrangen will send you a letter providing substantiation of your contribution for IRS tax purposes.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

There are a variety of opportunities for community participation, depending on your interests, skills, and time. The Participation Form will help us reach out to you to involve you in ways that are best suited for you. Opportunities include:

- serving on the steering committee
- leading part of the Shabbat service or holiday service
- reading Torah on Shabbat or a holiday
- participating in special readings on other holidays (e.g., Megillat Esther on Purim, Ecclesiastes on Tisha B'Av, the book of Ruth on Shavuot)
- preparing a d'var Torah for Shabbat or holiday service
- being a "shomer" on Shabbat, i.e., opening and closing WES for services and setting up the sanctuary for services
- assisting with the logistics of setting up our High Holiday services in our temporary home
- helping with children's programming
- providing support for shiva or bereavement
- editing the bi-weekly E-announcements
- blowing the shofar on the High Holidays
- participating and/or leading social action activities for the community
- providing transportation to Fabrangen services and events for those who need assistance with transportation
- providing storage in your home for books and ritual objects that do not fit into our limited storage space at the Washington Ethical Society
- serving on the Outreach Committee
- assist with Fabrangen's website

Tab 5 provides a list of members currently responsible for different parts of our community. Feel free to contact them directly to get involved.

WHAT IS FABRANGEN'S MAILING ADDRESS AND CONTACT INFORMATION?

Fabrangen
7750 Sixteenth Street NW
Washington, DC 20012
Phone/Fax: (202) 595-9138 (a recording provides updated information)
Email: fabrangen@yahoo.com