

## Hanukkah Traditions and Why They Are Important to Judaism

By RABBI GEORGE NUDELL

While Christmas is celebrated every year on December 25 (or January 7 in the Eastern Orthodox tradition), the date for Hanukkah varies from year to year. Or so it seems... Actually, Jewish holidays are determined by a religious calendar unique to Judaism.

The calendar is lunar, meaning that new months begin with new moons. Since lunar months are only 28 and a quarter days long, the Jewish calendar loses about 11 days a year when compared to the secular calendar.

Every three years or so, the Jewish calendar adds an entire month of days. This happens early in spring, to keep Passover in the spring season. Consequently, the Jewish holidays seem to bounce around the calendar.

But according to the Jewish calendar, the holidays are faithfully celebrated on their own special dates.

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days, beginning on the 25th of the month of Kislev. This year, that day corresponds to Friday night, November 29.

Because Friday night also begins the Jewish Sabbath, Jewish people will light their first Hanukkah candles before they light their Sabbath candles, after which no more lights may be kindled.

Hanukkah is also celebrated by eating foods fried in oil such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (doughnuts). This recalls the story of a miracle; a time when a day's worth of sanctified olive oil burned for eight days, in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem.

Hanukkah is definitely not the Jewish Christmas, as many people wrongly assume. In fact, it is a much older holiday.

Hanukkah celebrates the affirmation of Jewish identity in the face of rampant assimilation. In the second century BCE, many Jews had assimilated to Hellenistic culture and even the Holy Temple in Jerusalem had been given over to idolatry.

Jews who remained loyal to Jewish tradition overthrew the corrupted Temple leadership and purified and rededicated the Temple to traditional Jewish practice. Part of that rededication involved lighting the seven branched menorah that stood in the Temple, and Hanukkah has been celebrated with candle-lighting ever since.

The word Hanukkah means "dedication." In modern times, Hanukkah has become a time when Jews rededicate their commitment to Judaism and to the Jewish people. It has become a time when many families reflect on how they can maintain Jewish tradition, living as a minority in a mostly Christian culture.

This becomes inevitable as Jewish families see their neighbors and communities decorate for Christmas. Many Jewish children wonder how to relate to all the Christmas that goes on around them, especially in school. Hanukkah is an excellent time for Jewish families to ponder and discuss the meaning of Jewish identity.

Hanukkah is often called a minor festival because Jewish tradition did not require Jews to refrain from work as it did for the Sabbath, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But Hanukkah continues to have deep meaning for Jews around the world.

For all who observe Hanukkah this year, may Hanukkah be a time of pride and rededication to timeless Jewish values and, as always, a season in which we pray for peace and understanding for all people.

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Rabbi Nudell is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Israel, located at 1920 Cliffwood Street/Shalom Way in Scotch Plains.



**MEN OF FAITH...** Robert J. Conroy of Westfield, right, is joined by one of his sponsors, Bray Barnes, Esquire, at St. Patrick's Church in Washington, D.C., on the occasion of Mr. Conroy having been named a Knight of Merit in the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George. Both men are wearing the cape of office which bears the Order's Sacred Insignia on its left side.

## Westfielder Robert Conroy Receives Papal Knighthood

WESTFIELD—Westfield resident Robert J. Conroy was invested as a Knight of Merit in the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George on October 19.

The investiture, performed by Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, took place during the solemn celebration of the Mass on the Feast of the North American Martyrs at Washington, D.C.'s historic St. Patrick's Church.

Mr. Conroy was honored with the Knighthood in recognition of his youth ministry activities and his service to the Catholic Scouting movement.

The Reverend Donald Hummel, Pastor of St. Bartholomew the Apostle Roman Catholic Church in Scotch Plains, co-sponsored Mr. Conroy's investiture.

Reverend Hummel, who nominated Mr. Conroy for the honor, also is an Ecclesiastical Knight of Grace in the Order and the Boy Scouts National Catholic Chaplain.

Additionally taking part in the investiture was His Royal Highness Prince Carlo Maria Bernardo, Duke of Calabria and Grand Prefect of the Order; the Honorable David Lacey Garrison, Jr., the American Delegate to the Order, and His Excellency Ambassador Thomas Patrick Melady, former United States Ambassador to the Holy See and the American Vice Delegate to the Order.

Mr. Conroy is a member of St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church in Westfield. He and his wife of 27 years, Mary Catherine, are the parents of Caitlin, a freshman honors student at the College of Saint Elizabeth, and Michael, a sophomore at Oratory Prep School in Summit.

A health lawyer and Vice President of the firm of Kern Augustine Conroy & Schoppmann, P.C., Mr. Conroy is general counsel to the Medical Society of New Jersey and NJ Breathes, a statewide antismoking coalition. He is also President of the Westfield Senior Citizens Housing Corporation.

The Order was founded by Pape Bull in 1699 and is the oldest of the Roman Catholic chivalric orders. Members of the Order must dedicate themselves to lives of Christian leadership and pledge to defend the Roman Catholic faith.

## First Congregational Plans Alternative Gift Market

WESTFIELD—A Holiday Alternative Gift Market will take place at the First Congregational Church in Westfield on Sunday, November 24, at 11:30 a.m., following the Thanksgiving service.

Gift-givers will have the opportunity to donate to local and international charity organizations. In return, contributors will receive unique gift cards that can be given as gifts.

The Gift Market will help support various agencies. These include Bridges, which provides homeless people in Newark and New York with food and clothing, and Cancer Care of New Jersey, which provides services to cancer patients and their families.

The Gift Market also benefits Doctors Without Borders, an organization that delivers emergency medical aid to victims of armed conflict, epidemics and natural and man-made disasters in over 80 countries.

Other organizations assisted by the Gift Market include the Plainfield chapter of Habitat for Humanity, which builds affordable housing for residents of the Greater Plainfield area who are in need; Heifer International, which

fight hunger by providing people with livestock, and the Interfaith Council for the Homeless of Union County.

The church is located at 125 Elmer Street. For more information, please call the church office at (908) 233-2494.

### AARP Announces Holiday Luncheon

WESTFIELD—The Annual Holiday Luncheon of Westfield Area Chapter No. 4137 of the American Association of Retired Persons will be held on Tuesday, December 3, at noon at The Westwood in Garwood.

An international buffet will be featured, with Don Anthony providing entertainment. Besides his interpretations of Christmas and popular music, he will also display his expertise on several musical instruments, with some audience participation. The cost is \$20, including the gratuity.

Members and non-members alike are invited to attend the event. Chairwoman Marie Stock is accepting reservations and may be reached at (908) 925-2536.

## Torah Center to Present Two Events This Sunday

WESTFIELD—The Union County Torah Center will present a Chanukah Extravaganza on Sunday, November 24, from 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the center, located at 418 Central Avenue in Westfield.

The event will feature a variety of Chanukah crafts for children, including a design-your-own-menorah activity, as well as an olive-pressing workshop from 4 to 4:45 p.m.

Youngsters will sort and hand-press fresh olives in an old-fashioned olive press made of wood and iron, then purify the olive juice with a modern centrifuge to quickly extract the pure olive oil.

There will also be Chanukah gifts

and Judaica available for purchase at the event. Admission to the Extravaganza is free and there is no charge for the olive oil workshop. Prices for the crafts range from \$3 to \$5.

Additionally, a "Chassidic Farbrengen" will be held that evening at 7:30 p.m. at the center. A farbrengen is an informal gathering in which participants celebrate their Judaism through song, stories and words of inspiration. It will be open to the public and offered free of charge.

For more information on these events, please call the Torah Center at (908) 789-5252.

### Presbyterian Church Posts Tree Lighting

WESTFIELD—To commence the Christmas season, The Presbyterian Church in Westfield will hold its annual tree lighting and carol sing at 7 p.m. on Sunday, December 1, on the front lawn.

Following a local tradition, a church family always presses the button that turns on the tree lights for the first time. Performing the ceremony this year will be Deborah and David Christianson, who team teach a Sunday school class, and their children, Kelly and Kyle.

Adding to the festivities will be a brass ensemble, made up of church members, playing traditional holiday music. After the ceremony, refreshments will be served at the adjacent Westminster Hall.

### Families to Celebrate Hanukkah at JCC

SCOTCH PLAINS—The Jewish Community Center of Central New Jersey will celebrate Hanukkah at its Wilf Jewish Community Campus, located at 1391 Martine Avenue in Scotch Plains.

The festivities will take place on Thursday, December 5, at 5:30 p.m. Participants will light the menorah, have dinner and share the story of Hanukkah. Stanley Schwartz will provide music for singing and dancing.

Children will be invited to use an olive press to make oil or join an arts and crafts workshop to make gifts during the craft session, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Dinner will be served from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

The dinner fee is \$12 for adults, \$6 for children ages two to 12 and \$9 for senior citizens. There is a \$5 per child craft fee. For more information or to reserve a spot, please call Tina Jacobs, Co-Director of Youth and Family Services, at (908) 889-8800, extension no. 218.

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## Chez Catherine Welcomes New Proprietors

Westfield, NJ - For the past two decades, Chez Catherine, the classic French restaurant located in the heart of downtown Westfield, NJ, has been winning the highest praise from numerous metropolitan area food critics. The NEW YORK TIMES recently awarded it a highly coveted "excellent" rating and THE STAR LEDGER and NEW JERSEY MONTHLY have been consistently awarding it 3 stars for years. It is a major culinary destination not only for Westfield residents, but for serious food lovers throughout the tri-state area. Presided over by Catherine Bourdeaux, and later joined by her husband Michel, the restaurant was famous for serving authentic, classic French cuisine in an atmosphere reminiscent of the Provencal countryside.

Chez Catherine has now just announced that Catherine and Michel have passed the baton to the new proprietors, Didier and Edith Jouvenet. The restaurant name will remain the same, but there's a new and exciting approach to menu preparations.

Didier Jouvenet comes to Chez Catherine from having spent 30

years with the finest New York City restaurants including 20 years at La Grenouille and 8 years at The Carlyle Hotel. He was born and raised in Lyons, France in a family of restaura-



Chez Catherine's new proprietors, Didier and Edith Jouvenet.

teurs and, understandably, was attracted to the kitchen early in life. He graduated from the Ecole Hoteliere in Grenoble, a culinary Hotel and Restaurant School, and gained excellent experience at sea. He was the

youngest Maitre d'Hotel on a French cruise line and also served in that position in the French Navy.

"My vision for Chez Catherine is to provide a wonderful total dining experience for our guests, from the first greeting to the last sip of their favorite beverage," Didier explains. "We're offering diners the same quality cuisine and service found at the best New York City restaurants, but at half the cost."

The dinner menu at Chez Catherine has been changed to a Prix Fixe \$45 for three courses. The wine list is extensive, but fairly priced and there is an excellent selection of liquors. Lunch is served Wed-Friday from 12 - 2 PM, Dinner Tuesday - Saturday 5:30 - 9:30 PM. The restaurant is closed Sundays and Mondays. Private rooms are available for 10 - 40 people.

Chez Catherine is located at 431 North Avenue and is adjacent to the Best Western Westfield Inn. Those wishing reservations can call 908-654-4011 or log onto their web site for additional information: [www.chezcatherine.com](http://www.chezcatherine.com).

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