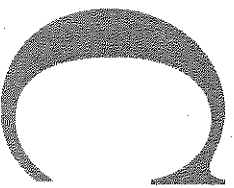


EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING GETS A MAKEOVER AT WOMEN'S LEAGUE

BY LISA KOGEN



ALL IT CHANGE OR call it tweaking. Call it what you will, Women's League for Conservative Judaism's dynamic new program agenda reflects the changing religious patterns and cultural expectations of this generation of women.

While the Women's League mission of educating Conservative Jewish women has endured ever since founder Mathilde Schechter first articulated it, both the message and the vehicle have evolved. From the publication of books on adapting to life in America for the first large influx of European Jews, to the creation of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* for the housewives of the 1950s, to today's on-line and up-to-the-minute website for those who want it all and want it now, the delivery of Women's League information has matched the times. But whether in the form of printed materials, study-session-enriched conferences and conventions, social-action initiatives, or the creation of Jewish handicrafts, Women's League programming always has been infused with Jewish content and value.

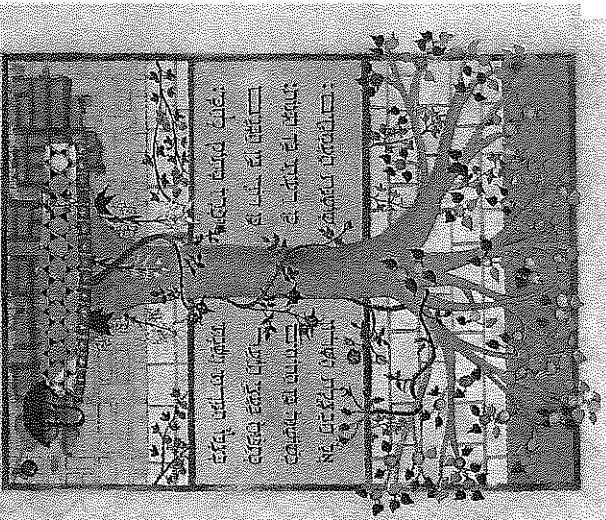
And Women's League continues to adapt, and the reality that fuels its latest direction – as in every generation past – is the face of its membership. Today, Conservative Jewish women are more Judically knowledgeable than ever before, thanks in part to the prevailing egalitarianism of most of their synagogues, equal expectations for both banot and bnei mitzvah, and the flourishing of formal and informal Jewish studies programs. The number of Women's League members who read Torah and serve as

baalot tefillah is in the hundreds, a far cry from the not-too-distant past when only male rabbis and cantors could fulfill this need. Women who read Hebrew and discuss Jewish issues with authority number in the thousands.

With this new woman in mind, the organization's programming has undergone a major makeover. Using our new materials, members now direct their own programs and activities without needing to turn to outside professionals and resources. Study and discussion guides come with step-by-step curricula so that an extensive Judaica background is not necessary to lead a meaningful and informative session.

The first of these new initiatives was the International Day of Study focusing on the five megillot. Beginning with Ruth, these multi-dimensional modules contain detailed leader guides with background resources and questions and answers. Prepared by specialists in their fields, each kit includes units on biblical and rabbinic texts and a handicraft project as well as a variety of other materials from theology and history to poetry and art. Beginning with almost 100 sisterhoods that offered the program as part of a tikkun layl Shavuot in 2004, each subsequent day of study has seen more and more sisterhoods and regions joining in study for Esther in 2005, Kohelet in 2006, and Song of Songs in 2007. Eikhah, the focus of the next module, will be available for Tisha b'Av observances next August.

The success of the day of study initiative caused us to rethink the traditional divar Torah used to open every sisterhood meeting. To expand on the idea of self-directed yet con-




Materials for the Song of Songs day of study included art from *The Honeybee in the Garden* by Debra Band (JPS, 2006).

tent-rich study, our new Divrei Hakhmah offers mini-study sessions – only five to ten minutes each – based on Jewish themes. So far, we have offered *The Book of Proverbs* and *The Ten Commandments*. This year, *Kol Ishah* will offer words of wisdom and religious and spiritual texts by and about women.

In a play on the book club established by the world's most influential reader, Oprah's List, named after Naomi's other daughter-in-law in the book of Ruth, is Women's League's own book selection project to celebrate Jewish Book Month. Participating sisterhood book groups receive a commentary and discussion guide, a letter from the author, and publisher's discounts for group book sales.

And how has our delivery system changed to meet the times? Sisterhood presidents can now download most of these resources, as well as much more, from our new website, www.wlci.org. Each of these innovative variations on a theme highlights a dynamic organization delivering a substantive and engaging message to a membership that remains committed to the past but invested in the future.

If you would like more information about Women's League innovative educational programs, go to www.wlci.org or call the education department at 212.870.1260. 

Lisa Kogen is education director of Women's League.