

Tenets of Judaism combine with MLK's legacy in bread baking and furniture making

Synagogue members come together for an afternoon of service at Temple Beth Am in Framingham

By [Tiana Woodard](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 15, 2023, 7:44 p.m.



Alison Abdu added to the tally of the lasagnas ready to go into the kitchen for baking at Temple Beth Am in Framingham. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

FRAMINGHAM — At the front doors of Temple Beth Am Sunday afternoon a blue sign

... ..

displayed one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s many memorable quotes: "The time is always right to do what is right."

"Jewish living is all about doing right," said Rabbi Sam Blumberg of Temple Beth Am, to the more than 80 people from about a dozen synagogues who came to work at an afternoon of service hosted by the synagogue. "Thank you for saying, 'On this weekend, we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and want to use our hands to make this world a better place.'"

The participants took King's message to heart at the annual MLK Day of Service as they honored the civil rights leader's legacy by baking food — lasagna and banana bread — and building furniture for those in need.

At dozens of round tables, volunteers rolled up their sleeves and began to work.

Karen Rogol, 46, of Natick and her 9-year-old son Henry took turns stirring out lumps in their banana bread batter.

Rogol said she learned about the service opportunity through her synagogue, Congregation Beth El in Sudbury. It would give her daughter Olivia, 12, a head start on her bat mitzvah project, the coming-of-age service project that allows adolescents to put their Jewish values and interests into practice, she said about deciding to come to the event.

"It was a no-brainer," she said.

Henry, a third-grader, said he has watched King's "I Have a Dream" speech and numerous marches in class. He said he has been inspired by the late leader because King believed that all people — regardless of race, religion, or background — deserved equal treatment.

"[King] makes me want to help out people, bake foods, make stuff, and donate," Henry said.

Shoni Aronovich, director of Jewish Learning Opportunities for Teens, which co-coordinated the event, said such an event gives Jewish youth a chance to see how their actions can help others.

“[The youth] grow up in a world that teaches us to take care of ourselves,” said Aronovich, who is also director of teen education and engagement at Congregation Beth El in Sudbury. “It’s important to break that paradigm ... and start to focus on what they can do for others.”

Barry Glass, founder and president of Volunteer Ventures of Massachusetts, who is another coordinator of the event, said the volunteers aimed to make 95 family-size vegetable lasagnas, 150 loaves of banana bread, 85 jars of soup, wooden “stars of hope” that they painted, and about a dozen wooden desks.

“The biggest trick of today was getting 600 rotten bananas,” he joked.

Sunday’s event was the first in-person gathering for the event since the start of the COVID pandemic, Glass said. It was canceled in 2021, and last year the organizers distributed ingredients for the lasagna and banana bread in the parking lot so people could take them home and make the food there.

“People are happy to be together, see each other, and be active together,” he said. “That’s what we missed, and that’s what we’re very happy to bring back.”

A quartet of interfaith coalition singers, called What The World Needs Now, supplied a soundtrack of freedom songs as the volunteers worked. Some participants clapped along to the rhythms of “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,” “This Little Light of Mine,” and “I’m On My Way to Freedom Land.”

Another 40 or so volunteers opted to do the baking and furniture making at home. The volunteers planned to deliver the food and furniture to several MetroWest groups, including the South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Harmony Grove Elementary School,

Sudbury Food Pantry, and Pathways Family Shelter.

The event offered a chance for the younger participants to learn new skills. At one table, Jessica Greenfield of Wayland held wooden planks steady as her daughter, Julia Kruse, 10, used a power screwdriver.

“I’m Julia, I’m 10 years old, and I can drill,” she exclaimed as she introduced herself to a reporter.

“This is a very tangible, hands-on thing to do for school-aged kids,” her mother said.

“This is also a very meaningful thing for us to do as a part of our religious experience, and being a part of the Jewish community.”

Tiana Woodard is a Report for America corps member covering Black neighborhoods. She can be reached at tiana.woodard@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@tianarochon](https://twitter.com/tianarochon).

[Show comments](#)