



NEWSGUIDE PHOTOS / KELLY GLASSCOCK

During the Blessing Over the Bread after the evening Shabbat (Sabbath) service April 15, Jackson Hole Jewish Community members Larry Rieser, Aviva Thal, Howard Turtle, Eve Scofield and Phyllis Turtle hold the challah – a braided bread.

Keeping faith's flame alight

Jewish group focuses on communal support

By Melanie White

Facing east towards Jerusalem, Jackson's Jewish congregation observes the impending Sabbath at sundown with candle lighting, silent prayer and song.

"We probably should have a fire extinguisher ready," quipped Judd Grossman as several children took turns to light matches and ignite two tall white candles at a recent Shabbat (Sabbath) service, held the third Friday of each month. Despite the lack of a synagogue, Jackson's Jewish community meets at the St. John's Episcopal Church chapel for services and sometimes holds functions like Sunday's Passover Seder (a dinner symbolizing the Last Supper) at Snow King Resort. Jackson Hole Jewish Community, which organized in 1996, also conducts the Bet



Judd Grossman plays the guitar as he leads the Shabbat service. An ordained rabbi serves the community part time.

Sefer Hebrew School at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on Thursday afternoons.

"The school is probably the most important thing," said Rose Novak, president of the

Jewish Community. Judaism "is a religious identity but also, for many people, cultural. We want educated children living in the Jewish faith," she said.

At the recent Friday service, six girls and one boy from the



As Esther Grossman looks on, Aviva Thal lights a candle at the start of the service. The Jewish Community convenes monthly in the chapel at St. John's Episcopal Church.

Jackson Hole Jewish Community

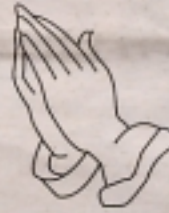
Address: Services held at St. John's Episcopal Church chapel, 170 N. Glenwood

Services: Third Friday of each month

Attendance: Average 45

Type: Judaism

Leaders: Rabbi Michael Comins,
prayer leader Dan Gordon,
song leader Judd Grossman.



**Religious
Jackson Hole**

*"Both the good things
and the difficult things,
we like to support people
through them."*

*- Rose Novack, Jackson Hole Jewish
Community president*

school helped Judd Grossman lead the "kid's service." Grossman, usually the song leader but serving as prayer leader in lay rabbi Dan Gordon's absence, strummed on a guitar and encouraged the children in a series of songs and readings, almost entirely in Hebrew. The Community's ordained rabbi, Michael Comins, lives in Los Angeles and visits Jackson for Passover, holy days and the occasional Shabbat service. Only the rabbi will preach, but lay leaders can guide the congregation in prayer.

"For Jews, it has become quite a mystical, celebrated event," Grossman said of the Shabbat service. The Sabbath begins at sunset Fridays and ends at sunset the next day. "It's a real kind of magic break from all the 24/7 working," he said.

While services attract an average of 40 to 50 worshippers, there are about 500 Jews in the valley. The faith is strongly family-oriented: Sons and then daughters were blessed at the Shabbat service, and Grossman encouraged the children to "go be with your parents" at times of prayer.

"There's a ceremonial recognition of special life-cycle events," Novak said. Baby naming, for example, is an

important ritual in the Jewish community. For Jews in Jackson, their faith provides an essential support system. "When there's a birth, death, marriage, bar or bat mitzvah, those are really important things in our community," she said. "Both the good things and the difficult things, we like to support people through them."

The old St. John's chapel enhances the warm atmosphere of the Jewish services. Many men wear a skull cap, known as a yarmulke or kippah, as a sign of respect. But most Jews would find it difficult to maintain strict orthodox standards in Jackson, Novak said. Congregation members probably don't adhere to all of the Torah's 613 commandments, which range from kosher dietary laws to permissible behavior on the Sabbath.

The Torah - meaning "the law" - refers to the first five books of the Bible, but can mean the entire body of Jewish teachings in the word's broadest sense.

"Like any religion, [Judaism] has tried to come up with an answer to any kind of question about how to live life," Grossman said.