2009 Revamped Yellow Candle Program Successful at Congregation Beth Emeth

FJMC Torch Award Entry

Submitted by Club No. 1144, Men’s Club of Congregation Beth Emeth, Herndon, VA
Torch Award Application No. TA09049  
“2009 Revamped Yellow Candle Program Successful”  
Congregation Beth Emeth, Herndon, VA

1. Identification Information
   - Submission Identifier Code: TA09049
   - Full Title for Entry (80 characters maximum): 2009 Revamped Yellow Candle Program Successful at Congregation Beth Emeth
   - Entry Category: FJMC Programs
   - Contact Person to be listed on Torch Award CD: Jim Sloan
   - Email address to be listed on Torch Award CD: jsloansarel@gmail.com
   - Club number & Club name: Club Number 1144, Men’s Club of Congregation Beth Emeth
   - Number of club members: 32
   - Synagogue name, city and state: Congregation Beth Emeth, Herndon, VA
   - Club President name (at time of entry): Craig Dubois
   - Club President name (at time of convention): Dave Hillelsohn
   - Person preparing entry: Gary Smith
   - Email address of person preparing entry: elegantsolutions@netscape.net
   - Date of entry submission: April 5, 2009

2. Summary Information

CBE Men's Club teamed up with the Religious School to implement a program that closely follows the FJMC Yom HaShoah Yellow Candle™ Program. CBE Men’s Club has taken the additional step of working with the religious school to institutionalize the program into the religious school curriculum. The program was revamped several years ago, and most of the hands-on work of assembling the packages are done by seventh grade students in the religious school. The up front costs are covered 100% by a congregational sponsor.
3. Self Assessment of Entry

What makes our implementation of the FJMC Yellow Candle program unique at Beth Emeth, and what makes it worthy of a Torch Award, is that we have worked with the Religious School to make an integral part of their curriculum; that the Seventh grade students actually perform the vast majority of the task of assembling packages; and that it has changed from a college student targeted program to a congregation wide program that helps the entire congregation commemorate this observance.

We’ve attached artifacts related to pre-event and ongoing planning and the awareness campaign. The sections below talk to the achievement of program goals, awareness, and advanced planning. We first talk to the history of the program at Beth Emeth.

History

The history of this program at Beth Emeth is that it was faithfully performed for many, many years as a free package sent to our teen students at college. The Men’s Club re-evaluated the program and solicited feedback to determine effectiveness about five years ago. We found that many dorm rooms had rules prohibiting the lighting of candles; the vast majority of college students it was shipped to were not engaged by the package and accompanying materials, and a targeted feedback campaign revealed no interest.

After a one year hiatus, the program was retooled and restarted by one of our members (later to become Synagogue President) whose father is a holocaust survivor. Marty Zelman, who is the Yom HaShoah Program Coordinator for the synagogue, decided that the new focus should be to send a candle to every congregant. This proved to be an effective change, with dramatically increased feedback (about 33% of the congregation, or roughly 150 family units – an unheard of response rate) since the program was retooled. The 2009 campaign, now in progress, is the third year that the Men’s Club has used this format.

An accompanying letter, based loosely on the model letter from the FJMC program guide for 2009, “FJMC Yellow Candle™ Program: Branching out and reaching out” asks for a donation to cover the cost of the candles. The letter states “Net proceeds received from the Yom HaShoah Candle Program will be used to fund Holocaust and other related programming and study in both the religious school and the synagogue.”

Synergistic Religious School Programming

Marty Zelman works with the seventh grade religious school class and its teacher Ita Mandel (whose father is also a holocaust survivor) to talk to the students about the Shoah.
A movie directly related to the holocaust is shown and the **same seventh graders** assemble the boxes, insert the prayer and donation letter, and put the address labels **on the boxes** to get them ready for bulk mailing.

The Men's club then sorts out the candles by zip code and mails them.

**Embedding the Program in the Religious School Curriculum**

One of the benefits of working with the Religious School has been that our partnership with the religious school has become embedded in the curriculum for the Seventh Grade. Our seventh grade students learn valuable information, and are also introduced to the idea that activities at the synagogue are not about segregating one group’s activities, but rather are about partnerships and synergy.

Third, we are able to present a substantial contribution to the religious school every year for holocaust and other related programming. About 33% of congregants do contribute and very generously. This is important as time goes on and our survivors are leaving us. It is important to keep reminding people so we never forget the six million that perished, Le Dor Va Dor, from generation to generation, and this story and its lessons have to be passed on forever. The implementation of the Yellow Candle program at Beth Emeth is helping us to do that in our generation, at our synagogue.

**Awareness Campaign and Advanced Planning**

**Pre-event and ongoing awareness** was created through

- email notices sent from the Men’s Club’s congregational list serve;
- through a letter that accompanied the package;
- through notices in the congregational newsletter, the “Shofar,” and by
- announcements from the bimah.

The FJMC Yellow Candle Program was actually **made part of the Seventh Grade religious school curriculum goals** as part of the Holidays Component for Academic Year 2008-09/5769. This was a result of years of ad hoc partnering with the religious school.

This joint program **enhances the image of the FJMC, the region, and our club** to the youngsters in the religious school and to congregational members. When activities cross over the boundaries of the club itself, and position its visibility to young people, Men’s Club provides a forward path to the young people that will grow up to be potential members of the synagogue as adults.

More importantly, it models that their participation in synagogue can be synergistic and need not partition them off into one group or another. It **emphasizes that the Men’s**
Club is part of the core essential elements of synagogue life, rather than an optional club.

Between five and ten club members participated in pre-event planning and day-of-event activities. The club has about 32 members. The congregation has about 460 member families of record.

**Related Torch Award Program Winners**

A search of the archive (Ref.: [http://www.fjmc.org/Files/TorchAwardFiles/TorchAwardHist-HolocaustRemembrance.pdf](http://www.fjmc.org/Files/TorchAwardFiles/TorchAwardHist-HolocaustRemembrance.pdf)) revealed similarities between Beth Emeth’s submission and a 2001 submission from Beth Tikvah, Green Acres, FL, which won a Silver award in the category of Holocaust Remembrance/Yom Hashoah Yellow Candle Program.

Instead of performing their activities at their synagogue, as Beth Emeth chose to do, the Beth Tikvah Men’s Club organized a program to bring the story of the Holocaust to the children of Osceola Middle School in Okeechobee, FL. Four speakers rotated through four class sessions and presented their experiences to the 8th grade. Time for questions and answers was scheduled in each session. The contact for that entry was Israel Sack, (561) 968-4755, nanapapa61@msn.com.
APPENDIX - Artifacts

Institutionalizing the Program

Excerpt From 2009 Beth Emeth Parent Curriculum Guide
The Men’s Club Yellow Candle project is now embedded in the religious school’s curriculum goals for seventh grade students.
Awareness Campaign

The pre-event awareness campaign included announcements by email and articles in the Congregation Beth Emeth monthly newsletter, the Shofar.
Items Accompanying the Package

Yom HaShoah Meditation
The Blessing of the Yellow Candle
Evening of Monday April 20th, 2009

As I light this Yellow Candle, I vow never to forget the lives of the Jewish men, women, and children who are symbolized by this flame. They were tortured and brutalized by human beings who acted like beasts; their lives were taken in cruelty. May we be inspired to learn more about our six million brothers and sisters as individuals and as communities and to recall their memories throughout the year. May we recall not only the terror of their deaths, but also the splendor of their lives. May the memory of their lives inspire us to hallow our own lives and to live meaningful Jewish lives so that we may help to insure that part of who they were shall endure always.

Rabbi Jules Harlow

Meditation Letter Accompanying the Package
The meditation text was taken from the FJMC Program Guide. The logo is from a sculpture near our bima.
Dear Fellow Congregants,

Please accept this Yom HaShoah Yahziret Candle with compliments from the Congregation Beth Emeth (CBE) Men’s Club. We ask that you join us on the evening of Monday, April 20, 2009, ever Yom HaShoah, by lighting the Yellow Candle and reciting the enclosed meditation. As part of the worldwide Jewish community, it is our collective obligation to honor and remember the Six Million who perished in the Holocaust.

Thank you to those volunteering their time to help pack and mail candles. You are truly appreciated.

If you would like, please use the enclosed envelope to return a contribution to the CBE Men’s Club Yom HaShoah Program to support this effort. Through your generosity, we will continue to purchase and mail candles each and every year. Net proceeds received from the Yom HaShoah Candle Program will be used to fund Holocaust and other related programming and study in both the religious school and the synagogue.

Sincerely,

Marty Zelman
Yom HaShoah Program Coordinator

Enclosed is my tzedakah donation to the CBE Men’s Club. Please make checks payable to CBE Men’s Club

$20 $25 $30 $36 $54 $72 Other

Name

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Tzedakah Donation Letter Accompanying Package
The letter was adapted from the FJMC Program Guide.
The package was accompanied by a simple envelope in which to return the response letter.

A decision was made to keep it very simple and clean, and to avoid the appearance of unnecessarily strong a solicitation, to not to include postage on the envelope. About 150 out of 460 member family units generously responded last year.