



The Future and the Past

We have two remarkable Shabbatot to look forward to, this week and next.

Our Future – Cheder Shabbat

This week our services will be led by our youth, with cantorial support. We should be enormously proud of the youth of our community, I am, and often astonished. I arrived at New London – 14 years ago – to a shul with no real youth programme. The Cheder was heroically hanging on, with a tiny number of students, most of whom didn't attend most of the time. I think there were two or three Bar Mitzvah celebrations in my first year here. A BM's-life later we are in the midst of an incredible array of celebrations, really remarkable celebrations of committed, engaged and hard-working young New Londoners. It's been remarkable to appreciate the way in which our youth are no longer 'just' preparing Maftir and Haftarah, but increasingly leading services, as well as teaching on Shabbat and then sticking around into their teenaged future, serving as teaching assistants at the Cheder and attending Noam camp. Very little of that is, of course, accidental. We work hard as a leadership team to integrate our approach to developing our youth – our future – into the life of the Shul. And this is a good time to acknowledge the leadership of our outgoing Head of Cheder, David Finberg, all the Cheder team, Rabbi Natasha, our Youth lead, and Chazan Stephen who has poured so much love and devotion into liturgical training for our youth and the Hebrew reading programme that is at the heart of their technical skills.

Our Past – Well Almost – Chazan Stephen Cotsen

This is the penultimate Shabbat for our extraordinary Chazan as a member of our professional team. Our celebratory Friday night dinner is fully booked, but please do plan on coming to sing heartily next Shabbat, 25th.

Stephen has been not only a remarkable leader of our prayers, but more than that, an incredible servant of the community. I know he would rather be serenaded with song than sermonised (there's a message in that, I'm sure). But I hope he will accept our deepest expressions of respect and fondness at this important time for our community. As I say, do plan on joining us, particularly next Shabbat, 25th July when – on the subject of our future – we will have the honour of celebrating yet another remarkable Bat Mitzvah, and singing Stephen into a long and glorious retirement ... as a member of this community.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy