



Milking the Custom of Dairy on Shavuot

by Rabbi Donni Aaron



What do you call a cow that won't give milk?

-A milk dud.

What do you get when a cow gets stuck in an earthquake?

-A milkshake.

What gives milk, goes "moo, moo" and makes all of your dreams come true?

-Your dairy godmother.

As a people, we may have a reputation for being lactose intolerant, but we Jews love our dairy. Especially on Shavuot (this year observed May 25-27), many of us have great memories of blintzes, lokshen kugel (noodle pudding), and cheesecake. But while we fress (enjoy) the holiday meals, let us ponder some of the reasons given for the custom of eating milk products on Shavuot. Let us note that the very number of midrashim and clever interpretations themselves points to the probability that the original reason, if there ever was one, has been lost somewhere along the way. Since we associate the giving of the tablets of the Ten Commandments with Shavuot, I will provide ten suggestions. Please do not hesitate to share with me your insights!

Reason #1: The Torah Is Like Milk, and Milk Is Life-Enhancing

Torah is likened to milk, as the verse says, "Like honey and milk [the Torah] lies under your tongue" [Song of Songs 4:11]. Just as milk has the ability to fully sustain the body of a human being (i.e. a nursing baby), so too the Torah provides all the "spiritual nourishment" necessary for the human soul. One midrash even suggests that Moses began nursing (i.e. drinking milk) on the same day that Shavuot is observed. When our ancestors became a committed people at Mount Sinai, they were as if newly born again. What do newborns drink? Milk! A mother's milk provides the newborn with all the nourishment it needs. Torah, then, is like milk, for it encompasses within it all the sustenance that a person needs for spiritual vitality and growth. Thus, dairy foods on Shavuot alludes to the life-enhancing properties of Torah.

REASON #2: Milk helps to recall and recapture our innocence

We suggested that just as milk nourishes babies, the Torah nourishes us. That image also suggests that at that holy moment at Sinai, we were all spiritual infants. There is something special and important in

recalling and recapturing a sense of our own spiritual innocence.

REASON #3: Milk teaches humility

Moreover, milk has traditionally been stored in simple glass or earthenware vessels, never in fancy or elaborate containers. Likewise, only one who is humble and not haughty will merit to fully appreciate and observe the Torah. Since milk connotes chesed (lovingkindness) and meat connotes din (judgment), we are to be nourished on milk as we accept the Torah (again) and begin again our journey to our individual and communal Promised Land.

REASON #4: MILK is 40

The gematria (numerical value) of the Hebrew word for milk, chalav, is 40. Eating dairy on Shavuot recalls the 40 days that Moses spent on Mount Sinai receiving instruction on the entire Torah [See Exodus 24:18]. The numerical value of chalav, 40, has further significance in that there were 40 generations from Moses who recorded the Written Torah, until the generation of Ravina and Rav Ashi who wrote the final version of the Oral Torah, the Talmud. Moreover, the Talmud begins with the letter mem—gematria 40—and ends with mem as well.

REASON #5: Recalling the Mountain

In the book of Psalms [68:15], Mount Sinai is referred to as gavnunim, meaning "many peaks." Some playfully associate this word with g'vinah, "cheese." Therefore, eating dairy products on Shavuot can help us try to recall that mystical moment on Sinai. Further, the gematria (numerical value) of the word g'vinah is 70, indicating that endless multiple facets of Torah, reflected in each generation's interpretations and contributions.

REASON #6: We did not know the kosher laws, but we wanted to learn

One midrashic understanding suggests that on hearing the Torah at Mount Sinai we were struck that there were dietary laws. We were most unprepared. Yet we wanted to honor that moment at Mount Sinai. The simplest way to prepare a kosher meal is to prepare dairy. After the conclusion of that first Shavuot, our Israelite ancestors could make the entire camp kosher.

REASON #7: A hint to the past suggests we grapple with our future

The sacrifices that were once offered on Shavuot are detailed in the Torah. The first four Hebrew words of that

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section [Numbers 28:26] spell out mei-halav, “from milk.” Since sacrificial offerings often were used for meals, this *remez* (“hint”) suggested that we at least start Shavuot dinner with a milk meal. The eating of milk on Shavuot, then, both hints at our rich, evolving history as a people and suggests that we must find our own way of sacrificing and living as we consider the meanings of Mount Sinai for our own time.

REASON #8: We affirm our devotion to Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel)

The land of Israel has been called a land “flowing with milk and honey” [e.g. Exodus 3:8]. We were first directed to Eretz Yisrael at Mount Sinai. Thus when we eat dairy on Shavuot, we recall our spiritual center, and we reaffirm our relationship to it—and to the people now restored on it in Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel.

REASON #9: We celebrate our abundance

Spring harvest festivals among many cultures and ethnic groups characteristically feature dairy dishes, perhaps because cheese was produced during that season. Indeed, since cattle are in the peak of the nursing period, there is always a surplus of milk around the

time of Shavuot. The best way to preserve milk was (and is) to make cheese—and eat it! In addition this surplus was considered to be a good sign of prosperity—the meaning, after all, of “a land flowing with milk and honey”—and therefore people celebrated eating dairy. When we eat dairy on Shavuot, then we too can celebrate our prosperity, but it is a prosperity of a rich heritage, replete with beautiful traditions, a history that borders on the miraculous, and legacy of personal caring and social justice. May this abundance continue!

REASON #10: We exercise self-control

A spiritual life is gained by keeping a balance. Excess is counterproductive. Meat represents excess, while dairy connotes restraint. Eating dairy on Shavuot is a reminder that we receive Torah and the spiritual direction it offers by living a more sober, thoughtful existence. [See Abraham Eliezer Hirshovitz, *Otsar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun*, p. 201].

So I have proffered ten possible reasons why we should delight in dairy on Shavuot. I hope whichever one(s) resonate with you, that you will have a meaningful and delicious Shavuot.

**Thoughts from our President by Jonah Markowitz**

I hope this edition of the newsletter finds you happy and well. As we head into summer, I’m full of excitement for the opportunities for worship, togetherness, and fun that we look forward to here at MCJC. We have engaging and meaningful services led by Rabbi Donni as well as our lay leaders, fun social events, and memories to be made together. I’d like to send a shout out and hearty mazel tov to the Grover sisters on reaching the milestone of their b’not mitzvah this summer. As we look forward to the future at MCJC, I also reflect on our blessings and am so grateful to all of you for helping keep a center for community and Jewish life in McHenry County.

We had an awesome school year for the kids (thanks so much MCJC Teachers!). We’ve enjoyed fun social events together as well as educational and impactful speakers. We have helped the community with acts of mitzvah. We have had some successful fundraisers including our Panera and Portillo’s nights. We have enjoyed outings and celebrations together with other area synagogues like our bowling event which Gene and Sandy Lindow hosted (we had a blast!) and Passover Seder at CKI where they welcomed us with open arms. Looking forward to continued collaboration with them. In addition to our successful fundraising events, I’m also very thankful and excited to say that we reached our matching funds donation goal thanks to you and your generosity! We have so much to be excited about here at MCJC. I am looking forward to seeing you all soon and wishing you and your families all of the best.

**Fundraising Report**

We are happy to announce that the \$10,000 'Matching Funds Challenge' has been met! Thanks to the generosity of many of our members, we raised over \$20,000 that will help secure MCJC’s continued operations. Big thanks in particular to one member who prefers to remain anonymous who put up the \$10,000 as a matching fund.

Thank you also to our other fundraiser organizers: Gail Frank at Panera Bread and Portillo's & Barnelli's and Sunshine Roth for the 'MCJC Bowling Party'.

These events not only raised funds, but also proved to be very enjoyable social events for our community.

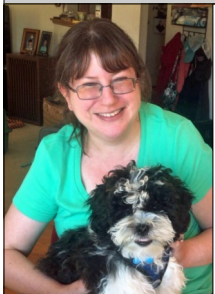
Thank you to the MCJC community.

MCJC Board of Directors



Religious School News

by Davina Kelly



During March, we held a fun and educational Purim celebration. Our students put on a readers' theater of the Purim story for family and congregants, baked hamantaschen, sang Purim songs, played games, and decorated wood flower cut-outs for a local nursing home. These included original, inspirational sayings. Also in March, students learned about a Jewish visual pop artist who helped lead the pop art movement in the United States. We then created Passover pictures in the pop art style.

In April, students participated in a Passover education morning. In small groups, students put the Passover story in order, created a mock seder plate, listed the ten plagues, and put together a matzah puzzle. They also reviewed and practiced the four questions, sang Passover songs, and made a fun craft to review the meaning of Dayenu.

Later in the month, students will learn about the history of Israel in honor of Yom Ha'atzmaut. During May, guest artists Elaine Kadakia and Josie Rochell will work with our students on a wonderful art project. We'll wrap up the school year with closing day on May 21. All grades continue to work on their Hebrew and prayers. Our younger students have also learned about Jewish immigration to America around the 1900s, and about some more prophets. Our older students are hard at work preparing for their B'not Mitzvah this summer.

Purim Highlights

MCJC proved once again that we know how to celebrate Purim. We had games, songs, the Megillah reading, hamantaschen...and of course Goldschlager! Thanks to Paula Eskoz for reprising many of our greatest hits from Purim spiels throughout the years (and adding a few more!) and leading us in song.



King Norman and Queen Paula at Megillah night



Olivia, our hamantaschen beanbag champ



Baking hamantaschen with Ilene



Deborah and Asher playing Purim twister

Glo-Bowl Event Right up MCJC's Alley



Jerry & Linda Trachsler enjoy meeting up with Gene Lindow, host of the bowling party and MCJC fundraiser at Glo-Bowl which was organized by Sunshine Roth.



Bowling wasn't the only activity that day. Socializing with old friends was on tap as well. Here Davina Kelly and Mark Goldberg catch up.



Habitat by Howard Frank



Things continue to be very quiet at Habitat work sites since the first of the year. All three of the Marenengo houses are finished and two of

them have partner families living in them leaving one more home to be closed on. The Wonder Lake duplex is being worked on by volunteers on Friday and Saturday installing trim, cabinets, and soon appliances.

Continuing the news relative to the Woodstock Restore, the store has reopened with lots of brand new goods. We are waiting for schedules for build sites for 2023 in Oakwood Hills and McHenry. We hope for foundations to be poured soon (will spring ever really get here?).

If you want more info please contact me at howard.gail.frank@gmail.com.

Drive-Thru Pantry Report

MCJC drive-through food pantry team members Muriel Pick, Lou Dolmon, Charles Mages, Rabbi Maralee Gordon, Donny Kohnke, and Bruce Weiss worked alongside fifteen other volunteers from St. Ann's Episcopal Church and Grace Lutheran Church and helped at the Woodstock drive-thru food pantry's March 20th food distribution day. One hundred and eighty-four families received boxes of food on March 20th, and one thousand seventeen families have received boxes of food from the Woodstock drive-thru food pantry thus far during calendar year 2023.

The Woodstock drive-thru food pantry is managed by the Woodstock St. Ann's Episcopal Church and is a joint venture between the McHenry County Faith Leaders Food Collaborative and the Northern Illinois Food Bank. It is located in the parking lot across the street from Woodstock High School at 501 W. South Street in Woodstock and is open every other Monday between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm. If you would like to participate in this important community service project, please contact MCJC social action community service chairperson Bruce Weiss at woodstock-bruce@hotmail.com or 815-338-2721. MCJC has been asked to help provide volunteers at the pantry's April 24th food distribution.



Honorable Menschen

Lots going on with the **Turnball/Pacyna** clan! First, Seth Turnball is graduating from Woodstock North High School and will be attending Rock Valley College to study to be an airplane mechanic. And his brother Eli Pacyna will graduate 8th grade so the Turnball/Pacyna house this summer will be a ‘mess’ of graduates.



Allyson Frager and Jacob Thomas were wed in a lovely ceremony at the Ancala Country Club in Scottsdale, Arizona, on March 24, followed by a masquerade reception where fun was had by all! Allyson is the daughter of Cheryl and Jeff Frager, former MCJC members. Several current and former MCJC members were on hand for the celebration. Mazel tov to all!



Kay and Jack Grossman have plenty to celebrate these days. Daughter Sara is graduating from Northwestern University with a Masters of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy. Meanwhile son Zachary and daughter-in-law Monica welcomed their third child, Ari. He joins big brother Nathaniel and big sister Eleanor. Mazel tov to all!



Sienna Kelly will be the featured artist at the Huntley Public Library this June. Her paintings will be displayed starting the 2nd week of June. Stop on by and see them!



Profiles of B'not Mitzvah Girls: Deborah & Sophia Grover

Meet Deborah: Today, I will teach you how to bake a Deborah! This will be a complex recipe, but I'm sure you can do it if you follow along.

We will be starting by adding 13 years into an empty bowl, this will add something or other to the finished Deborah. There you go, that looks perfect!

Next, you will sift in some A's in school, just to add the little spice of an ego boost. There you go, straight A's work great!

Now, you need to be careful not to add anything that will cancel out the ego boost. Here, wait, no- don't add that, don't put that in there- oh no. This perfectly good Deborah didn't need a twin sister! Oh well, at least the sister is not nearly as cool.

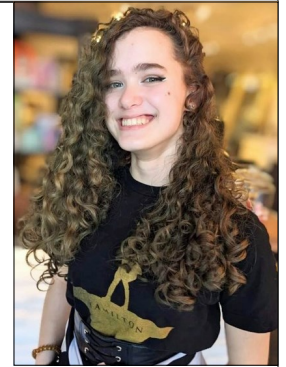
Well, since you already added one sister you might as well add two younger sisters. And a mother. And a step-parent. And a mother's boyfriend. No such thing as too many parental figures.

Then, sprinkle in some hobbies, really just go ham with the hobbies. Yeah, that looks to be about the right amount: too much. Can I see the ones you added? Playing bassoon in band and orchestra, basketball, embroidery, reading, drawing, being constantly exhausted, and being cool? Great choices!

Next up, add a cat for that extra chaos factor... sure, 5 cats are also fine.

Lastly, add on a Bat Mitzvah Project. We have a wide selection of different options. Nice choice! That project is a lot of fun! When Deborah had to spend a lot of time at The Shirley Ryan Ability Lab after her father's surgery, she was pretty bored there, and the stuff for her to do was clearly designed for younger kids. So she is going to create an activity booklet and care package to give kids at the facility. She knows that it can be hard and scary when a parent becomes sick or disabled, but a good sense of humor and fun go a long way. Her dad taught her that before he died.

Now you've finished! Just cook in an oven at 400 degrees for 15 minutes, then serve with cat hair. Now you have a finished Deborah! Be sure to come to her Bat Mitzvah on June 10th!



Meet Sophia: I was recently banned from playing a board game I invented for my 7th-grade math class. It was a class assignment that was distracting a solid two-thirds of the students from playing the other games, along with making the people playing said board game irrationally upset. Over the course of five rounds, people quit, joined to find out what the fuss was about, and tried (and failed) to flip the board. Generally, I don't think I'm much trouble, as I usually stay quiet and do my work, but when needed I can cause some chaos.

For instance, when I started learning trombone over the pandemic, I did it solely to make sad trombone noises at my father's bad jokes. Once that went out of use, however, I started learning the tuba with my end goal being to attend KKK counter-protests and so I could drown out fascists with the sweet sound of the VeggieTales theme song. (Careless Whisper : Saxophones :: VeggieTales : Tubas)

When it was time to pick a bat mitzvah project, I asked my mother how my old babysitter was doing since the pandemic. Before the pandemic, she started having problems with her joints and has had a lot of surgeries. I don't actually feel comfortable calling her "my old babysitter." I love her, and describing her as just "my old babysitter" doesn't describe her role in my life. She's had a hard time since the pandemic, and I wanted (and still want) to check in on her and help her with things around the house as she did for us. I asked my old babysitter if she was okay with me helping her as my mitzvah project, and she said yes.

I don't know how to talk about myself. This is uncomfortable. I think I'll end with a joke.

How many snakes are there?

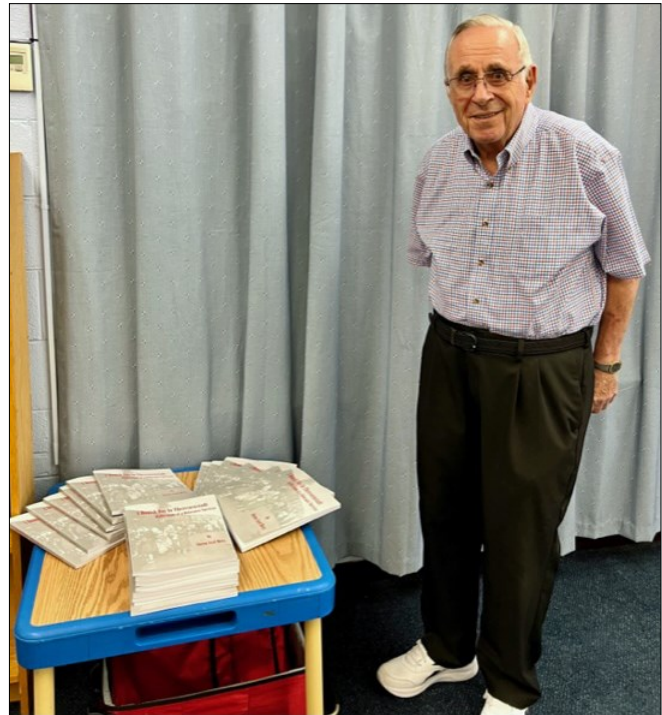
Thirteen.

Thank you for coming to my TED talk.

MCJC Welcomes Holocaust Survivor



Steen Metz, with the assistance of event organizer Bruce Weiss, fielded questions from the audience, many of which were from young audience members.



Steen Metz signed copies of his book chronicling his experience during the Holocaust.

MCJC was fortunate to have the gracious and informative Steen Metz as a speaker recently to share his experiences as an 8-year-old Danish boy imprisoned with his parents at the Theresienstadt work camp during World War II. His father died in the camp, but he and his mother were liberated after 18 months. His appearance attracted a good size crowd which included history instructors from McHenry County College.



The presentation drew about 70 people, many who were guests from the wider community.

MAY 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3 <u>7:00 p.m.</u> Ritual Meeting	4	5 <u>6:30 p.m.</u> Kabbalat Shabbat	6 <i>Edythe Kessler</i>
7 <u>9:45 a.m.</u> Religious School	8 <u>7:00 p.m.</u> MCJC Board Meeting <i>Jeanette Belle Swislowsky Barkelhamer Joseph Lichtenholz Sylvia Greenfield</i>	9 <i>William Green</i>	10	11 <u>7:00 pm</u> MCJC Book Club via Zoom <i>Cyclorama</i>	12 <i>Gerald Migdalewicz</i>	13 <u>9:30 a.m.</u> Shabbat Morning Service
14	15	16	17 <i>Roger Kraatz Sr.</i>	18 <i>Allen Steinberg</i>	19 <u>6:30 p.m.</u> Kabbalat Shabbat	20 <i>Maurice Kaplan</i>
21 <u>10:30 a.m.</u> Religious School Closing Day Picnic Townhall Meeting MCJC Workday	22 <u>3:00 p.m.</u> Drive-thru Pantry	23	24	25	26 <i>Mildred Lanbe</i>	27 <u>9:30 a.m.</u> Shabbat Morning Service
28	29	30	31			

*Names at the bottom of the dates denote Yahrzeits

JUNE 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 <i>Henry Knell</i>	2	3 <i>David Robert Kazen</i>
4	5	6	7	8	9 <i>Lorraine Zaler Jacob Greenberg</i>	10 <u>9:30 a.m.</u> Shabbat Morning Service & B'not Mitzvah of Deborah & Sophia Grover
11	12	13	14	15 <i>Miriam Simon</i>	16	17 <i>Herman Cheslow</i>
18 <i>Morris Greenfield</i>	19 <u>3:00 p.m.</u> Drive-thru Pantry	20 <i>Jerome Finger Aaron Wolf</i>	21	22 <i>Irving Greenberg</i>	23 <u>6:30 p.m.</u> Kabbalat Shabbat	24
25	26 <i>Norman Siegel</i>	27	28	29 <i>Fred Leff</i>	30	

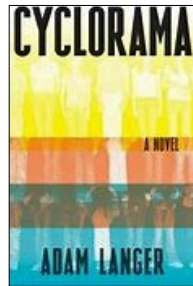
*Names at the bottom of the dates denote Yahrzeits

MCJC Book Club to Discuss Cyclorama

For its final selection before the summer break, the MCJC Book Club will be discussing *Cyclorama* by Adam Langer on Thursday, May 11, at 7 pm via Zoom. Facilitated by Rachel Kamin, the discussion will focus on the novel, which is a deeply moving, propulsive story of 10 teenagers in Evanston brought together by a high school production of “The Diary of Anne Frank” that will shape and influence the rest of their lives.

In addition to the MCJC discussion, Rachel has arranged for a session to meet the author on Zoom on Monday, May 1 at 8 pm.

For more information, and the Zoom links for both sessions, consult the MCJC Calendar on our website at mcjc-online.org.



MCJC Gratefully Acknowledges the Following Donations

The following donations were made towards the Matching Fundraiser

Steven and Ilene Kaye	Steve Boress
Linda and Jerry Trachsler	Sandy and Gene Lindow
Linda Puzzo	Paula and Norman Eskoz
Sheri and David Drizner	Badowski Family
Donalda Kohnke	Judy and Mike Lewis
Iza Celewicz	Ellen and Dale Morton
Elizabeth Dewey	Kitimbo Paulsen
Elaine and Larry Steinberg	Kay and Jack Grossman
Isabel and Mark Schiffer	Mark Goldberg
Helen Lindow	Jay and Sunshine Roth
Gail and Howard Frank	Eliane Aizenstein

Rita Janowitz made a donation to the Mishebayrach Fund

The following donations were made to the Kiddush Fund

Rita Janowitz
John and Elizabeth Dewey
Marian Michaels

Yahrzeits



Edythe Kessler	15 Iyar	May 6	Lorraine Zaler	20 Sivan	June 9
Jeanette Belle Swislovsky Barkelhamer	17 Iyar	May 8	Jacob Greenberg	20 Sivan	June 9
Joseph Lichtenholz	17 Iyar	May 8	Leo Schneiderman	21 Sivan	June 10
Sylvia Greenfield	17 Iyar	May 8	Miriam Simon	26 Sivan	June 15
William Green	18 Iyar	May 9	Herman Cheslow	28 Sivan	June 17
Gerald Migdalewicz	21 Iyar	May 12	Morris Greenfield	29 Sivan	June 18
Roger B. Kraatz Sr.	26 Iyar	May 17	Jerome Finger	1 Tammuz	June 20
Allen Steinberg	27 Iyar	May 18	Aaron Wolf	1 Tammuz	June 20
Maurice Kaplan	29 Iyar	May 20	Irving Greenberg	3 Tammuz	June 22
Mildred Laube	6 Sivan	May 26	Norman Siegel	7 Tammuz	June 26
Henry Knell	12 Sivan	June 1	Fred Leff	10 Tammuz	June 29
David Robert Kazen	14 Sivank	June 3			

MCJC Invited to Tour Milwaukee Jewish Exhibit

Congregation Tikkun Olam has invited MCJC to take part in a docent-led tour of a special exhibit at the Jewish Museum Milwaukee on Sunday, May 7, at 1 pm. The tour of the exhibit, titled “Degenerate: Hitler’s War on Modern Art,” will last about an hour and will be led by a former CTO member who is now a docent at the museum. The exhibit chronicles the confiscation of thousands of pieces of art across Europe by the Nazis with the goal of promoting the idea that certain peoples were ‘degenerate.’ The exhibit is suitable for ages grade 5 and up. Given that the tour date is approaching soon, please RSVP promptly to jandjm436@sbcglobal.net or e-mail tikkunolam@hotmail.com or call or text 815.236.9092 (Debbi) or 815.455.5325 (Jack and Judy).

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 at office@mcjconline.org.
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Connections...to our heritage,
to each other, to the future

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MCJC Connections...

...is a bi-monthly publication of the McHenry County Jewish Congregation (MCJC) which was established in February 1979. MCJC is a community synagogue that serves Jews of all backgrounds. MCJC is located at 8617 Ridgefield Road, Crystal Lake, IL 60012; phone 815-455-1810, email: office@mcjconline.org. If you have any story ideas you would like to see mentioned in the newsletter, please phone MCJC or e-mail Judy Lewis at office@mcjconline.org. **All copy must be received by the 1st of the month prior to publication for consideration in the next newsletter.**

Thanks to All Those Who Serve MCJC

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Dale Morton <i>Secretary</i>		



Candle Lighting Times

May 5	7:38 p.m.
May 12	7:46 p.m.
May 19	7:53 p.m.
May 26	8:00 p.m.
June 2	8:05 p.m.
June 9	8:10 p.m.
June 16	8:13 p.m.
June 23	8:15 p.m.
June 30	8:15 p.m.