



Bridging the Gap: Study Exchange with Michigan Corrections Officers

BJ's **Faith & Public Life** initiative is exploring two truths that we are holding simultaneously at this political moment: The first, that Judaism calls us to alleviate the injustice and suffering we see in America, Israel and the wider world, and that the need to act on our values is greater than ever. The second, that we will only heal the widening rifts that run across our country by opening our hearts and minds to dialogue across lines of difference; not simply to talk but to listen and to forge a broader and deeper politics.

To engage deeply in the second truth described above, we are excited to be organizing a unique encounter between BJ members and correction officers from across Michigan, and are now inviting BJ members to apply to participate in this encounter.

If you are interested, please read the following program overview and FAQs to learn more, and fill out the application by January 8, 2018 at www.bj.org/bridgingthegap.



Program Overview and Goals

A small group (8-15) of BJ members will form a Tzedek Minyan that will undertake this effort to help bridge cultural, political, and socio-economic divides. **The group will travel to Lansing, MI from Sunday April 29-Tuesday May 1, 2018, to meet with members of the Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO); MCO participants will travel to New York City from Friday June 22-Sunday June 24, 2018.** The program in each location will include dialogue and discussion, home hospitality, and social activities. Goals include the following:

- Participants develop a deeper understanding of the perspectives and lived experiences of those entirely outside of their experience and worldview
- Participants educate and learn from others about their values and experiences in seeking to build a “common ground” politics that can solve our nation’s most pressing problems
- Participants engage in self-reflection aimed at understanding and addressing preconceived notions of the “other” in American life
- Participants are further grounded in their religious spirituality by using it as a platform for self-reflection and sharing those values and traditions with an entirely new constituency
- BJ’s ongoing political and social justice work is informed by the learnings from this program

Program Requirements

- Participate as both a host in NY *and* travel to MI (joining only one portion is not an option)
- Willing to host a participant in your home for up to two nights, or to help find a host in NYC
- Ability to pay for your roundtrip travel to Lansing, MI (air fare and ground travel—approximately \$600). We are endeavoring to provide home hospitality in Michigan, both to reduce cost and to deepen the experience for BJ participants. If we are unable to identify home hosts, participants will be responsible for hotel costs, approximately \$150/night.
- Commit to participate in two prep sessions prior to the program and two debrief sessions afterwards. Sessions will be held in the evening, exact time TBD.
 - Prep sessions: Thursday March 8, 2018 and Thursday April 19, 2018
 - Michigan trip debrief: Wednesday May 23, 2018
 - Program debrief: Wednesday June 27, 2018
- Willing to bring learnings and reflections back to the BJ community in a variety of forums



Timeline

January 8, 2018	Applications Due
January 23, 2018	Applicants notified of selection
March 8, 2018	Prep session 1: BJ members with MCO staff
April 19, 2018	Prep session 2
April 29–May 1, 2018	Travel to Michigan
May 23, 2018	Debrief session 1: prep for MCO visit to BJ
June 22–24, 2018	MCO members travel to NYC
June 27, 2018	Final debrief session

FAQs

What is Michigan Corrections Organization and why are we partnering with them for this program?

The Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO), Service Employees International Union, Local 526M, represents nearly 7000 corrections officers and forensic security assistants working inside Michigan's prison and the Center for Forensic Psychiatry. Cambridge Heath Ventures (CHV), a consulting firm with deep experience in social change and political strategy work, has been BJ's primary partner and consultant on the Faith & Public Life initiative, and has been working with MCO for several years. The work with MCO has engaged their members in projects designed to understand how many of them make sense of being pro-union and conservative and how the perspectives of corrections officers can inform—and in some cases complicate—the criminal justice reform conversation; and to bridge gaps across political and cultural divides. Because of MCO's leadership in these areas throughout the labor movement and CHV's ongoing work there, we know that MCO's leadership and membership has an appetite for this type of study exchange, and that the exchange with BJ members will be a rich one.

What will the BJ group do in Michigan, and what will the MCO group do here in NYC?

While the exact itinerary and program is still in development, our goal is for each group to have some exposure to daily life and culture of the other group. In Michigan, BJ members will stay in MCO members' homes and have a chance to interact with the members and their families. We hope to tour a local prison and learn about some of the challenges and realities of the prison system in Michigan and elsewhere through the eyes of the people who work there. In New York, MCO members will join us at BJ for services and a special Shabbat dinner, and we will explore part of New York City's history together through a visit to a local tourist site such as the Tenement Museum or Ellis Island. Structured sessions for dialogue about politics, religion, and culture will be built in to both the Michigan and New York City programs.



I'm available for one set of dates, but not the other. Can I still participate?

To participate in this program, you must be available to travel to Michigan in April, and to be in New York in June to host the MCO group. The program is designed as a comprehensive experience, and joining only one segment is not an option.

What expenses are included in the program and what do I need to pay for?

Included in the program are group meals. Program participants will pay for their travel to Lansing (air fare and ground travel), meals during travel, and admission fees to any tourist attractions we go to in New York. We also encourage participants to bring a small gift of appreciation to their Michigan home hosts.

Will food be kosher?

All group meals in New York City will be certified kosher. Depending on availability, group meals in Lansing will either be certified kosher or dairy/vegetarian. Participants will be able to connect with their Michigan home hosts in advance of our trip to Michigan to let them know of dietary restrictions/requirements; home hosts will be able to accommodate dairy/vegetarian requirements. If you strictly observe kashrut, we will work with you to make accommodations.

How will participants be selected?

We are looking for individuals who have an open heart and open mind, and who are ready to participate in an encounter rooted in deep listening. In addition, our hope is for participants to bring their learnings back to the larger BJ community so that this experience can impact BJ's social change and political work going forward. We are looking for people with these qualities, and who are positioned to impact the BJ community on their return. BJ staff, including Rabbi Shuli Passow, Director of Community Engagement, and Rabbi Felicia Sol will select participants, in consultation with our partners, Cambridge Heath Ventures and Michigan Corrections Organization.

About Michigan Corrections Organization

The Michigan Corrections Organization, Service Employees International Union, Local 526M, proudly represents nearly 7,000 Corrections Officers and Forensic Security Assistants working inside Michigan's prisons and the Center for Forensic Psychiatry. MCO is a statewide local with 33 chapters throughout the state. MCO participates and holds positions in a variety of union and task-related organizations such as: SEIU's boards and committees; International Labor Communication Association; Michigan Labor Press; and the American Correctional Association—to name only a few. MCO is dedicated to serving those who have Michigan's



toughest jobs.