



Seven Hundred-Plus Jewish Teens Gather in Atlanta for United Synagogue Youth's 64th International Convention **December 21-25, 2014**

At Five-Day "Party with a Purpose" Young People Will Celebrate Hanukkah, Learn & Bring to Life Lessons of the Civil Rights Movement Through Large-Scale Community Service Projects

Highlights include numerous service projects, interactive visits to historic civil rights landmarks, and a massive community-wide holiday concert

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New York, NY- This December, United Synagogue Youth, one of North America's leading Jewish youth groups, will bring the spirit of giving to Atlanta, when 700-plus socially conscious teens gather at their 64th International Convention. The annual event includes five days of fun, learning, hands-on service, touring, and meaningful Jewish experiences.

Drawing inspiration from Atlanta and its rich history of civil rights activism, this year's convention theme is *Ve'ahavta L'reyacha Kamocha* - "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself." In this spirit, USYers will participate in service projects with more than 10 local charities, including the Atlanta Food Bank, Safehouse Outreach, Freedom Park Conservancy, and more.

"Coming to Atlanta, with its rich history of civil rights, there's an incredible opportunity to leverage those lessons and really bring them to life," said Rabbi David Levy, Director of Teen Learning for USY's parent organization, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

On Tuesday, December 23, the convention will hold a day of service in honor of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the leading twentieth-century Jewish theologian who marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and participated actively in the Civil Rights movement.

Teens will engage in large-scale social action projects benefiting a variety of groups, including Atlanta's homeless community, terminally ill children, nature conservancies, and underprivileged students in Africa.

"Our convention is a party with a purpose," Rabbi Levy explained, "one where we're going to be able to make a contribution and not just take in all the wonderful cultural experiences. We'll try to leave a bit of ourselves behind as well."

The day of service will also include visits to several historic social justice sites including the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the newly opened Center for Civil And Human Rights.

In addition, teens will hear from inspirational speakers such as Doug Shipman, CEO of the Center for Civil And Human Rights, the Reverend Graham Williams, a retired pastor who struggled in the Civil Rights Movement alongside Dr. King, and Jessica Abo, a USY alumna and social activist who has been working with USYers all year as the organization's first Danny Siegel Changemaker-in-Residence.

The convention will also celebrate the final hour tally for Operation 54,000, a year-long social action project in which USY's student leaders invited teens and their home communities to log community service hours in order to hit a goal of 54,000 hours.

Finally, the convention's community outreach includes a public holiday celebration. On the convention's first night, USY, in partnership with the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, The Marcus Foundation, and the Israeli organization Nefesh B'Nefesh, will invite the local Jewish community to join them for "USY Lights the Night," a concert and Hanukkah celebration featuring renowned singer Joshua Nelson, the Prince of Kosher Gospel.

A community menorah lighting and holiday party, the event will be held on, December 21 at 7 p.m. at the Omni Hotel at the CNN Center.

A full schedule of events at USY's 64th International Convention is available upon request. Members of the press are invited to attend convention events and interview teens but must RSVP in order to receive security clearance.

USY is grateful to all of our convention sponsors, including The Marcus Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, Nefesh B'Nefesh, Ahavath Achim Synagogue, Congregation Etz Chaim, Congregation Bnai Torah, The Southeast Regional of the Rabbinical Assembly, Greek organizations AEPi, SDT, AEPi, ZBT, SAM, and SAEPi, Inc., USY 2104 Alumni of the Year Beth Kanter and Jeff Goodell, Margo and Larry Gold, Scott and Shelley Kaplan, and Dave Lindner.

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About United Synagogue Youth

USY is Conservative Judaism's premiere youth group, run by its parent organization, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. With over 350 local chapters, USY boasts a membership of thousands of teens throughout the United States and Canada.

For more than 60 years USY has taught the young Jews the values and skills they need to become exceptional leaders in their religious and secular communities. USY's focus on leadership, social action, and relationship building has produced successful alumni with a deep sense of pride in and love for their Jewish identity.

Through year round programming and domestic and international travel opportunities, USY provides meaningful, immersive Jewish experiences, helping teens integrate Jewish rituals and values into their everyday lives.

For more information visit www.usy.org.

About United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is a network of hundreds of North American congregations that are committed to a dynamic Judaism, which is learned and passionate, authentic and pluralistic, joyful and accessible, egalitarian or traditional.

It represents more than one million North American Jews. More information is available at www.uscj.org.