

**IN DIALOGUE  
WITH OUR FUTURE**  
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION



A Strategic Plan for  
**TEMPLE ISRAEL**  
Westport, Connecticut

October 2011 — Tishri 5772

# OUR LEGACY

## A History of Choices and Values

Temple Israel has more than 60 years of history as a congregation. During that time we've developed our own traditions for worship, education, social action, socializing, and more. Walk into any Jewish synagogue in the world and the prayers will be basically the same, the food will be somewhat familiar, the names will ring a bell—but each synagogue is its own congregation with its own twists on everything from music to education to (of course) food.

During our sixty-year history, much has changed in the world of Judaism, the world of Reform Judaism, and the world at large. We have naturally been influenced by these changes. As this brief history will indicate, we have always been a congregation that experiments, changes, and evolves. In fact, our willingness to change may be our strongest tradition.

We can identify some overall arcs of change within each of the key areas of congregational life:

- **Worship:** Our worship has become more inclusive of Hebrew and of singing, moving away from Classical Reform elements towards a more conservative service.
- We have moved from a model of social action that emphasized congregational preaching and individual action, to one that involved congregational organizing for specific projects, to a more modest involvement.
- As we have grown from a congregation of 250 families (circa 1967) to one of 800 families (2011) we have lost some sense of cohesiveness and community.
- Our Religious School has become more rigorous and professional in its curriculum with a greater emphasis on Bar Mitzvah preparation. At the same time, we offer a greater variety of options for post-Bar Mitzvah involvement.
- Our Adult Education program has moved from a smaller number of programs (with an emphasis on multi-week “mini-courses”) to a larger number of one-off sessions.
- We have consistently maintained an attitude of unwillingness to engage in formal, general or endowment fundraising choosing instead to rely on dues and school fees for the vast bulk of our revenue. We have however consistently maintained a series of special funds that attract small donations for specific purposes.

## Worship

In the mid-1960s, worship at Temple Israel was based on the New Union Prayerbook, and was largely conducted in English. Hebrew was largely limited to a few core prayers, such as the Bar'chu, the Sh'ma, and the V'ahavta. The congregation's senior rabbi, B.T. Rubenstein, was our only clergyman, although we had a cantorial soloist for the High Holy Days. The organ accompanied all Friday night services. "Hymns" were sung, often in a modern, or Christian-influenced style, and usually in English. No one wore kippot or talesim, except for a small few on the High Holy Days. Several of our long-time members recall that services in those days were "like going to church." In keeping with widespread Reform Jewish practice of the time, Shabbat evening services included a Torah services and a sermon.

Shabbat morning services were held only if there was a Bar Mitzvah (or, in later years, a Bat Mitzvah). The B'nai Mitzvah requirement was significantly smaller than it is today, with the child leading the service from the Bar'chu through the Mi-chamocha, in a mix of Hebrew and English, and then reading a small number of verses from Torah and Haftorah. Blessings were occasionally chanted; the readings rarely were. Although the child presented a D'var Torah, there was no service requirement.

At this point, Temple Israel was the only synagogue in Westport, despite the fact that the community had a larger Jewish population than most surrounding towns. As a result, the Rabbi had to balance the needs of people from different Jewish traditions (Classical Reform through Orthodox) in order to satisfy all the various congregants who joined the Temple simply because it was "the only game in town." This began to change in the seventies and eighties. First the Conservative Synagogue, and then an Orthodox congregation, opened in Westport. Reform and Conservative congregations were formed in Georgetown and Wilton, and later a Chabad synagogue opened in Westport. At the same time, the Reform Movement as a whole was becoming more traditional, largely abandoning the fundamentals of Classical Reform worship.

In keeping with the movement, our worship began to include more Hebrew. We retained a part-time cantor, who became full-time and participated in services, in a minor role at first, then as a virtual equal of the Rabbi in terms of leading parts of the service. More traditional practices were incorporated, such as the Torah procession. More congregants began to wear kippot and talisim. Music became a much more important part of our worship, and the tunes changed from the Classical Reform "hymns" to more traditional melodies. Still later, a song-leader model, intended to involve congregants and increase the energy of services, increasingly influenced our music. These trends were reinforced by the changes in the siddurim authorized by the UAHC: from the New Union Prayerbook, to Gates of Prayer, and now to Mishkan Tefilah, each of which moved farther from

Classical Reform roots towards a synthesis of Reform and traditional Jewish worship.

In the last ten years, we have moved from the old Reform model of a Shabbat evening service, towards the more traditional Kabbalat Shabbat. The Torah reading has been eliminated, and sermons are fewer, although the Rabbis offer more d'vrai Torah—short explications of the weekly Torah portion. The services are shorter and have largely moved to an earlier time, following the Jewish tradition of attending services before returning home for a Shabbat dinner.

The Bar Mitzvah service has become much more rigorous, with children expected to be able to lead virtually the entire service, mostly in Hebrew. They are reading much longer portions of Torah now, and are expected to complete a community service project as part of their Bar Mitzvah preparation. While the Shabbat morning service in the sanctuary remains the exclusive province of the Bar Mitzvah (and is not conducted if there is no Bar Mitzvah), we added a Shabbat morning minyan that meets every week, currently in the Adult Education classroom. Mirroring the changes in the congregation, this minyan has become somewhat more traditional over the last fifteen years.

Change is always difficult. However, our congregants seemed to have adapted to, and even embraced the changes that have occurred in our worship. We can build on this tradition of evolutionary change to continue to alter our worship to meet the needs of congregants, while remaining true to our Reform Jewish heritage.

## Social Action

Temple Israel has always prided itself on its commitment to social action—indeed, this is one of the most prominent items always mentioned in connection with our history. Social Action in our congregation has had four general stages.

In the 1960s and early '70s, Rabbi Rubenstein preached often and passionately about social action. He was a strong proponent of Civil Rights for African-Americans, and one of the hallmarks of his career was his arrest for involvement in an integration effort. James Baldwin, Margaret Mead, and Dr. Martin Luther King and other prominent figures spoke at Temple Israel during those years.

The congregation at that time did not sponsor many organized efforts at social action. However, there was a great deal of what was called “consciousness-raising”, with programs designed to educate congregants regarding the various social issues of the day. Taking action to correct social evils was left largely to individual congregants. The Temple itself sponsored few actions.

This phase of our involvement with Social Action might be termed “inspirational.” The Temple acted as a place of education, of motivation, of

inspiration, while allowing congregants to seek their own avenues for putting into practice what the Temple preached.

By the middle of the 1970s a general change in the larger society's commitment to issues of social justice, was mirrored by a change in the role of Temple Israel in the community. The local UJA Federation sponsored an effort to bring individual Jewish families from the Soviet Union to the United States. While this effort was not sponsored by Temple Israel, it was led by individual members who were intensively involved in the process. Jewish families in the Soviet Union were identified, housing was found for them and jobs obtained. The committee worked on everything from obtaining Social Security numbers for the new immigrants to collecting furniture for their homes. The effort was tremendously successful, with four or five families successfully integrated into American life. Committee members felt a great sense of satisfaction, both because of the mitzvah in which they were involved and because, as several people put it, they could "touch" the outcome. That is, they were directly involved in an effort with a clear beginning, middle, and outcome, and many of them became friendly with the families they had helped bring to the United States. This effort, widely known throughout the congregation, has been a well-remembered hallmark of our social action efforts—despite the fact that the Temple did not formally sponsor it.

In addition, Rabbi Orkand became increasingly involved as a community leader, participating in community efforts such as the United Way and an initiative by the Westport school district. The emphasis in our social action gradually shifted from the broader crusades for social justice that characterized the '60s and '70s to more local, community-oriented matters such as Interfaith Housing (providing a variety of residence options for the underprivileged in Westport) and formation of the Interfaith Council.

In the 1990s, the congregation began to organize ways for congregants to participate in Temple-sponsored action for social justice. The social action committee organized volunteers to supervise the Gillespie Center on Sunday morning while other Westporters were in church. Later, the committee organized volunteers to cook for the center once or twice each week.

The most successful and well-known effort was Mitzvah Day—one Sunday each week in all congregants were encouraged to participate in Temple-sponsored activities. People brought clothes to the Temple for a clothing drive, where members organized and packaged the clothes for delivery to a variety of charities in Fairfield County. The Red Cross conducted a blood bank staffed by Temple members in administrative roles. Activities for children were provided, such as making baskets to be delivered to the sick, people typed books into a Braille machine for the blind, and so on. Other activities occurred outside the building. Some crews went to do environmental clean up, others painted houses

for the needy. The day began and ended with a brief service at the Temple. A large percentage of the congregation participated.

In recent years, our Social Action efforts have been somewhat limited. We continue to cook regularly for the Gillespie Center and participate in the Interfaith Council. A number of our members have recently participated in an interfaith effort for community organizing, focusing on issues of key concern to our congregants and our fellow citizens of Fairfield and New Haven counties.

While we are in something of a hiatus, our traditions of social action are deep and various. We can build on these traditions to move in directions that will meet the needs of our congregants and of the larger communities of which we are a part.

## Social Activities

The Temple does not have a strong tradition of conducting purely social activities, although there are many opportunities for congregants to come together to socialize in various settings.

When the congregation was smaller, up to around 250 families, congregants felt that they had strong social bonds with other congregants. In many cases, people moved to Westport and became involved with the Temple. There they met other congregants who became their close friends—in some cases, friends for life. The general recollection is that these friendships formed in the context of Temple activities, but that they grew strong and were sustained outside of Temple life. In other words, people met each other through their volunteer work, but maintained friendships as part of the ordinary course of their lives.

The Temple did have some traditions that fostered connections among congregants. In the sixties and seventies, the Rabbi would stand outside the Sanctuary after each Shabbat evening service and greet each congregant (or visitor) as they left the room. People then went into the Social Hall for an Oneg Shabbat. People recall a long table with fairly elaborate pastries, and two urns at either end. Women would take turns sitting at the urns to serve coffee or tea to those who wanted (this was not an assigned job; instead, people just sat down to do it, then spelled one another). Congregants lingered at these Onegs and felt that it was an important opportunity for connecting with friends or meeting new members.

A similar tradition grew up around the High Holy Days. At that time, the congregation was small enough that there was only one service. After each morning service, virtually the entire congregation would gather on the patio and greet one another. Several people mentioned that this was an opportunity to see people they hadn't seen in a long time, so that a connection could be maintained even with those who did not regularly see one another.

There was also an annual (or perhaps biennial) dinner dance, and always a new member dinner. There were several trips to the theater in New York, including dinner at a Chinese restaurant. And there were special events—a party for Rabbi Rubenstein’s 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Broadway-style shows about the congregation on the 40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of our founding. This was continued with the celebration in honor of Rabbi Orkand’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In later years, there were several dinners with associated silent and live auctions. We have recently implemented an annual dinner for members of long-standing. And several of our program-oriented groups include a strong social component: the Men’s Group, the Jewish Book Group, and the Mah Jong players.

The sense of community was strong when we were a small congregation. We have an opportunity to create a set of traditions that will bring us together as a congregation of 800+ families.

## Education

### *Children’s Education*

Our focus on education has been unwavering, and our educational programs have continuously expanded and evolved. The centrality of our commitment to education is illustrated by the fact that, through most of our history, we made a commitment that school fees would provide no more than 60% of the cost of running the school. The remainder was paid from dues, involving every member of the congregation in our educational efforts.

In the 1960s and ‘70s, the school program had two parts. Hebrew School met twice a week, in the afternoons, to provide children with a background in both prayerbook and Modern Hebrew. The program focused on readying children for their b’nai mitzvahs, and over time the amount of Hebrew they were required to learn increased; in addition, the school taught conversational Hebrew, with the hope that some children would continue to study the language and become fluent.

Sunday School met once a week. At that time, there was a much higher percentage of children who did not have bar or bat mitzvahs, so the Sunday program included Jewish history, Bible stories, worship, and, for older children, ethics and literature. Beginning in the late ‘60s, the Confirmation Class began to meet one evening each week, providing an expanded opportunity for 10<sup>th</sup> graders to both socialize and learn

In the 1980s, the school was revamped. The “Hebrew School” program was combined with the “Sunday School” into a single program which met once a week up to fourth grade, and then twice a week. This was partly a result of the increasing number of children who became b’nai mitzvah, and partly a response

to the increasing demands on schedules which led to a reduction in the hours kids were willing to commit to religious education.

In the 1990s, two major changes were made to our religious education. Our nursery school, the Early Childhood Center, was opened and became very successful. And the Religious School undertook a complete revamping of its curriculum. Later, the program was expanded with the addition of the Hebrew High School, as well as alternative programs for children: the Chesed Club and the Madrichim program. These enable kids to stay involved with the Temple and with Jewish learning, even if the more formal programs did not appeal to them.

The history of our religious school has been something of a balancing act. We have tried to find the right mix of Bar Mitzvah preparation and other Jewish education; of Hebrew studies and other Jewish learning; of formal and informal education; of time spent in religious education and time spent on other extra-curricular activities. That balancing effort continues.

Our Religious School staff was initially drawn from members of the community who wanted to teach in our school. Some of them have had training in education; some of them have not. As with other areas of Temple life, we have many teachers who have significant longevity with our school. These aspects have been true throughout our history.

#### *Adult Education*

Temple Israel has always had an active Adult Education program, involving speakers, panel discussions, and classes. The program has changed over the years, in response to both the changing needs of congregants and the shifting costs of the various programs we have offered.

In the 1960s and '70s, we were able to attract very well known speakers. For example, Isaac Bashevis Singer spoke, as did Irving Howe and Judith Viorst. These events naturally attracted large numbers of congregants.

In addition to this type of event, we also programmed mini-courses. A teacher would come to the Temple once a week, or once every two weeks, for three or four sessions, covering some topic in great depth. Topics ranged from Jewish history, to Bible studies, to social action. And there were speakers who came once to speak on a topic of interest. Congregants remember that these evenings attracted perhaps forty or fifty people for each session. Most of these teachers and speakers were recommended to us by the UAHC, the CCAR, or HUC, and many of them were professors at the College.

In the early 1990s, the Temple initiated an effort to become a Learning Congregation, devoted to promoting lifelong learning among all our members. A working group was formed to design a set of programs that would respond to



the educational requirements of congregants of different ages, backgrounds, and needs. Although this effort was promoted by the UAHC, it did not gain a great deal of traction, and the adult education program continued as it had been.

However, there was a shift in both the type and the quality of speakers. The sort of “famous” person we were able to attract in the ‘60s is no longer available for a fee that meets our budget. In addition, there seems to have been a decline in congregants’ interest in the type of mini-course that we had offered. Adult Education is now focused almost exclusively on speakers who come for a single session, and topics are quite varied. There are, however, a number of ongoing classes: a Talmud class and a Hebrew class, both taught by Rabbi Hoffman; and the Torah Study group which meets every Shabbat after the minyan. However, it appears that a much smaller percentage of our congregants attend Adult Education programs than did in the past.

Our Adult Education has evolved as our congregation has changed. We have successfully offered a small number of intensive and high-quality courses. We have also provided speakers on diverse topics, from humor to music to astronomy. We can build on these traditions to respond to the changing needs of our adult congregants—as we have always done.

# OUR COMMUNITY

## Demographics and Trends

A simple, quantitative portrait of our congregation, and how it has been changing over the past few years, follows. The first section, the Demographic Snapshot, compares how we looked at the end of 2007 to how we looked at the end 2010.

### TEMPLE ISRAEL DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

|   | As of<br>2007 |     | As of<br>2010 |
|---|---------------|-----|---------------|
| <b>Total # of people in congregation:</b>                   | 3,051         |     | 2,822         |
| • adults:   | 1,660         |     | 1,554         |
| • children:   | 1,391         |     | 1,268         |
| • average per household:                                    | 3.375         |     | 3.312         |
| <b>Total # of households in congregation:</b>               | <b>904</b>    |     | <b>852</b>    |
| • Headed by a couple:                                       | 757           |     | 702           |
| • Headed by an Individual (includes single parent families) | 147           |     | 150           |
| • Individual with children in home                          | 56            |     | 50            |
| Households w/ children in ECC or Religious School           | 378           | 42% | 317 37%       |
| Households w/ adult age less than 38                        | 62            |     | 45            |
| • with children   | 55            |     | 39            |
| • with no children  | 7             |     | 6             |

The second table shows new member trends aggregated over two, three-year periods.

## NEW MEMBERS JOINING OVER 3 YEAR PERIODS

|  | 7/1/04-<br>10/9/07 | 10/9/07-<br>5/20/10 |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|
| Total New Members During the Period                      | 194                | 98                  |
| New Member Couples                                       | 180                | 84                  |
| New Member Individuals (includes single parent families) | 14                 | 14                  |
| • with children in home                                  | 6                  | 7                   |
| • without children in home                               | 8                  | 7                   |
| Empty Nesters  | 9                  | 6                   |
| Households w/ children in ECC or Religious School        | 151                | 65                  |
| Households w/ children not in ECC or Religious School    | 20                 | 20                  |

These figures begin to tell a story. Our current numbers track not only trends in the community around us but also a membership whose make-up reflects social changes within both the Reform and larger Jewish communities.

The Strategic Planning Committee looked at three trends that will affect our planning for the future: population, affiliation and the make-up of Reform congregations. To do that, we drew on many sources. Those sources, as well as suggestions for further reading, can be found in the Appendix. Some of the highlights of our research are summarized below.

### Population

- Jewish population in the surrounding area grew vigorously in the 1990's. For example, the UJA / Federation 2001 study of the Jewish Communities of Westport, Weston, Wilton and Norwalk estimates a Jewish population in our towns rising from 1558 in 1994 to 2560 in 2001. Although no equivalent, comprehensive study for the past decade is available, all other indications suggest this trend has been flattening over the period.
- Projected school enrollment is another important indicator, especially since Focus Groups have told us THAT enrolling children in religious school is a primary driver of new membership. Some trends to consider are:

- Westport estimates overall K-8 enrollment to decline by as much as 10% over the period 2010-2015. The peak enrollment seen in 2010 may not be reached again until 2030.
- Weston anticipates similar changes, with overall enrollment diminishing by perhaps 5% by 2015.
- As an indication of how sensitive our own membership is to such factors, consider the numbers above that compare the years 2004-2007 with 2007-2010. Both new members and member families with children are down by half, while households with children are down by 57%.

## Affiliation

- Affiliation is another important driver of membership. URJ studies report that an increasing number of young Jews no longer feel that membership in a synagogue is important to Jewish identity. This is a significant change from earlier generations.
- Similarly, while Reform remains the largest “denominational” affiliation among Jews at 35%, 40% consider themselves “just Jews” for whom cultural rather than organized, religious connections are sufficient.
- Multiple modes of Jewish affiliation are also available to replace the benefits once available almost exclusively from synagogue membership, from JCC’s to internet communities to politically based organizations and the like. As Dr. Steven Cohen of the URJ reports, the JCC is “the largest institutionally based affiliation in American Jewish life.”
- In a development to be celebrated, new congregations have formed that add welcome richness and diversity to Jewish life in our communities. It also means that a relatively static Jewish population will be shared among them, and congregational growth will be tempered at best. This is especially true for more established congregations like Temple Israel.

## Reform Congregations

- The membership of Reform synagogues continues to look increasingly different from the more consistent nature of member families of earlier generations. As Dr. Steven Cohen of the URJ reports, in particular, interfaith and single-parent families represent increasingly larger segments of congregations. For example:
  - The 2001 Jewish Population Survey conducted by United Jewish Communities estimated that approximately one-half of Reform Jewish synagogue members are families in which one spouse was not born into a Jewish family and may or may not have converted.
  - A number of URJ investigators report that these trends have continued over the past decade.
  - The number of divorced families, with one parent or one parent and a stepparent at home, is also growing, as is the number of single parent

families. Both reflect national trends and differ markedly from the make-up of earlier generations of synagogue members.

- As a result the URJ stresses the need to re-examine old models and assumptions about synagogue membership. They call on congregations to embrace the urgent need for synagogues to reach out and address the distinctive needs of their constituencies as well as those of other, potentially underserved segments.

For many years, Temple Israel has benefitted as the Jewish communities around us have grown. Our revenue from dues and tuition has grown too. This trajectory is changing. Not only must we be mindful of how future expenses and income will align; we must also be sure that the investments we make and The Temple we plan for will best serve the emerging needs of our members.

# OUR VOICES

## Focus Groups Results

No element in the development of the strategic plan was more important than ensuring that the voices of as many congregants as possible were not only heard but also determined the future direction we would take. To accomplish that, the Strategic Planning Committee, with help from the Union for Reform Judaism, facilitated a series of focus groups. Temple members and staff offered perspectives on current Temple life and on actions that could be taken to improve how The Temple meets the needs of its congregants. Invitations were sent by post and email to every congregant home. In all 21 focus groups were held, and nearly 250 congregants and professional staff took part.

### Group Structure

Groups were structured with input from the URJ and were organized around two distinct sets of activities. In the first activity, participants were asked to provide their response to five specific questions:

1. The reason I became a member of Temple Israel is \_\_\_\_\_
2. If Temple Israel did not continue to \_\_\_\_\_, I would lose interest in remaining a member
3. If Temple Israel would \_\_\_\_\_, I would call my friends and tell them what wonderful things they are missing
4. If with the stroke of a pen I could change one thing about Temple Israel, it would be \_\_\_\_\_
5. The two or three most significant changes I would like to see at Temple Israel are \_\_\_\_\_.

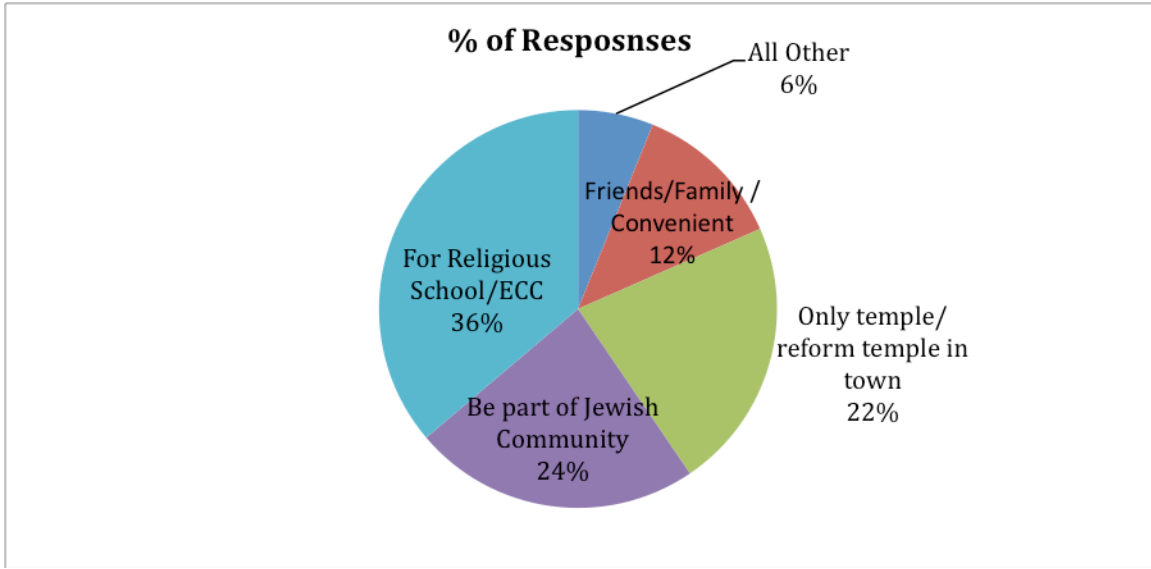
These questions were not provided in advance. They were intended to evoke immediate, top of mind responses and to identify broad trends that need to be addressed as part of any strategic plan. Each participant shared his or her responses with the broader group. In addition, as part of an initiative of the Social Action Committee, participants were asked to identify issues in our broader community that were of great concern. These written responses were provided to the Social Action Committee but were not shared publicly.

An overview of responses the groups shared with one another follows.

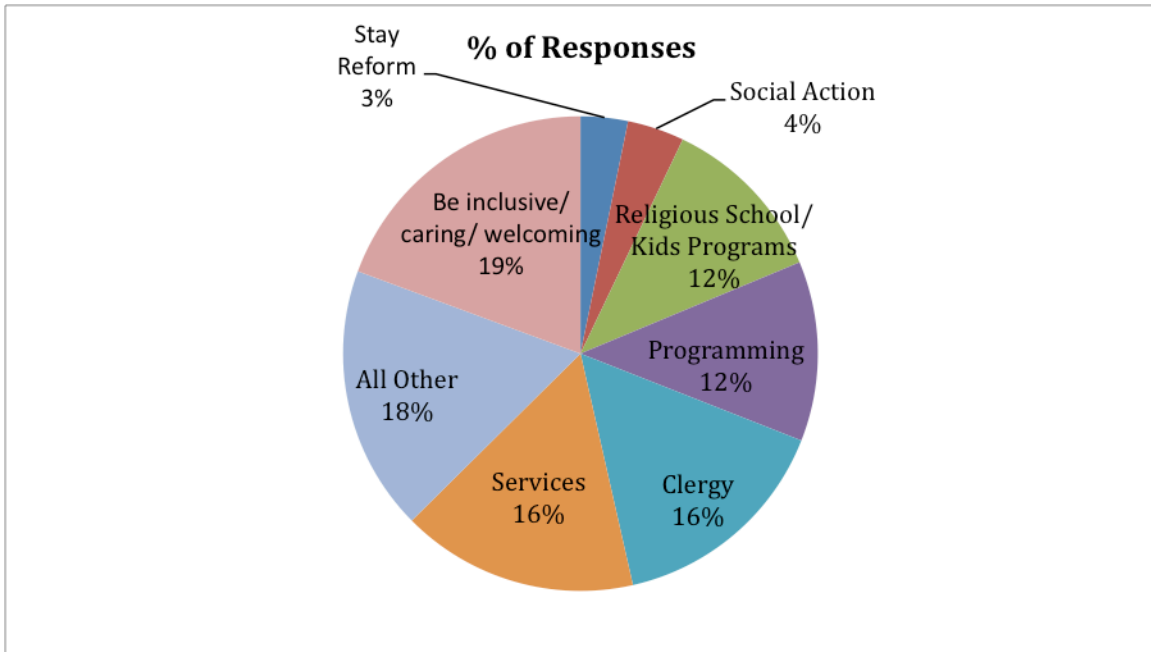
## PART 1: Roundtable Question Responses

Each participant was asked to “fill in the blank” with their response to each question. Responses were then placed into categories to create the tables that follow.

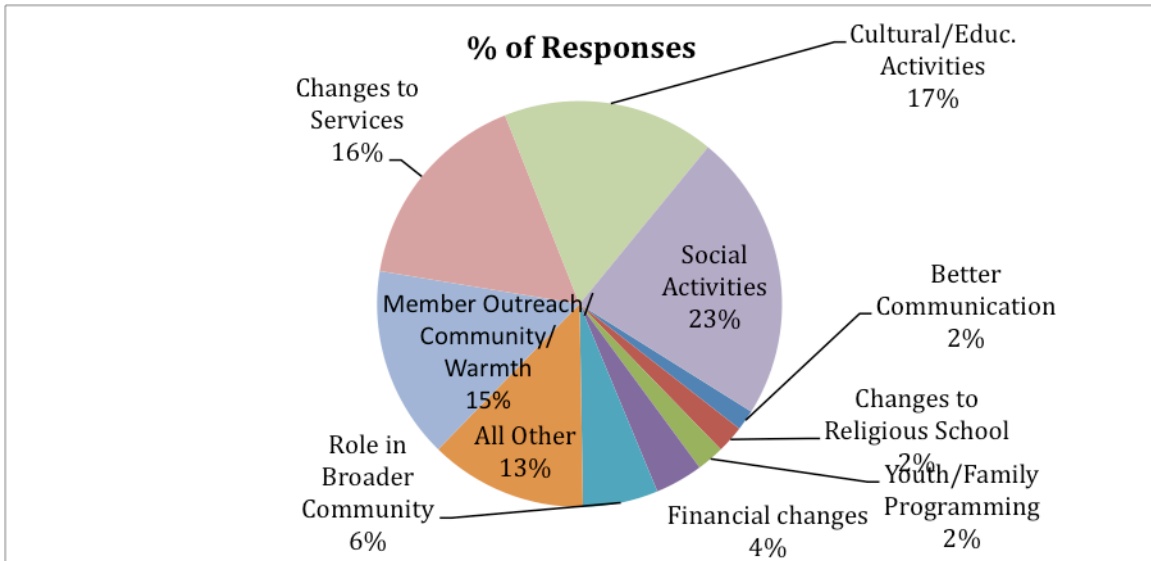
**The reason I became a member of Temple Israel is \_\_\_\_\_**



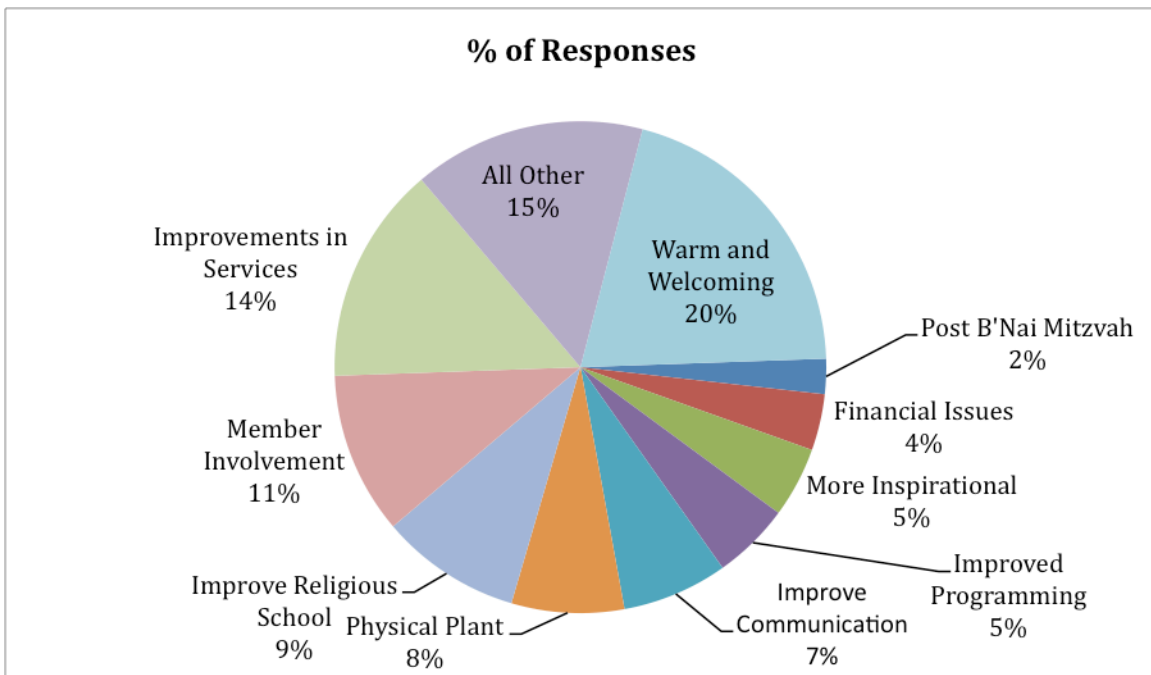
**If Temple Israel did not continue to \_\_\_\_\_, I would lose interest in remaining a member**



If Temple Israel would \_\_\_\_\_, I would call my friends and tell them what wonderful things they are missing



If with the stroke of a pen I could change one thing about Temple Israel, it would be \_\_\_\_\_



The final question, "The two or three most significant changes I would like to see at Temple Israel are \_\_\_\_\_" was intended to allow congregants to elaborate on the themes that developed in each group. There are many great



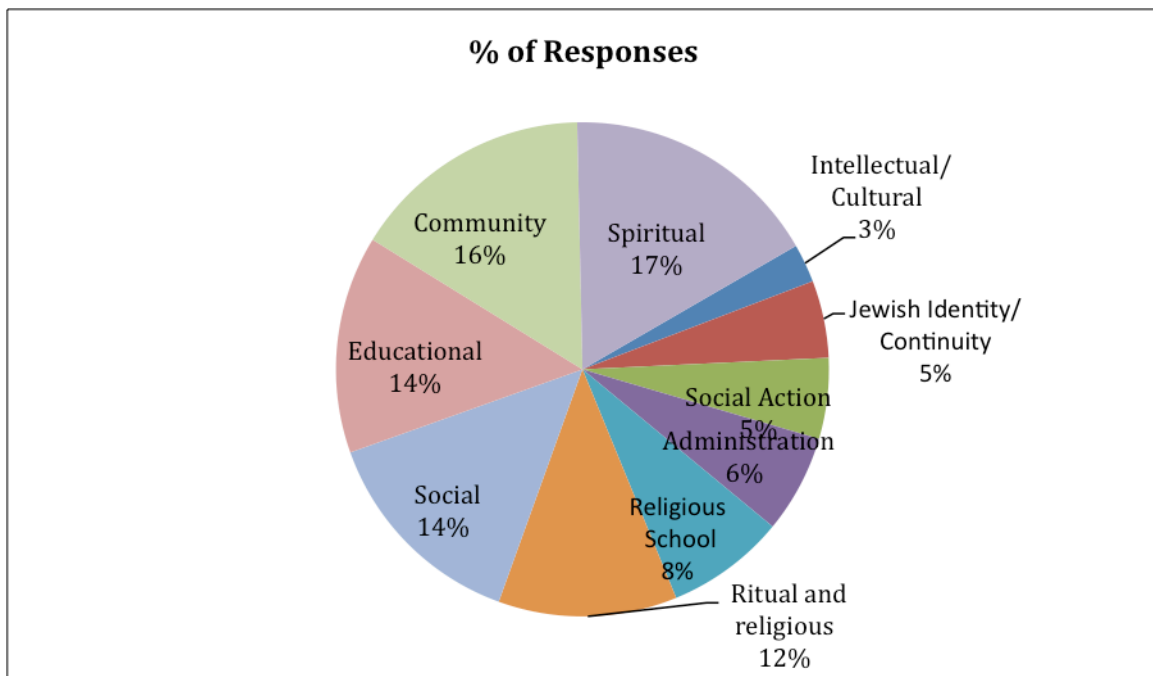
ideas in the responses, but they are also very specific critiques and calls for improvement. These conversations set up the next part of the focus groups in which participants were asked to focus their discussions.

## PART 2: Prioritized Needs

In the second activity, the group brainstormed a list of broad “needs” that The Temple addresses for its members (e.g., education, spirituality, community, social life). The group then prioritized the needs most important to them at this stage in their lives. One or two of these were then selected for further discussion around three more questions:

- a. What is The Temple doing well to meet your needs in this area?
- b. What is The Temple not doing well in meeting your needs in this area?
- c. What could The Temple do better to meet your needs in this area?

These questions were discussed in more of an open forum with greater discussion across the group. The table below represents the aggregation of these top priorities as they emerged from the groups.



Like the first part of the Focus Group, these conversations quickly targeted areas for improvement and desired changes in practice as well as strengths and success to build upon. Throughout the process, information has been shared with clergy, staff and members of the Strategic Planning committee. While no summary can capture the richness and often-divergent character of the feedback, the analysis and recommendations that follow speak both to its sincerity and importance.

## Understanding Focus Group Insights

Each answer and comment was collected and consolidated for analysis by the Planning Committee. The objective of the analysis was two-fold:

1. What are the topics of most pressing concern to the membership?
2. How would congregants like those concerns to be addressed?

This analysis identified four broad topics of primary concern:

### *A. Religion and Ritual*

We are, first and foremost, a religious organization, and the importance of ritual in Temple life was a prominent theme in many of the groups. The core of these discussions was worship and practice at our services. A significant number of people expressed a desire for services that might be more participatory or educational. Others spoke about social and programming opportunities associated with Shabbat services, among other ways of promoting connections and more regularly attracting a larger group of congregants. It was readily apparent that we have opportunities to revisit our approach to ritual and religion in ways that could further enrich the lives of our congregants.

### *B. Education and Religious School*

The religious school was foremost among the reasons why members initially joined Temple Israel, and it continues to remain important to them. This was true not only for religious school parents but also for those whose children have moved on as well as those without children. Importantly, this commentary extended not only to the religious school but also to the ECC and our youth programs. The promotion of Jewish continuity, continued innovation in the religious school and encouragement of our b'nai mitzvah to continue their Jewish education figured prominently as did the quality of and investment in educational programming generally. Clearly, providing a strong Jewish education for the next generation and focusing on families are major sources of value for all congregants.

### *C. Social Engagement*

The desire for engagement and connection was expressed throughout the sessions. For example, when people were asked what Temple Israel could do that would make them call their friends and tell them what wonderful things they were missing, cultural or educational activities, member outreach and social activities were most prominent. Also the issue of communication was often cited as a key lever in making the most of our programming and the opportunities it presents.

*D. Jewish and Temple Community*

The most prominent trend was a shared concern for building community and creating a warm, caring and inviting atmosphere at The Temple. The presence of just such an atmosphere was the second most cited reason why people remain members. At the same time, others bemoaned its lack. Nearly everyone agreed, however, that we could and should do much more to make Temple Israel a truly “warm and welcoming place” for all congregants. Comments about the issue and suggestions for improvement touched on every aspect of what we do, from services and programming to how we interact with clergy, staff and, most of all, one another.