

A Day of Reflection on the Past of Congregation XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX By Michael Remson and Robert Leventhal

Introduction:

Families in transition - those facing changes caused by birth, divorce, death or other major events - often find it helpful to review their past. In the same way, a congregation in transition from one leader to another can also benefit from a historical review. The goals listed below will explain the benefits of this task.

The former rabbi of Temple Israel had left with controversy, and his predecessor had retired and moved away after 25 years of service. The Jewish community was also aging, and the congregation had experienced a change in size and in the way it functioned.

Leventhal and Remson designed this program to help Temple Israel get over its past and move toward new goals. The program helped the members deal with their emotions, and taught them to focus on their future rather than on their past

Goals:

- To provide realistic insight into the legacies of the past
- To give a voice to founders and past leaders
- To understand the changes that have brought the congregation to its current position
- To affirm accomplishments, mistakes and hurts
- To carry the best of the past into the future
- To leave behind that which will not be helpful or possible in the future

Basic Description:

This should be a major, interactive program, open to the entire congregation. Board members, committee chairs and other lay leaders should make a point of attending, and all members are encouraged to participate. Teens are welcome to attend, and childcare should be available if that is in the tradition of the congregation.

The program will begin with a Shabbat morning worship service, followed by lunch. Seating at lunch should be at tables of 8-10 participants. On the wall there will be a large time-line, described below. The facilitator should have a large pad of newsprint on an easel with a marker and tape. Other items listed below should be on the tables, with snacks and beverages available.

The time-line will be a long sheet of butcher paper divided into 3-foot sections, or it may be poster-board panels, each representing about five or 10 years in the history of the congregation. Each panel should be divided into three sections, top, middle and bottom, representing member families, the congregation and the world Jewish community, respectively. Prior to the program,

major events should be marked in the bottom two sections. The middle section might show the founding of the parts of the congregation, the mergers, construction of facilities and rabbis' tenure. The bottom section might show wars, the founding of Israel and other events that had impact on the Jewish community.

Program Outline

Welcome:

Introduction of the facilitator and the program

Worship:

In place of a sermon, three people should be invited to speak for 10 minutes each about the accomplishments of the last three rabbis or the founders, depending on the congregation's age and upon the impact of each.

Lunch:

Lunch should be held with appropriate blessings.

Time line:

Each table, will list on a pad important events, both positive and negative, in the history of the congregation and of world Jewry. Then, as each table reports, the items will be added to the time line.

Then, in the top third of the time line, people will walk around and enter (without their names) times when they interacted with the congregation, including times when they felt hurt. These may include joining the congregation, weddings, bar/t mitzvah observances, taking offices, family funerals, being insulted or left out by a rabbi or lay leader, etc.

Finally, each person will have two sticky dots each, of two different colors. They will put two red dots on the two congregational events that are most significant to them, and two blue dots on the two world Jewry events that are most significant to them.

The facilitator will walk the time line, reviewing what people wrote in the top section and on the items with the most dots.

Cong XXXXXXXXXXXX Today:

The group will divide itself into four groups, each with a recorder and a large sheet of newsprint. The groups will be "Governance," "Worship," "Social Action" and "Adult Learning." Groups will list the norms that describe the congregation in the area they have chosen, both positive and negative. (Examples from other congregations included: beautiful worship, Board members don't come to services, caring leadership, hard to become involved, inspiring sermons, etc.) All comments will be recorded without judgment, although people may be asked to explain what their comments mean.

Large group reassembles and the recorders will report. The facilitator will lead a discussion on "What can we learn?"

The Future:

Facilitator: "From the previous discussion, what changes might be made? What does the congregation want to keep the same? Our past as prologue, but it can not be identical with the future. The past explains how we got here, but every member has impact on the future of the community. Every member can work to make changes or to prevent them.

"Each person will be given two color coded 'pledge cards.' One says 'I cherish _____ from the congregation's past, and I am willing to do _____ to carry it into the future.' This will have space for name, phone number, and email address.

The second will say 'I cherish _____ from the congregation's past, but I recognize that change is part of life. With sadness, I am willing to let go of it as we move into the future.' This card will be filled out without your name.

"Please fill them out and place each in the box of the same color. The first cards will be given to appropriate committee chairs. The second cards will be buried (or buried.)"

Havdalah (May include burying or burning the box of cards.)

Evaluation forms: Ask people to fill them out before leaving.

Follow-up: The first "pledge cards," those with names, will be sorted, referred to Board and committees, and monitored.

Preparatory Tasks:

Publicity

Arrange baby-sitting and child care

Arrange speakers, facilitators, reporters and table leaders

Prepare things listed below

Things Needed:

Time line

Large newsprint pads

Markers

Pens

Blue and red sticky dots

"Pledge forms" and boxes

Evaluation forms