

Last year I spoke to you about what makes a building a synagogue and reiterated that in my October bulletin article that just came out. I spoke to you and asked you to come to TBAY at least once a week. To that end we have been busy creating programming to entice you to come. Our efforts have been somewhat successful but those of you who know me well understand that I don't strive for somewhat successful. I strive for total success. To that end I needed to step back over the summer and reflect on what we have been doing and see what worked and what didn't. What I found is that we were not meeting the needs of the TOTAL congregation. We were very good at reaching some groups but other groups were totally unaffected. What I discovered is that the answer was not so much in the programs we were offering but in the groups we were offering them too. In looking at the demographics of the congregation we see four very distinct groups or generations who all have a different paradigm of what the synagogue means to them and how it should be reaching out to them. By understanding each of these generations, the Traditionalists, The Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials we can shape the programming and functions of the synagogue to meet their needs and desires. If we can do this we can make Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael strong and active for many years to come.

The Traditionalist are the first generation to speak about because they are the ones who established and built Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael. These people were born between 1928 and 1945. Like all of us they were shaped by many of the experiences of their youth. The two most important things in this generation were the Great Depression and World War 2. These experiences gave them very specific values. The traditionalists' prize financial security and they have a deep respect for government institutions and authority. This generation is thoroughly Americanized unlike their parents who were Polish, Russian or German the Traditionalists are Jewish Americans. They contributed greatly to the growth of Reform and Conservative Judaism and during the 1950's and 1960's built great modern synagogues just the like the one we are sitting in right now. The Traditionalists were very much motivated to build these large central Jewish organizations by two very big factors. The ashes of the Holocaust were a primary motivator and the establishment of the State of Israel was another. If we examine these motives in the context of the time, building was the most important thing they could have done for American and World Jewry at that time. It was a statement made to the world and the United States that we were here and we were here to stay. In contrast to the Anti Semitism displayed in the United States perpetrated by the likes of people like Father Coughlin prior to World War 2 this was a very bold statement of permanence for Jews in the United States.

The Baby Boomers are the second generation because right now they are the biggest group among us. The Boomers were born between the years 1946 and 1964. The experience of their youth is vastly different from their parents, they, or I guess I should say we because I am a member of this generation, grew up in a time of plenty in the United States. However our group tends to be more cynical towards authority having been shaped by the battles of the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War as well as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Bobby Kennedy. The Watergate Scandal also shaped our view of government and the politics of big organizations. This group set out to change the world and to escape the control of our parents. We became more egalitarian in our gender roles at home and in the sanctuary. We moved our Jewish institutions further out into the suburbs and moved a lot of Jewish life out of our homes and into the synagogue building. Because the synagogue is so central to our Jewish lives we built it bigger. Once again you are sitting in the evidence of that right now as a result of the building project done here at TBAY in the 1990's

The Generation X ers are the next group and they are important because they represent the new leadership that will be taking control of our country and institutions in the very near future. They were born between 1965 and 1980 and their formative years came in the 1980's and 1990's. Having been born in 1964 I can also identify with this group. This group chooses to marry and have children later in life. They are very proficient with the use of technology and very tolerant of diversity. This generation does have a higher divorce rate, intermarriage rate and non-conversionary marriages; they are not producing enough children to replace themselves creating a net lowering of the Jewish population. This group has a much higher geographic mobility, making more frequent moves away and tending not to put down roots in any one community. This group is important because it helps us explain some of the situation the temple is in

right now. As many of the Traditionalist and Baby Boomers retire and move away from Springfield for more retirement friendly communities, they are not being replaced by Jewish families with children in Springfield. This is not to say there are no new Jewish families in Springfield but there are less and less. The only group that bucks this trend are the Modern Orthodox Jews. I know this sounds bleak however I believe there is hope in reaching this generation and the Millennial Generation that follows them.

The Millennial Generation or the Millennials were born between 1980 and 1995; their formative years were in the 1990's and 2000's. This generation are digital natives they were born on the internet. When it comes to social networking like Facebook and Twitter they are very used to living their lives in cyberspace. They are very good multi-taskers because they are always connected, they love teamwork and collaboration and they tend to delay marriage, children and home ownership. This generation takes a lot of criticism from their elders because they have bad grammar habits from texting, and their sense of entitlement having grown up in the on-demand world. But like their elders they are a product of their environment and we need to learn to be more accepting. As far as accepting goes this generation not only accepts diversity but it embraces diversity, they also are very optimistic and want to love their life's work and have a strong balance between work and life.

As far as involvement in the Jewish community is concerned the Millennials are very different from all of the previous generations. While the focus of synagogue for the Traditionalists and the Boomers was based on synagogue based ritual, Israel and the Holocaust this generations Judaism is more focused on the cultural and artistic expression of Judaism. To them Judaism is pluralistic and should be devoid of labels describing the kind of Judaism it is. This is difficult because it makes formal affiliation with a synagogue less important however not if the synagogue has something to offer them.

So after these descriptions the question that begs to be asked and answered is this. Is there hope? Is there hope for Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael? How can we keep this community viable and here for future generations? I am here to tell you there is hope. There is hope but it will take work but most of all it will take understanding and patience from all four of the generations to continue the transition into the 21st century.

Being faced with a younger generation that is nearly 47% intermarried we need to be open and accepting of interfaith households. As the Rabbi has taught us many times we are not judges there is only one judge in our faith and that is god. So we must never say that interfaith households are "not Jewish enough". Many of you come to us with no knowledge of Hebrew and the prayers in the siddur but at the same time you remain very proud of your Jewish heritage and continue to identify yourselves as Jews. However you may feel judged almost as if you are not high enough on the Jew scale to be accepted in our community. I understand how this can be intimidating to some you sitting here right now. To you I would say that my desire to be proficient in Hebrew and prayer is because I enjoy it and get great satisfaction out of it. I don't play on the Men's Club Softball team because I wouldn't enjoy it and I would definitely not be an asset to the team, in fact they might run me off the field. But some of you could be an asset to the team. And all of us can be assets to the Temple.

Last week on Rosh Hashanah I spoke about the wide variety of programming that we have seen here in the last month and that we are offering in the next several months. If you can recall what I said you may notice that the programming we offered really is geared toward meeting the needs of the four generations here in this sanctuary. There is something for everyone for the Traditionalists we offer fun with your peer group, Holocaust Educational programming and Israel Advocacy programs. For the Baby Boomers we offer fun programming that is not necessarily tied to Jewish ritual or advocacy but offers time with your peer group having fun in and around the Temple. For the Generation Xer's we offer a combination of Jewish cultural programming and activities that you can do with your children and as a family. For the Millennials we offer Jewish Cultural, artistic and educational programming. One other characteristic that the Millennials have that I did not mention is their desire not only to take part in this type of programming but they also have the desire to create this type of programming. So there is one other thing we have to offer the Millennials, the offer is take the reins and create. Create the types of Jewish cultural, educational and experiential programming you would like to take part in. I think what you will end up creating things that not only you will enjoy but the rest of the congregation will enjoy as well. To the other three generational groups we make the same offer pick up the reins and create for your peer group. If you were

a congregational leader in the past and you would like to get involved again there is a place for you within your peer group and or the Temple leadership to help make your temple strong. In the old days a good metaphor for teamwork was telling everyone to pull together and row in the same direction. That was the old days and I don't think that metaphor works anymore. I think we all need to be rowing, but new times bring new challenges and new challenges need new solutions. The solution is for all of us to row with our peer groups and sometimes we will all be rowing together like today when we all sit in one great room together and pray or during the annual Hanukah party in the ballroom, but sometimes we need to row in our own directions, the key is we all need to be rowing! Not rowing as a team, but for the same team. That team is Temple Beth Ahm Yisrael.

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