

JCCO STRATEGIC COMMITTEE on RABBINICAL STAFFING

Synopsis of Congregational Talks

This is a compilation of notes from talking to Presidents of:

Five Reform Temples;

Three Conservative Synagogues;

One Reconstructionist Temple; and

One unaffiliated Congregation

CONGREGATIONAL MAKEUP AND DUES STRUCTURES:

The majority of the congregations we spoke with had membership ranging from 40 to 160 family units. One congregation had a membership of 235 family units. The synagogues were located in the states of Washington, Oregon, Montana, and New York (Woodstock), respectively.

Annual minimum dues ranged from Seven Hundred Dollars (\$700) to One Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$1,500). One Reform congregation has a 2% of adjusted gross income scale, with a minimum of Seven Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$750), and a maximum of One Thousand Four Hundred Seventy Five Dollars (\$1,475). One Conservative congregation had an annual Two Hundred Dollar (\$200) building fund assessment in addition to dues. The Reconstructionist congregation had a range for base dues from Twelve Hundred Dollars (\$1,200) to One Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$1,500).

RABBINIC STAFFING AND COST

Two of the Reform congregations have a full time Rabbi, one has a three quarter time Rabbi and the other two have visiting Rabbis, due to cost. One of the Conservative congregations has a full time Rabbi, one has a visiting Rabbi (for the High Holy Days and approximately four other times a year), and one is completely lay led. The Reconstructionist congregation has a full time Rabbi. Prior to having a full time Rabbi, it had a three-quarter Rabbi that it shared with another congregation (one-quarter time). It had no Rabbi for a full year while it transitioned to a full time Rabbi.

The total financial expense for one Reform congregation's full time Rabbi is One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000), and the second Reform congregation's full time Rabbi cost is Ninety Five Thousand Dollars (\$95,000). The total expense for the full time Conservative Rabbi was closer to \$125,000. The Reconstructionist full time Rabbi was significantly less at approximately Seventy Thousand Dollars (\$70,000).

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For the Reform congregations that have a full time Rabbi, the job function also includes being the religious school director. The Conservative congregation that has a full time Rabbi has a separate Education Director, and the Reconstructionist congregation with the full time Rabbi has a day school led by a Principal.

In addition to dues, to help defray the cost of having a full time Rabbi, the congregations hold **annual** fundraisers. These fundraisers include pledge drives and socials, just to mention a few. The Reconstructionist congregation holds a semi-annual auction that has traditionally raised Twenty Five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000).

AFFILIATION

A common thread throughout the conversations with **all** of the Reform presidents was their absolute conviction pertaining to affiliation. Each president reiterated that affiliation with the URJ provided them the following benefits, just to mention a few, albeit not inclusive.

Benefits of affiliation

- Defines the community

- The URJ is in partnership with the Board

- The URJ does the vetting, matching and checking when doing a Rabbinical search

- The URJ has a summer camp program

- Networking with other congregations

- BLOG with other congregations

- The URJ holds biennial conferences

- Provides leadership services

- Provides curriculum frameworks

- Provides Rabbis in the event of an emergency

- Provides many additional resources

The representatives of two of the Conservative synagogues were somewhat less enthusiastic regarding the benefits of affiliation, while the third Conservative President believed that affiliation was a tremendous asset. The dissatisfaction expressed by the two Conservative Presidents regarding affiliation included insufficient assistance in obtaining a visiting Rabbi, and the perception that the USCJ was “only interested in large congregations East of the Mississippi or Los Angeles and San Francisco.” Notwithstanding their dissatisfaction, however, both also expressed that access to the youth camps was a big advantage to affiliation.

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The Conservative President, who was strongly in favor of affiliation, cited the following benefits:

- Establishes congregation identity
- Children's camps
- Lots of helpful resources
- Leadership training
- Meetings and seminars with other congregation leaders

The President of the Reconstructionist Congregation also cited the following benefits of affiliation:

- the availability of student Rabbis, as needed
- access to numerous services from the Regional Office (particularly, regional conferences)
- support with management and recruitment

Two of the five Reform congregations were unaffiliated for years until they decided they needed to affiliate. They said they are very pleased with their decision. The Reconstructionist congregation was also unaffiliated for many years, and became affiliated in 1999.

SOME QUOTES FROM PRESIDENTS:

- ✓ Don't be the little synagogue on the prairie.
- ✓ Rabbis come and go, but the community remains.
- ✓ We have no consensus; the Board runs the show.
- ✓ More to the left (Renewal), the more expensive affiliation becomes.
- ✓ Prior to affiliation, we really struggled with identity; where we stand.
- ✓ After we affiliated and hired a full time Rabbi, we rented a space in a congregant's building. We only paid for utilities and things were tight but always going in a forward direction. One day a member came in and offered to write a check for \$6,000,000. He stated, before he didn't like the direction the synagogue had been going, but now he felt they were moving in the right direction; affiliation, full time Rabbi and a Board that made sound decisions.