Spring 2012 | Nisan 5772

SYNERGY

UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK AND SYNAGOGUES TOGETHER

American Synagogues and Money: Lessons from History

Rabbi Dan Judson

In 1825 at Congregation Shearith Israel, the only synagogue in New York City, Barrow Cohen was called to the Torah for an aliyah. The custom at the time was that to have an aliyah one needed to pledge a donation to the synagogue's *tzedakah* fund. Cohen refused, claiming he did not know this was expected and the price of two shillings was too high. The board of the congregation called him to a trial where it censured him for what was considered a grave action. Cohen fought back, mustering support from members of the congregation who agreed that the price was too high. The synagogue board, seeing that Cohen had significant support, backed down and agreed to reduce the price of an aliyah. By this point though, it was too late. The fight over paying for an aliyah had spilled over to include other contentious issues in the congregation. The result was that a dispute over paying for a Torah honor led to a synagogue split and the creation of New York City's second congregation: Congregation B'nai Jeshurun.

Tensions in synagogues over money have existed for as long as there have been synagogues. Religious leaders hoping to make money and boards of synagogues worrying over how to raise money are issues that go back hundreds of years. But as some things regarding money have remained unchanged, it is important to note how much has changed.

Today, synagogues raise money primarily through some kind of dues structure. They raise additional money through school fees, donations, High Holiday appeals, and some synagogues are even known to make some money through bingo. But none of these methods, not even bingo, really existed for the first few hundred years of American synagogues. Throughout most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the primary way for synagogues to raise money was by the rental of seats. Additional monies were raised by selling off Torah honors, fining congregants for misbehavior during services, and charging fees for becoming a member.

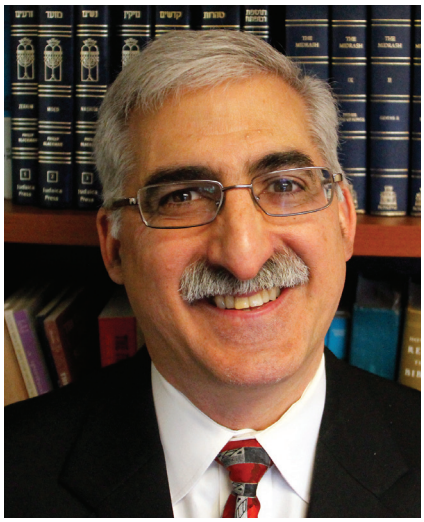
Rabbi Dan Judson

Lesson 1 **Although it may seem that the dues system has always been in place and is the only way synagogues can raise revenue, history teaches otherwise.**

In the 1700s, Shearith Israel had tried multiple methods to raise revenue. They tried fixed dues, then they tried assessing congregants based on their wealth, then they tried selling seats, then they cycled through each of these methods one more time, before decreeing in their 1806 synagogue constitution that they would henceforth and forever after rent seats and never again assess based on wealth. Forever lasted a few years at least. The variety of ways they tried to raise money points to another historical lesson.

Continued on page 6

Exploring New Business Models: A Conversation with Rabbi David Fine



Rabbi David Fine

To address this topic, SYNERGY turned to Rabbi David Fine, Union for Reform Judaism specialist in Congregational Systems, a role in which he has worked extensively with congregations across North America since 2009 to address transitions, resulting in collaborations of various kinds, including mergers.

The conversation is familiar: "Membership numbers are down. Finances are a challenge. The building has become a liability. We are considering tapping into the endowment. The trends are not in our favor. There is a second congregation in our community with whom we have some history. Do you think a partnership is possible?"

If you hear yourself or your congregation in any of these words, please read on. There is cause for optimism.

SYNERGY: Rabbi Fine, it appears that the combined pressures of demographic shifts and the economic downturn are moving many congregations to consider new ways of sustaining themselves. What are some of the most creative solutions you've seen?

Rabbi Fine: Of course, each congregation's context and resources are unique and fundamentally shape the options that any given congregations might explore. That said, there are many variations on some common outcomes that might have been hard to imagine before now.

Cohabitation is one. As the metaphor implies, both congregations maintain their own identity with their own members, clergy, and board, but share a building, overseen by a joint operations board. Two congregations, a Reform and Conservative, in Newburgh, New York, are undertaking this option. Temple Beth Jacob (Reform) will sell its building and join with Conservative Congregation Agudas Israel and the local JCC in the refurbished Agudas Israel building. The sanctuary, chapel, and meeting rooms of the newly named Kol Yisrael will alternately accommodate the worship needs of each congregation, each with its own rabbi. The JCC programming attracts children of both congregations. In addition to the increased financial security of shared operating expenses, leaders see this new structure as a way to strengthen their small Jewish community.

A shared campus is an expansive solution sometimes pursued by larger communities. Charlotte, North Carolina is a good example. Shalom Park was founded in 1986 to accommodate educational and recreational facilities, but now includes Reform and Conservative congregations, a JCC, federation offices, a community day school, and preschool. Current shifts in the community have been accommodated by recalibrating use of space and renegotiating some of the founding principles.

The sanctuary, chapel, and meeting rooms of the newly named Kol Yisrael will alternately accommodate the worship needs of each congregation, each with its own rabbi.

Another variation on cohabitation is rental: one congregation rents space to another, whether to a new independent *minyan* as Union Temple or Beth Elohim in Brooklyn have done, or to support a satellite site of a larger congregation as Reform Kol Ami in West Bloomfield enables for Conservative B'nai Israel Synagogue.

Some congregations, realizing the efficiencies of sharing space, and the value of interfaith relationships, have joined together as well. The Genesis Project in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Continued on page 11

Dru Greenwood

From the Director . . .

Shalom *chaverim:*

As I write these words, we are about to celebrate Purim, the topsy-turvy time when we must remember to forget, when appearances are deceiving, when the Jewish future hangs in the balance only to be rescued by the slim, strong fiber of faith.

And you will receive these words when we are about to begin Pesach — or perhaps during Pesach, when we mark in our households and communities the foundational beginning of our journey as a Jewish people covenanted with the Holy One.

As opposite as these narratives sometimes seem, they reflect in profound ways the dilemmas and the promise of our *kehillot*. How can we sustain our congregations in rough waters? How can we gather the *erev rav* — the mixed multitude — into a coherent and purposeful community? How can we assure that the vulnerable will not fall prey along the way? How, as leaders, will we muster the faith to imagine new possibilities and to take action? In one trope or another, these are questions I hear from synagogue leaders regularly.

The writers gathered for this SYNERGY newsletter edition respond in multivocal ways. Rabbi Dan Judson offers a historical perspective on synagogue sustainability, while Rabbi David Fine speaks from his experience about new possibilities for sustainability emerging now. And Rabbi Les Bronstein reminds us of the ultimate roots of sustainability. Note: Stay tuned for additional SYNERGY exploration of sustainable models!

SYNERGY newsletters are prepared and forwarded to you by mail twice a year. To keep up with opportunities specifically designed for New York synagogues and synagogue leaders as they arise, you must be included on the SYNERGY e-mail list and review e-mails as they come in. If you do not receive SYNERGY e-mails, please forward your name and synagogue role, your synagogue's name and city, and your preferred e-mail address to **synergy@ujafedny.org**.

For an overview of upcoming Synagogue Leadership Development Project workshops, webinars, and consultations, please see the accompanying insert or check the SYNERGY website, **www.ujafedny.org/synergy**.

Lisa Colton and Allison Fine urge us toward a new model of connected congregations and Diane Scherer highlights the extraordinary work of some of our New York synagogues to include people living with disabilities. Rabbi Howard Stecker touches our hearts with ancient words that similarly open a way toward inclusion.

Most of all, these writers — and this newsletter — are intended to start a conversation, perhaps among your own leaders, but more especially among our New York congregations. You can find the newsletter online at **www.ujafedny.org/synergy** to spark conversation at your own shul; you can let us know what you think at **www.synagogue2point0.posterous.com** or by e-mailing me at **synergy@ujafedny.org**.

May you, your loved ones and the *kehillot* you lead be blessed with a zissen Pesach. I look forward to keeping in touch! *Chag sameach,*

Dru Greenwood

Dru Greenwood
Executive Director, SYNERGY: UJA-Federation of New York and Synagogues Together

The Connected Congregation: Re-Humanizing Synagogues

Lisa Colton and Allison Fine

"Eureka!" Tami shouted. We were just finishing our second full-day social media workshop for Jewish professionals including Tami. What happened, we asked. "I asked on our Facebook page whether we should have bagels or muffins for tomorrow morning's meeting, and someone answered bagels. It's the first time I haven't felt alone online!"

Tami was never actually alone online, she just felt that way sitting behind her high institutional walls. Her "Eureka!" moment was just the beginning as she continues to shift from a traditional inside-out organization that broadcasts messages, to a new kind of organization that operates, looks, and acts like a social network powered by two-way conversations and enabled by social media. Tami's discovery is a small fissure in a much larger landscape of tectonic shifts in Jewish communal life.

We aren't futurists, but we don't need to be. The changes aren't in the future; they are right here, right now, fundamentally reshaping the way synagogues are organizing themselves and their communities. The combination of social networks and social media sparks our imaginations as to what's possible for our communities and our sacred purpose. The contours of a new model of synagogues we call Connected Congregations are beginning to emerge with examples like these:

Allision Fine

Lisa Colton

Social Sermon
Rabbi David Levy at Temple Shalom in Succasunna, New Jersey, has used Twitter, Facebook, and his blog to open up Torah study by conducting a "social sermon." By posting text and questions online, he invited members of the community — often not those coming regularly to adult education classes or services — to learn, discuss, and explore together. Rabbi Levy then used the community comments "like a primary text," he says, for a sermon woven of the communal conversation.

Side-to-Side Connections
Allison's synagogue is using its Facebook page to enable congregants to ask questions of one another, share news, and organize events. The post that generated the most comments? Where to buy the best challah, of course! The Facebook page is becoming an all-week *Oneg* directed and energized by congregants.

Story-Telling
Traditional synagogue communications tend to be front-loaded. Come to this event, sign up for this dinner, write a check for this cause. But what *happened?* Events can be streamed live online, photos shared on Flickr, and videos uploaded to YouTube. Congregants will have a full circle experience enhanced by social media from design to implementation to celebration.

> We aren't futurists, but we don't need to be.

These episodes hint at the coming fundamental transformation of synagogues, the fulfillment of the shift Rabbi Larry Hoffman describes as moving from the how to the why of being Jewish. Synagogues as physical places for worship and community are not going away; they are being augmented by online engagement. We have heard clergy express reservations about exposing themselves to an unregulated, untamed online world. However,

Continued on page 10

Originally, they used to allow any [farmer] who wished to recite the passage [i.e., the lengthy first-fruits declaration from Deuteronomy 26:5 in Hebrew] to recite. But for those who didn't know how to recite, the [priests] would recite [and the farmers would repeat the words]. The [less educated farmers] stopped bringing the fruits [to avoid being humiliated in this way]. So it was decreed that the priests would recite for both those who knew and those who didn't know.

Mishnah, *Biqurim*,
6:3 translation from JTS website

Our ancestors faced a dilemma. The ceremony of the first fruits, involving the recitation of the passages that have become central to the Passover seder, was being avoided by a portion of the population. The farmers who could not recite the passage independently were embarrassed by their lack of fluency and simply opted out.

I find this passage instructive in a variety of ways. To begin with it seems that "opting out" is not a phenomenon unique to contemporary American life. Who would have imagined that thousands of years ago, in an atmosphere with more theological and sociological gravity than we have today, people would just desist from performing a ritual steeped in Biblical and Rabbinic authority?

We have much to learn from our ancestors' response. While they could have written off the less educated farmers and allowed the practice to become the province of the elite, it seems they were philosophically opposed to doing so. They could have set up adult education for those farmers alienated from the ritual, yet that would likely have posed challenges to reengaging the disaffected, at least initially. Suppose they didn't want to admit further that they needed remediation? Suppose they weren't interested in leaving their families at the end of the workday and heading to night class?

Our ancestors intuited that while people often appreciate joining the community for an uplifting spiritual event, they don't generally want to be "outed" regarding their level of comfort or knowledge. Besides, the recitation of the communal story, the encapsulation of the Exodus and entry into the land, was hardly a time to separate people; it was a time to express unity.

What a creative solution our forebears found! Presumably, after they leveled the "praying field" by diminishing the distinctions among the farmers, everyone was back on board.

I imagine that, subsequent to the introduction of the innovative change in practice, all of the farmers felt like their first fruits were truly worth sharing and that each was a worthy participant in the communal narrative. Did they all go on to Adult Farmer Ed? Did they increase their donation to the temple? Maybe, maybe not. But they were probably far more likely to remain engaged when they felt fully invited to the table.

Two thousand years ago, creative, sensitive, and visionary leaders harnessed the details in service of the essence so that everyone could feel welcomed and part of the story. As we prepare to sit down to the seder and recite the same words that the ancient farmers did, shouldn't we pledge to do the same?

Rabbi Howard Stecker is senior rabbi of Temple Israel in Great Neck.

The Long Haul

Because Pesach plays such a big role in our Jewish imagination, we forget that most of the Torah's story is not about leaving Egypt and going to the Promised Land. Most of the tale focuses on getting by, day after day, for forty years in the wilderness.

In other words, the Torah's sweeping message is less about freedom from Pharaoh, and more about what we contemporary Jews call "sustainability and membership retention." No kidding!

In the aftermath of the giving of the Torah at Sinai and the punishment for the Golden Calf, we learn about the great communal project called "the Tabernacle," or in Hebrew, the *Mishkan*. The secret of that project was that it involved every Israelite — no matter how low on the totem pole — in the building and upkeep of the *Mishkan*, and that it enabled every person to contribute according to his or her financial means and to feel fully appreciated.

What kept our ancestors focused on the prize? Knowing that they *mattered* — that everyone valued their presence and their continued contribution.

Perhaps this is why their offerings were called *terumah*, literally an "elevation" offering. The offering elevated the giver's sense of worth to the community, and this in turn prompted each giver to stay involved, and to keep giving of himself or herself over the long haul.

That's sustainability for you!

Rabbi Lester Bronstein is rabbi of Bet Am Shalom in White Plains.

Continued from page 1

Lesson 2 **Synagogues generally take a pragmatic approach to raising revenue. Given that there is very little Jewish law or custom delineating how to raise money, synagogues have utilized the method that would raise the most money at a given time.**

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, synagogues moved away from selling seats and moved to yearly dues and High Holiday appeals as the major sources of synagogue revenue. The move away from selling seats mirrored a parallel Christian trend. Paying for better seats like a theatre did not fit with a democratic ethos that suggested everyone should have equal right to religious experience.

The focus on High Holiday appeals, however, was not so much a matter of ideology as simple pragmatism. One hundred years ago, just like today, the High Holidays was the time of year Jews particularly sought out synagogues. The millions of immigrants from Eastern Europe who transformed American Jewish life at the turn of the twentieth century did not for the most part attend services regularly. Estimates are that only 20 percent of Jewish men attended synagogue with any regularity, with attendance probably much less for women.

As the immigrant population settled in and their children grew up, many second-generation Jewish families successfully raised themselves out of impoverished conditions and wanted to build synagogues that reflected this newfound wealth. In almost every city with a Jewish population, large new synagogues were constructed in the 1920s. With the onset of the Depression, this turned out in hindsight to be a particularly inopportune moment to be taking on debt to pay for massive buildings.

At the same time another type of competition was introduced. At High Holiday time, hundreds of so-called "mushroom synagogues" arose to take advantage of the numbers of Jews wanting to attend services. Mushroom synagogues were for-profit enterprises held in Yiddish theatres and saloons which sprang up (like mushrooms) just for the High Holidays and charged tickets for services that were less than established synagogues charged. The synagogues and rabbis of New York eventually banded together and lobbied the New York State Legislature to declare such establishments illegal — a law that is still on the books today.

While synagogues did not all crumble as a result of the Depression, synagogue finances clearly tightened. Rabbis went unpaid, synagogue employees were laid off, numbers of congregants dropped significantly. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations wrote a pamphlet for congregations to survive the difficult economic times with tips such as encouraging them to put in place a monthly payment plan for congregants. In general, the Depression exacerbated underlying weaknesses of synagogues. Synagogues that were relatively strong prior to the Depression survived intact, while synagogues suffering from demographic or economic difficulties closed or limped along.

The experience for synagogues during the Depression presents certain similarities with our current

recession. The recession has certainly not crippled synagogues; strong synagogues continue in large part unaffected by the economic climate. Yet at the same time, overall synagogue membership has declined and many synagogues are responding to the financial stress by closing, merging, or experimenting with different payment structures.

Lesson 3 The health of synagogues has roughly mirrored the financial health of the country.

During times of economic hardship people leave synagogues and churches — religious historians in fact call the Depression era "the spiritual depression" because of the drop off in religious participation. And conversely, the postwar economic boom led to growth and strengthening of synagogues. While the present recession has hurt synagogues, I am also optimistic that, as businesses recreate themselves in leaner and more adaptable forms, synagogues too have the opportunity to function differently. As synagogue leaders rethink membership, style of prayer, and physical needs, some synagogues are also taking the opportunity to fundamentally rethink the collecting of dues as the way to raise revenue. Synagogues have not always funded themselves in the same way. That knowledge alone may be useful in finding a new way forward.

Rabbi Dan Judson is director of Professional Development and Placement for the Hebrew College Rabbinical School. He is also a doctoral candidate in Jewish history at Brandeis University where his research focuses on the history of synagogues and money.

Synagogue Inclusion Awards

Travis Epes and Diane Scherer

Just as Cheshvan has become identified as Jewish Social Action Month (JSAM) — a time when many New York synagogues collaborate in elevating the mitzvot related to *tikkun olam*, February 2012 marks the fourth annual Jewish Disability Awareness Month. In the past, many of you have utilized this time to focus attention on breaking down physical, communications, and attitudinal barriers; educating congregants on what accessibility and inclusion really mean; and renewing outreach to Jews with disabilities.

One of the best ways to inspire a passion for Jewish life is to truly open our doors and make sure that no Jew feels like they're outside the Jewish community looking in.

This year, leading up to Jewish Disability Awareness Month, UJA-Federation's Caring Commission invited New York synagogues to share their successes by introducing Synagogue Inclusion Awards in recognition and support of extraordinary efforts to create a warm, meaningful, and accessible congregational community for those with disabilities.

Criteria for the awards set a high bar. The task force looked for inclusion practices to be integrated into multiple facets of synagogue life, to be sustained over time, to be supported by professionals with specialized knowledge and training, to be coordinated with other synagogues, and to highlight Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month in a meaningful way. Responses were extraordinary. Every synagogue that applied — and they are listed at the end of this article — is an inspiration.

Eight synagogues received the award, which will enable them to enhance and further develop their services. The following highlights offer a glimpse of what each congregation offers.

Congregation Rodeph Sholom on the Upper West Side was awarded first place. "We are thrilled to be among those recognized by UJA-Federation of New York and we thank them for supporting the steps we are taking at Congregation Rodeph Sholom to include everyone in the Jewish community," said Rabbi Robert Levine, on behalf of himself and Special Needs Committee Co-Chairs Gina Levine and Dr. Nancy Crown.

Special needs services on Rosh Hashanah (second day), Purim, Hanukah, and Pesach incorporate text and music particular to each and are carefully designed for the participants. Prior to the service, attendees are sent a "social story," a commonly used cognitive processing tool, to offer a visual outline of the service with simple text in preparation for the experience. A trained team of Rodeph Sholom congregants, including youth group members, create a welcoming environment for each family by greeting each attendee as they enter the synagogue, escorting them to

the service and making sure that they are comfortable. The services last one hour and are musically oriented, with instrumentation carefully selected and timed so as not to be over-stimulating. A rabbi briefly explains the holiday to help participants better understand what is taking place and a four-minute holiday-related story that involves concrete imagery with a clear and relevant message accommodates various attention needs. During the service, a pictorial schedule is displayed next to the bimah, providing visual cues. The service is interpreted into sign language by certified sign language interpreters for additional visual support.

Beth El of Flatbush, an historic Orthodox shul, regularly includes community members who live in a neighborhood residence and who in past times had nowhere to go. These individuals are called for Torah honors and to lead parts of the service if they are able, and all participate in the weekly Kiddush and special Yom Tov meals and observances. Residents have a special place at the communal Passover seder table. In February 2012, Beth El dedicated a Shabbat service to honoring the counselors and members of the residence and held a special Shabbat luncheon following services. With funds from the award, Beth El plans to extend programming for the residents on Saturday nights, as many of them do not have families in the area.

Chabad of the Greater Five Towns' Friendship Circle is one of an array of programs (Judaica Circle, Sunday Circle, and Sib Circle) that engage hundreds of children and youth faced with disabilities in Jewish life and community. Their extensive use of volunteers

Rabbi Ben Spratt lighting Hannukah candles with children at an inclusion service at Congregation Rodeph Sholom in Manhattan. Courtesy of Rodeph Sholom

enables youth without disabilities to build relationships with youth faced with disabilities. For instance, at their Chanukah Experience, special needs children with their specially trained teen volunteers attend the Chanukah workshops and enjoy the crafts, entertainment, and Chanukah excitement alongside their able-bodied peers. Mid-winter and summer camp offer Jewish programming, games, sports, and field trips for children with and without disabilities, and, again, children with special needs are accompanied by their teen supporters who accommodate their special needs. Chabad of the Greater Five Towns' preschool is directed by a licensed psychologist with training in special education and several preschool teachers have degrees in special education. Services are supplemented by behavioral therapists who are Special Education Itinerant Teachers (SEIT). For Jewish Disability Awareness Month, a Volunteer Ambassador Day was planned to empower 150 teen volunteers to use their social media network to tell their friends about the rewards of being part of the life of a person with a disability.

Congregation Sons of Israel in Northern Westchester takes a multifaceted approach. Special, shorter services for Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Chanukah, Purim, and Passover are offered in a comfortable environment. Text and sermons are experienced through art projects, skits, and other developmentally and age-appropriate activities. CSI aims for mainstreaming in the Hebrew School by providing shadows and, when that is not suitable, children take part in their "Lev" class, taught by a teacher trained in applied behavioral analysis (ABA) techniques. Recently, a developmentally delayed adult, who had been a part of CSI for the past few years and wanted to become a bar mitzvah created a team to enable him to achieve his goal. In the wider community, CSI joins with neighboring Westchester Jewish Community Services to include developmentally disabled adults in special holiday parties.

Hebrew Institute of Riverdale expresses its ongoing commitment to inclusion in a number of ways. Periodically on an Erev Shabbat, Jewish residents of three local group homes are invited to the Bayit for services and dinner. Upon their arrival, these individuals are escorted inside together with their aides and seated among the congregation. As the service concludes, the men are invited to the bimah to chant *Alenu* with the hazzan, and afterwards, both men and women come up together to recite Kiddush. An annual Yachad *Shabbaton* brings together teens and young adult members of Yachad with students and staff of SAR High School for an intensive experience of prayer, learning, and recreation. Words of Torah and prayer leadership are shared among all participants and the whole community joins together for a *seudah shlishit*. For Jewish Disability Awareness Month this year, HIR honored an individual with a disability each Shabbat as a "Star Among Us," highlighting not only their accomplishments as individuals with disabilities, but also their many *abilities* and commonalities with nondisabled congregants. The month culminated with an annual Diversity Day, when interactive programming educated congregants about different disabilities in the broader Jewish community.

Lincoln Square Synagogue on the Upper West Side held their first Inclusion Shabbat last year. A Jewish educator who grew up with learning disabilities spoke during services about the experience of learning disabled children in the yeshiva day school system followed by an afternoon tea with a community rabbi who spoke about the opportunity and challenge of raising a child with autism and a *seudah shlishit* with a young professional in the community who is partially deaf who spoke about her life. Since then, additional efforts to educate adults and youth and inspire a culture of inclusion are underway: a learning series on Disability in Jewish Law to raise awarenss of the many potential questions and accommodations that arise; a training program with youth directors and leaders; a joint Lincoln Square-Manhattan Day School *Shabbaton* for eighth graders and members of Yachad, the National Jewish Council on Disabilities.

Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on the Upper West Side notes that, "The openness of the SWFS community to everyone and the diversity of our community are well known, are emphasized in our mission statement, and are an essential part of the essence of our synagogue." KULANU, a program for low functioning children on the autism spectrum is a key expression of their commitment. Approximately 25 percent of the Religious School faculty has some advanced training in special needs education — four teachers with masters' degrees in special education and four who are currently enrolled in graduate programs. Experienced special education teachers lead quarterly teacher development days designed so students with varying degrees of need can be better served. Education specialists have created prayer books with special manipulatives for Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Purim, and Pesach, and plans are underway to enhance the classroom experience of visual learners through technology, such as iPad applications.

Westchester Reform Temple fosters a culture of inclusion both within its ongoing synagogue activity and in raising up the abilities of those who happen to have particular disabilities. Its website describes the b'nai mitzvah experience and explicitly notes: "For students with special needs (for example, learning or developmental disabilities), we will help to tailor specific

Learn More

UJA-Federation and network agency services for people with disabilities
www.ujafedny.org/disabilities/
Resources for synagogue inclusion efforts
www.ujafedny.org/jewish-disabilities-awareness-month/

Kol hakavod to all congregations who shared their fine efforts to include those with disabilities in the life of their synagogues.

B'nai Jeshurun, Manhattan • Congregation Kol Ami
Conservative Synagogue Adath Israel of Riverdale
Hewlett-East Rockaway Jewish Centre/Etz Chaim
Mastic Beach Hebrew Center/Congregation B'nai Shalom
Oceanside Jewish Center • Temple Beth El of Huntington
Temple Israel Center, White Plains • Temple Shaaray Tefila, Bedford Hills
The Community Synagogue, Port Washington • Town & Village Synagogue, Manhattan • Woodlands Community Temple

requirements and expectations for the process of bar/bat mitzvah." Care is taken to appropriately match students sharing a service so that the service is shared equally with both feeling satisfaction and joy in their accomplishment. A special needs coordinator, in consultation with family, clergy, and educator, considers not only a student's potential for mastery of Hebrew and Torah readings, but also study skills, residential location, school system, age, grade, interests, friends, and so forth to plan for success. This February, WRT hosted youth groups from neighboring synagogues and individuals with disabilities from local high schools, youth groups, and group homes for a performance of Flame the Band, a musical group from upstate New York made up of 10 people with developmental and/or physical disabilities including autism, Down's Syndrome, and blindness. WRT takes the lead at UJA-Federation of New York's Westchester Special Needs Roundtable in sharing ideas and programs.

As UJA-Federation vice president Roberta Leiner notes, "One of the best ways to inspire a passion for Jewish life is to truly open our doors and make sure that no Jew feels like they're outside the Jewish community looking in." We are honored to support and to acknowledge your efforts.

Travis Epes is chair of the Autism Task Force of the Caring Commission and Diane Scherer is a program executive at UJA-Federation of New York.

Continued from page 4

the opportunity to make themselves more accessible to more people is too great to ignore. Rabbi Jonathan Blake at Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, New York uses a simple service called Formspring to field questions ranging from "What's your favorite ice cream flavor?" to "How do you define 'forgiveness'?" to "What do you think about Israel's handling of the flotilla situation?" In an open forum, Rabbi Blake is connecting with his community and making himself more human, more approachable as a result.

Social media tools are not about technology; they're about connecting people and building relationships. There is no prescription for creating a Connected Congregation. The lack of a blueprint is actually the point; each community creates a new togetherness based on their own needs and interests. This leaves synagogue leaders with a daily struggle: how do we figure out how to move forward? The answer is using a set of questions as a guide: Are we being more open than closed? Are we asking for input and advice rather than dictating? Are we connecting online and on land?

Social media tools are not about technology; they're about connecting people and building relationships.

Every aspect of synagogue life is being reshaped: how we worship and learn; how we care for and comfort one another in times of need; how we enjoy each other's company, wisdom, and faith. The one thing we know absolutely is that beautiful, unexpected things happen when organizations willingly take down their walls and dive into the social world because the results — learning, sharing, celebrating, caring — are what Jews and synagogues have always done best.

Lisa Colton is president of Darim Online, creator of UJA-Federation's Social Media Boot Camp for synagogues, and blogs at www.JewPoint0.org. Allison Fine is a writer, speaker, and president of Temple Beth Abraham in Tarrytown, and blogs at A. Fine Blog. Lisa and Allison are co-authors of *The Networked NonProfit*.

Continued from page 2

is a full partnership between Temple Beth El and St. Clare's Episcopal Church. They share a building —with a common worship space designed to metamorphose as appropriate.

Mergers between one or more synagogues of the same movement or absorption of one synagogue into another are becoming more common as well, of course. A somewhat unusual absorption is Temple Beth El of South Orange County in California, which took in Congregation Eilat and now is dually affiliated with Reform and Conservative movements. I could go on…

SYNERGY: Sounds like quite a few of the deep collaborations you've mentioned are across denominational lines. Why do you think that is? What makes them easier — or harder?

Rabbi Fine: Initially congregations of the same denomination may not consider working together. They may have spent too much energy over the years emphasizing how different the two congregations are. A split may have separated the two communities. However, if the two groups find small ways to cooperate (Hebrew or religious school, high school, adult learning, social programs, preschool, yom tov observance, to name a few) they will likely find that they have much in common. The members already live in the same area and are affected by the same demographics and economic conditions.

While congregations of the same denomination may share similar philosophies and perspectives, Conservative and Reform congregations offer much to each other as well, beginning with complementary schedules. In general, Reform congregations have larger attendance on Erev Shabbat and Conservative congregations bring in the largest number of people on Shabbat morning. When we approach collaboration with an emphasis on getting to "yes" and cooperating, the possibilities are powerful.

SYNERGY: Speaking generally, what are some of the pitfalls of the process of concluding a merger that can become troublesome down the road? How have some congregations sidestepped them?

I encourage congregations to avoid the "M" word — merger.

Rabbi Fine: A couple of things come to mind. First is language. I encourage congregations to avoid the "M" word — merger. Merger is viewed by many as the demise of a congregation. And its resonance from the business world can imply a strategy that is, yes, painful, but that should be done efficiently and expeditiously so that the new entity can move on. Quick processes can leave a lingering sense of two congregations rather than a vital new one. I have found it helpful to use different terminology that focuses on the common interest in building a stronger future for the community as a whole.

Healthy transitions take time, time to build relationships, test the match, and work out details up front. It's a tricky balance between maintaining a sense of reality and moving toward a new relationship in which a congregation's interests and values can be realized anew. Of course circumstances vary. But a good balance maintains an appropriate sense of urgency (sound data is helpful here) and diminishes anxiety and pressure as individuals accommodate to the changes inevitably underway.

In the moment, which may include the need to reconfigure clergy and staff positions and redesign boards, I encourage congregations to do the hard work of refocusing job descriptions and consider "right sizing" for the future. A number of congregations seek a CEO —"chief engagement officer" or purposefully spread that function among clergy, staff, and lay leaders. While finances and numbers may have prompted the conversation to begin down a new road, in making the change, engaging members and potential members in new relationships and enduring values is key.

SYNERGY: Any final thoughts?

Rabbi Fine: I am heartened by the determination and success of so many congregations to imagine and persevere in creating new forms to hold their *kehillot k'doshot* and live their Jewish lives.

UJA-Federation of New York Leadership

President
Jerry W. Levin*

Chair of the Board
Alisa R. Doctoroff*

Executive Vice President & CEO
John S. Ruskay

Chair, Caring Commission
Jeffrey A. Schoenfeld*

Chair, Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal
Eric S. Goldstein*

Chair, Commission on the Jewish People
Alisa F. Levin*

Chair, Jewish Communal Network Commission
Helen Samuels*

General Chair, 2012 Campaign
Marcia Riklis*

Campaign Chairs
Karen S.W. Friedman*
Wayne K. Goldstein*
William L. Mack

Treasurer
Roger W. Einiger*

Executive Committee At Large
Lawrence C. Gottlieb*
Linda Mirels*
Jeffrey M. Stern*
Pamela P. Wexler*

Special Advisor to the President
Michael G. Jesselson

Senior Vice President, Financial Resource Development
Mark D. Medin

Senior Vice President, Strategic Planning and Organizational Resources
Alisa Rubin Kurshan

Senior Vice President, Agency Relations
Roberta Marcus Leiner

Chief Financial Officer
Irvin A. Rosenthal

General Counsel
Chief Compliance Officer & Secretary
Ellen R. Zimmerman

Executive Vice Presidents Emeriti
Ernest W. Michel
Stephen D. Solender

Chair, SYNERGY Coordinating Council
Sara E. Nathan

SYNERGY Staff

Executive Director
Dru Greenwood

Director of Regions
Adina Frydman

Program Executive, Long Island
Ewa Maniawski

Leadership Development Project Manager
Gayle Bloom

**Executive Committee member*

UJA-Federation of New York | *Good together.*™

www.ujafedny.org

Main Office
New York
130 East 59th Street
New York, NY 10022 • 1.212.980.1000

Overseas Office
Israel
48 King George Street
Jerusalem, Israel 91071 • 011.972.2.620.2053

Regional Offices
Long Island
6900 Jericho Turnpike, Suite 302
Syosset, NY 11791 • 1.516.677.1800

Westchester
701 Westchester Avenue, Suite 203E
White Plains, NY 10604 • 1.914.761.5100

Northern Westchester
27 Radio Circle Drive
Mt. Kisco, NY 10549 • 1.914.666.9650

www.facebook.com/ujafedny www.twitter.com/ujafedny

Through UJA-Federation, you care for people in need, inspire a passion for Jewish life and learning, and strengthen Jewish communities in New York, in Israel, and around the world.

SYNERGY newsletters are available online at www.ujafedny.org/synergy.
Editor: Dru Greenwood • Project Manager: Laura Sirowitz • Designer: Shahpar Nili
1825