

## **TBA STRATEGY 2020: A PLAN FOR SYNAGOGUE RENEWAL**

As it approaches nearly 50 years as a congregation, Temple Beth Ami is facing the challenge of gradually declining membership and uneven involvement by various components of the membership. Since its peak of approximately 1,200 family members in 2000, membership has fallen more than 20 percent. It now stands at 985, plus or minus.

School enrollment is strong, 650 students in grades K-12, far outsized that would be expected for a Temple of our size. The nursery school has a strong reputation enrollment is full at 125 children. Both program are recognized for their desire and ability to educate and include all children.

Temple Beth Ami is weathering demographic and cultural trends better than many. But the long-term prospects dictate we review everything now to see what alternatives might be fruitful in the three main attributes of a strong congregation:

1. Affiliation – does the place attract people? Is there a right number, a sustainable number short of continuous growth?
2. Affinity – how strongly do those who choose to affiliate actually connect with the temple and its religious, educational and cultural programming options?
3. Finance – what is the best model for financial sustainment that includes but is not limited to the elements of dues, fundraising, and bequests? What is the right dues level? The right dues model? How do we change the fundraising culture, if we do?

**Through brainstorming and ideation, followed by focused research, the aim of TBA Strategy 2020 is to develop a refreshed way forward for Temple Beth Ami such that the institution remains an attractive, sustainable center for Jewish worship, learning, culture and community in a changing environment.**

This document is a draft, a sketch of how things stand and what we believe we need to study. Beginning September 2017, with guidance from a paid

consultant, a special committee will further explore these findings. Together with the Board, clergy and professional staff, the committee will conduct a visioning/ideation process leading to a recommended course of action.

### **SOME FACTS ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION:**

Like other Reform Movement congregations, TBA faces a changing cultural environment marked by falling synagogue affiliation rates, a fee-for-service mentality and greater competition for discretionary family dollars.

We still have demand for High Holy Days services and schooling at least through Bar/Bat mitzvah. The post-B'nai Mitzvah dropout problem remains, although changes in the approach and curriculum for post-B'nai Mitzvah students have leveled this off. Youth programs, integrated into the school program, are very strong.

Characteristics of this environment:

- A high percentage of new members join at a reduced dues.
- Many of the b'nai mitzvah families do not send students through the 8th grade year.
- Too few of the parents of TBA Machane (Hebrew School) seem to participate in available activities or sign up for lay leadership. Are we reaching out to them?
- Senior members, at one time assumed to be able pay full fees, are choosing to lower the amount they pay. Several have asked about the possibility of adding a reduced senior rate. Some have dropped out, yet continue attending services and participating in brotherhood/sisterhood at virtually no financial contribution.
- "Empty nesters" are the real place where we have significant drop-offs
- Annual and one-time fundraising-philanthropic activities are lightly subscribed. The high holy day appeal produces approximately \$30,000. The Atid Campaign to reduce the mortgage produced about 50% of the hoped-for \$2 million.

Net effects:

- Membership has been on a steadily downward course.
- Budget deficits have become persistent. The capacity for significant dues increases appears to have reached its limit. The deficit for the 2017 year ended up at \$120,000, up from \$40,000 in 2016.
- The Temple is at near total dependence on annual dues for its operating expenses and savings contributions.

## **Additional note**

In this July 2017 revision of this document, first drafted in 2015, we note a significant change in Temple Beth Ami in the retention of a new senior rabbi, Rabbi Gary Pokras. On July 1, 2016, he succeeded the successful 35-year tenure of Rabbi Jack Luxemburg, who transitioned to Rabbi Emeritus. At the one-year mark since this change, the Board, clergy, professional staff and the majority of the membership feel the transition was a successful one.

Temple Beth Ami  
14330 Travilah Rd  
Rockville, MD 20850  
(301)340-6818

Gary Pokras, Senior Rabbi  
Baht Yameem Weiss, Rabbi  
Janice Rosenblatt, FTA, Executive Director

*Revised July 2017*