



HOLY BLOSSOM TEMPLE

ק"ק פרחי קדש

## **Membership Department**

### **Report to the Annual General Meeting**

**November 22, 2015**

The year since the 2014 AGM, has been one of change and growth in the Membership department. As new Chair of the Membership Department, in addition to the ongoing work of the department, and introducing changes to our membership activities, we also engaged in the process of rebuilding the department and committee structure. A dedicated, and growing, group of volunteers has been recruited, supported by Yael Scutaru, our staff Director of Membership. Together, we have undertaken a number of initiatives to improve current member experience thereby working to retain our membership. As well the team has engaged in some initiatives aimed at growing our membership in some key segments.

Another positive shift in the Membership Department this year, and one to build on going forward, has been increased collaboration with other Departments, bringing a membership lens to shared opportunities. For example, with Education Department beginning to create initiatives around our Early Childhood Centre families, and also with the Department of Jewish Living with our Young Professionals initiatives.

#### **Membership summary**

Members are the core reason "why" we do what we do on the Membership Committee at Holy Blossom Temple. Our goal for our members is for them to be sufficiently happy with their Holy Blossom Temple membership experience as to wholeheartedly recommend Holy Blossom to their friends and family. We will attract new members who align with our vision and values, as we more clearly articulate and experience these values with our current members.

We are pleased that since October 2014 we have had 63 new and reinstated member units, some of whom are families, some are singles. Among this group are first-time members, plus a number of members who have re-joined our congregation after an absence. Welcome. And Welcome Back!

Currently we have 1593 membership units who have renewed (compared to 1664 at the same time in 2014, 1706 in 2013). There are 106 members who have not yet advised us of their intention to renew at this time. Historically, this is consistent, as we have members who renew late in the calendar year for tax purposes. Our lay leadership and Temple senior staff have been reaching out to all of these members in recent weeks, and outreach is continuing. In addition, lay leadership and/or senior staff have reached out to members who have recently resigned or are now resigning from Holy Blossom Temple membership. These calls are revealing and helpful input to future planning.

Like most large North American congregations, experiencing some decline in numbers is not uncommon based on demographic and social trends. Many similar stage congregations in the Union for Reform Judaism are also renovating and building for the next generation. Based on advice from the URJ, we can anticipate some suppression of membership numbers while the building is under renovation. However, the Membership Department is engaging initiatives and strategies toward building positive member experiences to support member retention during this time.

With our Senior Rabbi and Executive Director in action with a forward-focus and our Renewal of Space & Spirit is underway, there is a positive opportunity to increase membership over the longer term.

## **Department Structure**

The Department has primarily been in a rebuilding mode, as there had not been standing committees within the department, with the exception of Dues Relief. We have operated as a Member Experience Committee tackling the many dimensions of Temple membership, and initiating multiple initiatives to be described below.

In the coming year, the Department will further expand its committee structure by dividing some of the current team into stand-alone committees, by recruiting new volunteers, and empowering committees with specific mandates.

The Membership Department is currently seeking a Co-Chair.

## **Key Initiatives**

### **Member Experience:**

One key learning from our Engagement initiatives, both the Campaign for Youth Engagement, and the Renewal project, is the importance of understanding

member needs and wants by their specific Life-stage. Membership strategies and activities will be developed to be relevant to specific life-stage needs.

We have begun strategizing our membership initiatives by life-stage so as to bring relevant communications and outreach to various life-stage cohorts. We very much anticipate the new CRM system which will enable and support the furtherance of personally relevant membership activities.

- Renewal Communications – for the first time, we provided a warm, welcoming cover letter to the Renewal packages. We further provided life-stage specific messaging to our Early Attachment Families (kids age 0-5) Young Families (age 6-11), B’nei Mitzvah/Teen Families and our Young Professionals. These initiatives were gratefully created and supported by Earl Lipson, Justine Melman, Fern Lebo, Jill Kamin and of course, our Senior and Admin staff.
- Calling/Outreach – we undertook phone outreach to 50+ new and recently renewed members from 2014, with an invitation to the All Congregation Renewal launch in January. In late spring, some 150+ calls were made to some of our members who we have not been actively engaged in Temple life. Several Board members and Past Presidents, also made 200+ calls to members this summer to support membership renewal. Lay leadership and staff are currently reaching out to not yet renewed members. Further outreach initiatives will be planned for 2016. With thanks to all who have made calls to reach out to congregants over the year: Current Board members -- Jill Kamin, Corinne Black, Denise Gordon, Vanessa Yakobson, Alberto Quiroz, Jane Herman, Elana Paice Lidsky and Joan Garson; along with our Past Presidents Sheila Smolkin, Fred Zemans, Henrietta Chesnie, and Barry Borden; and volunteer caller, Janet Shiner.
- New Member Navigator Program – we launched a program to welcome our new, and recently renewed members Phyllis Segal Denaburg, and the leadership team of Jane Herman and Elana Paice Lidsky. Volunteer Navigators were recruited from the various life-stage groups to be matched with new members in a similar life-stage. For the past year, we thank our Navigators: Jane Herman, Sheila Smolkin, Jill Kamin, Elana Paice Lidsky, Karen Kollins, Kimmy Walters, Eric Klein & Gillian Helfield, Steve Rayson, Martin Markle, Bob Cooper, Dorothy Hasinoff & Kalle Vaga. Recently joining the team is Andrew Cohen. Some volunteers are leaving the team for personal reasons, and new Navigators are being recruited.
- New Member Welcome event – on October 4, in the Sukkah, we held our first new member welcome event in several years. And one we will put on the Temple calendar for future years. Rabbi Splansky, Rabbi Helfman,

Cantor Maissner, and Cantorial Soloist Lindi Rivers, Joan Garson, Temple President, and several Board members welcomed our new and recently rejoined members with blessings and songs, and a tikkun olam project to serve our Out of the Cold guests.

- Thank you to our Member Experience Committee members for their contributions to Membership over the past year – Phyllis Segal Denaburg, Jane Herman, Erin O'Connor, Elana Paice Lidsky, Jill Kamin, Sara Clodman, Rabbi Jordan Helfman, Lindi Rivers, Russ Joseph. Thank you also to Justine Melman and Sandi Smith for their contributions, we will miss their participation.

### **Young Professionals:**

- Membership retention strategy for children of Temple members, the goal of which is build a bridge to adult relationship with Holy Blossom Temple, starting at age 19, i.e. after high school, and becoming adults. The second goal of the program is to build on and expand the community of Young Professionals at the Temple. We created a graduated contribution structure, starting at age 19 and progressing to age 30. Age 19-22 are completely subsidized to a \$0 contribution by the Holy Blossom Annual campaign.
- The program addresses several key issues we have had with this life stage:
  - 1) Lack of personal membership (vs parent membership) = lack of contact info = lack of contact and relationship with young people.
  - 2) Graduated dues scale to address the 60-70% Drop in "membership" @ age 26 when we begin to charge \$330 for independent adult membership. (There was no charge until age 26)
  - 3) On-line registration for membership
  - 4) Monthly payments — like a gym membership, bank account or credit card, which fits with Young Professionals lifestyle
  - 5) Tactically — to teach them Temple membership is a charitable contribution, many do not think of Temple as a charity, or understand they will receive a tax receipt
- To date 203 Young professionals, children of our members and a small number of new members, have joined via our on-line portal You@HBT. We are now in a position to be in contact with them via email and social media.
- Temple has added one part-time staff person, Angie Shiffman to

support these members, and their programming. Thanks to Rabbi Helfman, Russ Joseph and our key volunteers who worked on this project: Sarah Rosen, Avram Musafija, Sara Clodman, Jill Kamin.

### **Member Recruitment:**

- Early Childhood Centre – this year we learned that only 10% of our ECC (Nursery, Preschool) families are Temple members, in spite of offering significant tuition discounts for members. We have engaged in dialogue with Pam Hamovitch, ECC Director, Debbie Spiegel, Director of Education and Temple Senior Staff, and also some of our ECC parents to understand their needs and perspective; and more dialogue is ongoing.
- We undertook some relationship building outreach to these families, with a Passover message and cookie gift for the children. After graduation, we sent personalized cards with photos of the children and an invitation to continue education in our Religious school, plus info about our Temple community of young families. Similarly, we created a lovely personalized welcome card from Rabbi Helfman & Pam to our returning and incoming ECC families with an invitation to participate in Temple programs for young families. Opportunities for more interaction between ECC families and the Temple is planned.
- HH Children's Services – Membership collaborated with our clergy to have a warm welcome to our Children's services participants, many of whom are non-members. Volunteer greeters, Temple announcements, our Young Family program materials were distributed, along with schmoozing over cookies with the families. Thanks to Jackie Margolis, Robert Schenk, Bob Charendoff, and Saul Mandelbaum for co-creating a warm welcome. Follow-up with these families is underway.

### **Diversity & Inclusion:**

- Through Membership department, and a small team of Board engagement, we are beginning to look at engaging all members of our community with our diversity of backgrounds, family situations, and needs for support. More work to be done in the coming year.
- Gay Pride parade – one initiative engaging our diverse community was our Temple participation in the Gay Pride parade. With Temple T-shirts and banners, we thank Andrew Cohen, Debra Bennett, Sharon Smith, Darren Sukonick, Sharon Good, Sandy Trehub, Erin O'Connor, and Nancy Ruth who participated in the event.

### **Dues/Dues Relief:**

- In collaboration with the Finance department, the Membership committee supported the recommendation of a \$75 increase in our annual membership contribution to a total of \$3,225 for families with members over the age of 35.
- Dues Relief is an important mandate: to grant dues relief from time to time, in a compassionate, fair and consistent manner, to members who, due to significant financial hardship, are unable to pay full dues.
- Under the leadership of Murray Hart, the Dues Relief committee developed revised guidelines, which were presented to the Board who endorsed and supported their work. Key among their revisions was the opportunity to inquire about reasonable particulars to assess need, and to suggest an income based guideline of 1.5-2% of income as a recommended contribution. The Dues Relief committee guidelines can be available to congregants, as requested.
- We have learned through the Dues Relief process, and follow-up calls, that our Membership contribution rates can be a burden to a significant percentage of families with children, particularly when combined with Education fees. Membership, Education and Finance departments are working on understanding this issue more deeply, with the goal of developing relevant recommendations for member contributions.
- With thanks to our committee, who fulfill this important work for our congregation, and out of respect for the process, undertake the work without public recognition of their efforts.

### **Strategic Marketing:**

- Membership has both informed, and been informed by the work of the Strategic Marketing committee. A special committee struck by the Board to develop our strategic marketing positioning, which enables greater clarity and purpose in our marketing and communications efforts going forward. Key to this initiative we development of a "Plan on a Page" which the Board endorsed revealing - our brand values, promise, and brand line: Holy Blossom Temple. Life can blossom here.

- One key component of the plan is identifying our priority audiences for current and future member communications and growth. We identified: Young Families with children, Young Professionals, and Members/potential members at all life-stages who share our values. We currently have 355 member families with children under 18, approximately 22.3% of our member units. Membership will continue to participate in bringing this work forward into our planning and day to day communications.

In conclusion, this has been a year of growth and change in the Membership department, with a great deal of learning, rebuilding, and re-energizing. We have a clearer handle on our membership challenges, with still more to learn and evolve in our member relationships and community building.

Thank you to all the numerous volunteers who have contributed to the efforts. I've named many throughout this report, and I apologize if there are contributions I've not named. Thank you also to the Temple staff for their ongoing, and specific support of Membership initiatives, particularly in a year of many changes which required flexibility on their part.

In particular, I thank Yael Scutaru, Robert Carnevale, Russ Joseph, Rabbi Yael Splansky and Rabbi Jordan Helfman for their collaboration and support. A final thank you to Joan Garson, Temple President for her unwavering support and active contributions to the Membership work whenever needed.

It has been an honour to fulfill this leadership role on behalf of the congregation.

Cheryl Sylvester,  
Chair, Membership Department