Board of Governors Meeting 11/10

Attending: Gerri Weiss, Brad York, Rabbi Goldstein, Trish Grant, Dana Katz, Steven Perlmutter, Nancy Kashanek, Paula Jaye, Jim Sciabarrasi, Marshall Leinson, Don Gottfried, Laura Freedman, Karen Krichmar, Amy Riemer, Steve Fox, Neal Roberts, David Trachtenberg, Julie Bernstein, Kim Cooperstein, Tara Satlow, Les Satlow, Rob Weisman, Eric Kachel, Cindy Remis, Jodi Slomsky, Allison Glick, Michele Belansky, Jocelyn Messinger, Sheldon Aronson, Toby Hodes, Max Perlitsh, Idan Irelander, Susyn Lichtenberg, Art Shiro, Amy Sebell, Rich Wallner

Prior meeting minutes: Approved

Committee Reports

Adult Ed – Prof. Leonard Saxe from Brandeis University is coming to speak at the temple as the Lynch Scholar. He will be speaking Friday night 11/20 at 7 p.m. and Sunday morning 11/22 at 9 a.m.

Larry Hodes film night with a movie and deli dinner will be held on 12/13.

Brotherhood – A couples night out with bourbon & wine tasting will be held 11/21.

Fundraising and Endowment – Interest in holding a golf tournament, which could also incorporate tennis and swimming to make it family-friendly and inclusive.

Sisterhood – 11/15- Curious Creatures event for kids, 11/18-Bunco women’s night, 12/6-Chanukah party, Share the Light – 2 children still need sponsors.

Exec Director -- Update on electrical upgrade plans. We have an estimate for fixtures; we still need labor cost, then we will apply to national grid with interior and exterior electrical usage information and will find out what rebate we might get. If we move to solar, the exterior portion would be void. If we do the upgrades then energy usage is expected to go down, which would impact our solar numbers as well.

One of the custodians, Brad, is leaving on Saturday. A few candidates are interviewing.

Old Business – Solar update: We asked two more companies to give proposals so we will have 3 options. A committee is in place to look at them.

New Business – Temple Finance Reform discussion.

Gerri Weiss: The current model of billing may not be aligned with current sensibilities. Families are leaving the synagogue post-bar mitzvah. In the past, dues adjustments were requested by those who were in financial need. Now it’s based on how much people feel temple membership is worth to them. The question also has to be what does it take to financially sustain our community. People want us to be here when we need them. We need to make it clear/talk about what that entails by looking at the budget divided by the number of families who are members and then asking people for sustaining contributions to fund the community so it is here for the future. A task force is in place to talk about how to finance our community and whether to move from a dues model to a sustaining contribution model.

Presentation by Brad York, past president of Temple Emanuel in Marblehead, which has moved to the sustaining contribution model:

The problem was decreased engagement levels, attrition and dissatisfaction with the dues system. Their board unanimously voted to change from the dues model to a pledge model (pledge what you want to contribute) in the fall of 2013 and they rolled it out July 2014.

So far they have gone from a 2-3% attrition rate to a 7% increase in membership (450 member units to 495 member units). Religious school enrollment is up (religious school fees didn’t change). They are meeting their budget. Their sustaining level is about $2,100 per member unit. Under this model, 39 families pay above sustaining level (with 6 families in a “Circle of Leadership,” paying $10,000 or more per year), 169 pay at the sustaining level, 287 pay less than sustaining. So all together, the money coming in under this model is the same despite the increase in membership. But more members bring in more streams of revenue and increased engagement. They have seen younger families joining and former members returning.

Communication was key. They marketed the change aggressively, sending out letters in the spring about what they were planning to do, holding many meetings at the temple and putting articles in the bulletin and newspapers. He would also recommend parlor meetings – getting a few people in a room with the rabbi/temple president to talk about this. The hardest part was overcoming the fear that they would come up short. They knew they could tap into their endowment if necessary. Other congregations have asked some members to provide a “safety net,” covering the difference if they fall short.

According to research, this model seems to work best for temples with 300-600 families who have a long-standing rabbi. The bigger congregations seem to have a harder time -- Temple Emanuel in San Francisco has gone back to a dues model. Otherwise, about 50 congregations are currently doing this and all have been successful in the short time that this has been in effect. They have found that people in the congregation rise up; some don’t pay much but most do.

The Marblehead congregation also supplements with a high holiday drive, which generates $50,000 for operating expenses. They have a speaker on Yom Kippur morning who talks about why the temple is welcoming and special. High holiday tickets are given out as part of membership, but they charge for guests.

In the end, they are not going back to dues. This changed the feeling of the congregation and feedback has been very positive. People knew there were risks but felt this was the right thing to do and believed in it.

He suggests reading the book “Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community” by Ron Wolfson.