

## Self, Congregation, and Community

Experiences in a Community-led Congregation

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## Background

- Founded March, 1993
- Always community-run, community-led
  - Minimal office staff
  - No executive staff
  - No rabbi
- 135 members
  - Membership afforded to individuals
  - Those 13 or over may become members

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## Challenges We Faced

- Acceptance in community-at-large
- Providing life cycle rituals
  - B'nai mitzvah celebrations
  - Baby naming ceremonies
  - Conversion
  - Weddings
  - Funerals
- Focus: eyes bigger than stomachs
- Volunteers: coordinating, managing

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## E.g.: Community-at-Large

- Acceptance at SPARE (administrators, rabbis, executive directors)
- Issues with being recognized sans rabbi
  - Rabbis contacted re community events
  - Rabbis invited to participate
  - No rabbi, no visibility
- Overcame through persistence

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## Accomplishments

- Established congregation
- Regular programming
- Accomplishments (cont.)
- High Holy Days services
- Life cycle rituals
- (But, still no good answer for conversion)

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## Great Avinu Malkeinu Debate

- Dilemma while writing machzor (1996)
- Themes central to the HHD liturgy
- Prayer central to the HHD ritual
- Melody central to the HHD experience
- "Father" and "King" (אבינו מלכנו): not our only God-images
- Question: What to do? How to preserve? How to discard? How to reconstruct?

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## Avinu Malkeinu Debate (cont.)

- Process: community-based debate (email)
- Result: 12 sets of God-images; e.g.:
  - אבינו מלכנו Avinu Malkeinu  
Our Father, our King
  - בורנו שומרנו Boreinu Shomreinu  
Our Creator, our Guardian
  - מקורנו חיינו M'koreinu Chayeynu  
Our Source, our Life
- Melody retained, experience preserved

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## Strong Community Values

- **Inclusive**
- **Participatory**
- **Egalitarian**
- Democratic
- Welcoming
- Listening
- Appreciative
- **Questioning**
- Innovative
- Mindful of tradition
- Affordable
- **Reconstructionist**
- Community-led
- But *not* anti-rabbi!

**Absolutely worth the time to get consensus!**

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## What We Did Right

- Built a strong community
- Filled a need in the Jewish community
- Established strong sense of values
- Learned, grew, experimented, listened
- Welcoming attitude
- Involved many
  - HHD: 50, (*plus* readers, children's services)
  - 40 different members of standing committees (~30% of membership)

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## What We Did Wrong

- Early burn-out: too few did too much
- Lack of leadership development
  - Improved, through strong committees
  - Improved, through JRF programs
  - Improved, through mentorship
- Ignored JRF and other congregations

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## Yet to Accomplish

- Better systematic leadership development
- Grow
- Children's programs
  - Starting "junior congregation"
  - Good pre-K Tot Shabbat program
  - Excellent Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur children's services
  - No children's educational program

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## Important Tools

- Appropriate consensus and priorities
- Web site (though generally under-used)
- Email (exceptionally important)
  - Among the Board
  - Among committees
  - Between leaders
  - Need more with membership (improving)
- Newsletter: the organization's face!

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## Quotes from Members

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- ...being on the Board...made me feel most part of the community
- ...plus side of "do it yourself" is... engagement and ownership...
- ...absence of paid... executive-level staff...has... hindered Keddem's growth.
- ...greatest challenge is to continue to maintain enough volunteers...
- ...strength of Keddem is community—...true caring...more than words...expressed... outside ... structure...

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## Lessons

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- Make it easy to get involved
  - Easy to volunteer
  - Easy to help
  - Easy to lead
  - Easy to say yes—and to say no
- Attitudes
  - Involvement = showing place in siddur!
  - Involvement = belonging
- Avoid monolithic jobs: divide and conquer

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## Summary

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- Participation fosters community
- Community fosters participation
- Encourage participation
- Model participation
- Encourage balance
- Smaller, but more involved
- Thank people: in person, in public, in newsletter, with thank you notes
- Leadership is a joy, not a burden

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## Your Experiences

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## NOTES

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- See Kate's letter to *Outlook* editor
- See ConventionTalk\_Notes\_2002.doc

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