

TAA Strategic Plan (2020-2025)

Approved unanimously by the Board of Directors on May 26, 2020

To be presented to the Members at the Annual Meeting on June 9, 2020

OUR TEMPLE HISTORY

For well over one hundred years, Temple Ahavat Achim has been the center of Jewish life on Cape Ann and surrounding towns. In this coastal outpost celebrated for its natural beauty and its artistic and maritime heritage, we have maintained a Jewish home for a diverse mix of creative, thoughtful, engaging people. We share prayers, learning, arts and culture, holidays, good works, food, adventures, and the joys of a supportive and welcoming community.

We began in the 19th century as a few Jewish immigrant families who held services in each other's homes. We incorporated in 1904. One of our first missions was the purchase of land for a cemetery. In 1951, we bought the historic Congregational Church building on Middle Street in Gloucester; at the time, the structure was more than a century old.

In 2007, our beloved building burned to the ground. But, we never missed a service or a social event. We moved into temporary quarters and made a commitment to remain in downtown Gloucester. In 2011, we dedicated our bright, expansive new home, Temple Ahavat Achim/The Jacqueline S. Paulson Center. Led by Rabbi Steven Lewis, we remain welcoming and inclusive - grateful for our past and working toward a better future.

It is in this spirit that we present this five-year Strategic Plan for 2020-2025.

INTRODUCTION

We are so pleased to present to you a new Strategic Plan to serve as the roadmap for guiding Temple Ahavat Achim (TAA) from strength to strength over the next five years. This plan follows our previous Strategic Plan which has so effectively served us since 2008. That earlier plan emerged through the dedicated and focused work of TAA's Strategic Planning Committee and other leaders after the devastating fire that destroyed our beautiful old building in December, 2007.

We are now enjoying our ninth year in our marvelous new home on Middle Street. We are thriving! Our membership level is approaching 200 households. We are drawing members from a wide swath of Cape Ann and beyond. Our Family Learning Project and adult education programs - meeting the needs of preschoolers to seniors - are innovative and attract more people each year. Our Shabbat, Sunday Minyan, and Holiday services are spiritually uplifting and well-attended. We embrace every member - those born Jewish and those from other faith traditions - and are egalitarian.

This Strategic Plan has as its foundation a commitment to Relational Judaism. As we were finalizing the plan, the world was overtaken by the COVID-19 pandemic. This outbreak has demonstrated more than ever why we want to focus on developing strong relationships within TAA and with our neighbors. Through these relationships we care for each other, deepen our connections, and promote understanding in ways that enrich our lives and sustain our Jewish community.

The development of this plan moved through several stages, as we learned more about who we are as a congregation and what our hopes and dreams are for TAA. We collected and analyzed data about the demographics of our members. We then gathered many TAA leaders, including past presidents, Board members, and committee chairs, for a kick-off meeting. We held focus groups for specific segments of our population. We held another focus group for anyone in the congregation and sent out a survey to all members. Next we formed a Strategic Plan Planners group to synthesize what we had learned and draft the new plan for Board review. After making its comments, the Board unanimously approved the final plan at its May 2020 meeting. The last step was presenting the final plan to the membership at the 2020 Annual Meeting in June.

We now share with you TAA's Strategic Plan for 2020-2025. Let us all work over the next five years to make TAA an even warmer and more welcoming home by enhancing personal relationships and strengthening our commitment to Jewish ritual, learning, and community

OUR MISSION

We serve the Jewish community of Cape Ann and beyond by providing a range of sacred and meaningful experiences: friendship, community, and celebration among a diverse membership; a variety of opportunities for prayer, learning, and the study of Torah; and the promotion of social justice.

OUR VISION

We are continually seeking innovative ways to create a place of profound spiritual experiences for all; a place where we can develop strong, caring relationships to carry us through life's journey; and a place where we can learn, grow, and contribute.

WHO WE ARE

As a Jewish Community:

- We are participants - Jews by birth, Jews by choice, and committed interfaith partners - who aspire to live in a meaningful, joyful, authentic Jewish life, guided by the principles and traditions of the Conservative Movement.
- We honor and celebrate a range of sacred Jewish practices and nurture all who wish to infuse their lives with Jewish learning, prayer, and worthy deeds.
- We share our Jewish values and practices with the Cape Ann community and help others understand who we are.
- We value our connections to the State of Israel, while recognizing the diversity of opinion surrounding Middle Eastern politics.

As a Community of Friends:

- We are egalitarian, with opportunities for all to participate in aspects of worship, leadership, and congregational life.

- We embrace our diversity related to religious observance, race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, family configuration, and political persuasion.
- We care for each other in times of need.

As a Community of Learning:

- We are engaged actively in deepening our knowledge of the principles of Jewish life and in the constant evolution of Jewish practice.
- We are committed through our Family Learning Project to help young people and their families understand their Jewish heritage and build a foundation for Jewish living.
- We support adult learning opportunities in many forms.
- We are enriched when people of all ages pray and learn together.

As a Community for Healing the World (Tikkun Olam):

- We advocate Jewish values and social justice within our community of Cape Ann and the North Shore.
- We affirm our obligation as stewards of the Earth and are committed in joining others to address environmental threats to our planet for the sake of coming generations.

I. RELATIONAL JUDAISM

STRATEGIC GOAL: Bringing the practice of Relational Judaism to Temple Ahavat Achim (TAA) is the core of this strategic plan. Developing strong relationships among our members will promote connection and mutual understanding and will result in a Jewish community that enriches our lives.

WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT? As Ron Wolfson discusses in his book Relational Judaism, centering Jewish life around institutions is an outdated notion. To survive and thrive, we need to embrace the idea of TAA as a relational community offering meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing. People will come to TAA for programs, but they will stay for relationships.

OBJECTIVES:

To ensure that TAA promotes relationships that connect congregants with each other, the Rabbi, and the Director of the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project. The needs of all age groups must be considered as well as opportunities for intergenerational relationships.

To achieve this objective we will:

1. Create a Relational Judaism Team (RJT) to implement and oversee the incorporation of Relational Judaism principles into TAA life. (2020-2021)
2. Educate the congregation about the principles of Relational Judaism. (2020-2021)
3. Create relationships through personal encounters by regularly conducting one-to-one conversations, holding house meetings, and using other appropriate methods with TAA members of all ages. Ensure the cultivation of relationships with new members to integrate them into the TAA community. (2020-2021)
4. Through information-gathering, identify the talents, abilities, and passions of TAA members of all ages. (2021 and beyond) Based on the information gathered, we will:

- a. Match individual members to specific volunteer opportunities within TAA and with TAA's activities in the outside community.
 - b. Enable TAA members to share their talents, abilities, and passions by offering approved new activities/programs to the TAA community.
5. Consider the following key transition points in the lives of TAA members that may affect their relationship to TAA. (2021 and beyond) As much as possible, we will work to engage:
- a. Families and individuals of all ages as they choose to become new members of TAA;
 - b. Pre-school families when they choose to enroll their children in the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project;
 - c. Pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah families in planning for their simchah and for their future involvement at TAA;
 - d. Families and their children as the teenagers graduate from high school and attend college;
 - e. Young adult members as they complete their higher education and become independent working adults;
 - f. Parents as their children move away and the parents become empty-nesters; and
 - g. Seniors as they age who may lose some of their ability to participate as actively in the life of TAA.

II. RITUAL AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

STRATEGIC GOAL: To ensure that the Temple’s ritual and religious experiences meet the needs of the TAA community.

WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT? Ritual and religious experiences are core to the Temple’s mission.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Led by the Rabbi, the Director of the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project, and the Ritual Committee, provide a range of Jewish study, prayer, and ritual practice opportunities to the Congregation. These opportunities should meet the needs of members of different age groups, religious backgrounds, and commitment to ritual practice in the Congregation, including Krovei Yisrael.¹ Examples are: Shabbat and Holiday Services, Torah Study, Intergenerational Shabbat Lunches, and Friday Night Neighborhood Shabbats.
2. Increase participation in services through a variety of means, including encouraging adults and children to take part in and/or lead services and continuing to offer voice and instrumental music.
3. Provide opportunities for adults to learn to read and understand Hebrew.
4. Continue to provide the opportunity for adults who come forward with the desire to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

¹ Krovei Yisrael (plural) is an inclusive term used for supportive spouses or partners who are secular or of other faiths. Karov (singular) literally means “relative” or “someone who is close.”

III. EDUCATION

STRATEGIC GOAL: To ensure that all elements of educational programming within the Temple and across all age groups meet the needs and curiosities of Temple members.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? Educating adults and children about our past and present, and putting that learning into practice, creates a strong community. Recognizing changing life-cycle needs will lead to relevant programming and a more involved membership.

OBJECTIVES:

1. SYLVIA COHEN FAMILY LEARNING PROJECT

- a. Maintain the excellence of TAA's educational programs for our children.
- b. Develop additional opportunities for parents to learn with their children, as well as adults-only conversations about raising Jewish children and other topics.
- c. Ensure that programs for parents are sensitive to their schedules and childcare needs.

2. ADULT LEARNING

- a. Offer diverse learning opportunities for adults of all ages. Topics may include those that are sensitive or political in nature. Examples are: Torah Study, Book Clubs, Israel discussions, etc.

3. TEACHING ABOUT TAA

- a. Create an evolving online "everything you need to know" manual that addresses ritual meaning, customs, and traditions; TAA policies; and frequently asked questions about attending TAA services and programs. This information will be accessible both via TAA's website and in hard copy at the Temple and could be undertaken as an intergenerational project.
- b. Using material from the on-line manual, provide information about major holidays in hard copy form to congregants.

IV. TIKKUN OLAM

STRATEGIC GOAL: To ensure that TAA members take responsibility for 1) repairing the world and advocating for social justice within TAA, on Cape Ann, and on the North Shore and 2) acting on our role as stewards of the Earth and committing to join others to address the climate crisis for the sake of future generations.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? Tikkun Olam ("Repairing the World") is a central tenet of Judaism. Through Tikkun Olam we help care for people in need of support within the TAA community. We work on social justice and environmental issues to honor the Jewish impulse to repair the world. We look outside the walls of TAA to identify issues on which we can work as Jews to add meaning to our lives and better our community and the world in which we live.

OBJECTIVES:

1. TIKKUN OLAM WITHIN THE TAA COMMUNITY

- a. Continue caring for those in need of support in our TAA community, as, for example, by the work of the Chesed Committee.
- b. Create a task force to determine and implement the best ways to address COVID-19 issues that arise within the TAA community.
(Spring 2020)
- c. Continue efforts led by the head of the Kitchen Committee to make practices in TAA's kitchen more sustainable.
- d. Continue to seek methods to reduce the environmental footprint of the TAA community and the TAA building.

2. TIKKUN OLAM IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD

- a. Strengthen the volunteer efforts of TAA members, including such efforts as participating in ECCO (Essex County Community Organization), a faith-based social justice organization, serving meals to and otherwise assisting Gloucester residents in need, and supporting refugees and immigrants who have resettled on Cape Ann.
- b. Hold learning events at TAA to increase members' understanding of the climate change crisis and identify opportunities for TAA members

to become leaders in working with others outside of TAA to address the multiple threats posed by the climate crisis.

V. FINANCES, MEMBERSHIP, AND ADMINISTRATION

STRATEGIC GOAL: Operate a model small synagogue whose financial and administrative functions reflect the highest standards of excellence and commitment to Jewish values.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? In order to achieve TAA's vision and continually fulfill its mission, TAA's financial and administrative functions must efficiently and effectively support all activities.

OBJECTIVES:

1. TAA's Finance Committee will:
 - a. Produce a five-year financial plan - one that balances present needs against future considerations;
 - b. Strive to submit balanced annual budgets to the Board of Directors; and
 - c. Continue to monitor the membership contribution process, with special attention to maintaining a Sustaining Level that is reasonable, and make recommendations to the TAA Board for any necessary modifications to this process.
2. TAA's Board, assisted by the Membership Committee, will work to attract new members of all age groups and create a welcoming environment in order to ensure the health and vibrancy of the TAA Community.
3. To respond to the fast pace of changes in technology, TAA will continue to assess its technological requirements and make necessary upgrades.
4. TAA's Board will continue to solicit annual Committee Forms from each TAA Committee outlining its annual goals and communicating about its annual results.
5. TAA's Board will design and implement a leadership development program for current and future Officers, Board members, and Committee chairs that includes training, mentoring, and succession planning.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE OBJECTIVES IN TAA'S STRATEGIC PLAN

THE ROLE OF THE RELATIONAL JUDAISM TEAM: TAA will establish a Relational Judaism Team (RJT). The RJT will work with the appropriate Board members and Officers, TAA Committee and event chairs, the Rabbi, and the Director of the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project to help them implement and evaluate actions taken each year under each Objective in the Strategic Plan. (2020-2025)

THE TOOLS OF THE RELATIONAL JUDAISM TEAM: The RJT will use appropriate tools from the following list to gather information and analyze feedback about the actions taken each year under each Objective in the Strategic Plan:

1. One-to-one conversations with TAA Board members and Officers, Committee and event chairs, the Rabbi, and the Director of the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project
2. One-to-one conversations with TAA members and prospective members
3. House meetings for TAA members and prospective members
4. Surveys/evaluation forms completed by participants
5. Counts of the number of participants and/or evaluations of the number and quality of materials produced
6. Narrative reports from Committee and event chairs
7. Reports on meeting the needs of Temple members of all ages
8. Reports on creating opportunities for forming intergenerational relationships
9. Reports on the success of efforts to gather information about the talents, abilities, and passions of TAA's members

THE SCHEDULE FOR THE WORK OF THE RELATIONAL JUDAISM TEAM:

- a. In calendar year 2020, the RJT will establish procedures for working with Board members and Officers, Committee and event chairs, the Rabbi, and the Director of the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project on how to develop annual plans that will use the tools described above to implement and evaluate the actions taken in each future year under each Objective in the Strategic Plan.

- b. By July 15 of each year starting in 2021, the RJT, working with the appropriate people from the list above, will develop a plan that will use the tools described above to implement and evaluate the actions to be taken in the upcoming fiscal year on each Objective in the Strategic Plan.
- c. By November 15 of each year starting in 2021, the RJT will work with the appropriate people from the list above to report to the Board and Officers, the Rabbi, and the Director of the Sylvia Cohen Family Learning Project about the actual progress made in structuring the work of the RJT in 2020-2021 and in 2022-2025 on implementing each Objective in this plan in the previous fiscal year that ended on July 31.

THANK YOU

It is with tremendous gratitude that we thank all of those who have participated in the development of this Strategic Plan. Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to:

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Board of Directors:

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*Lo alekha hamelakhah ligomar ... velo ata ben chorine lehibatel mimenu.
The work is not for you to complete ... but neither may you choose to absent yourself.*

(Pirkei Avot)