

State of the Synagogue

Marc J. Slotnick, President

Yom Kippur 2005

I must say that usually I get to stand up for High Holidays, exert quite a bit of air, but do not have to say anything nor prepare extensively. As usual, I have waited to last minute to write this speech, hoping something awe inspiring would occur. A month ago as I spoke with Rabbi, general optimism was the mood. Although we were lamenting the low numbers at various events, I decided to go through statistical exercise of synagogue usage. This was a technique that I learned at University of Miami Hillel to determine utilization. What we did was take an average week and total the number of people that attended events, what we called a turnstyle number. Basically the number of times people entered Hillel. This number may include the same person several times, but was a good barometer of how we were doing.

Therefore, if you will indulge me I would like to go through this exercise with B'nai Jacob:

- Minyans - 130 excluding Saturday Morning
- Saturday Morning - 20
- Friday Night - 50
- Rabbi's Classes
 - Talmud at 10:00 - 15
 - Wednesday evening 20
- Rabbi's Hospital Visitation, Counseling, etc. 5
- Sunday School (Students, Teachers & Parents) 55
- Post Bar/Bat Mitzvah 28
- Hebrew School 25
- Ladies Auxiliary 40
- Men's Club 60

Total 448

Now this does not include a week that there may be a Bar Mitzvah or other special event, nor basketball. This number is remarkable for a Synagogue with a

membership of just over 200 families. That number may be slightly inflated, but if we even use just ½ of that number of 220 people entering our synagogue is amazing.

Equally as encouraging was the positive feedback given by those of you who responded to the survey prepared earlier in the year. For the most part those surveys indicated that the synagogue, its Rabbi and staff were meeting your needs and expectations.

This has been quite a year, particularly as President. We had approximately 10 Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, which is quite an experience itself. Particularly since I am real estate lawyer and not trial lawyer, used to speaking in front of a number of people, We are currently at 208 members, that is technically up 2 from last year although I would not call that a trend. Since we are not a synagogue in a large Jewish community, where can encourage others to join and tap unaffiliated members, we can only hope that more people move to the City of Charleston. Unfortunately that is a job for our secular elected officials, and probably not something we should undertake. As a synagogue, though, we can help by making ourselves as attractive as possible to newcomers. We have had quite a few people who have decided between Charleston and other cities based on the friendliness of our synagogue. It is important that we maintain this and encourage newcomers.

The success of our Synagogue relies on people and while I cannot mention everyone here by name, I would like to make special mention of those that helped to maintain our synagogue this past year with special gifts and have given of their time:

Betty Schoenbaum has always made sure that our synagogue can raise the funds necessary to complete its projects. This year she generously donated to have our kitchen updated and organized in a fashion recommended by those that use it. This project was brought to fruition with the kind assistance of Linda Bloom.

Donn & Randi Neurman have graciously contributed the torah stand cover and prayerbook stand that we enjoyed through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Phyllis Sherman has assisted in making the torah cover used in between aliyahs.

Steve Rubin generously contributes his time to insure the maintenance of

our facilities and will be spearheading a large project to renovate our sanctuary.

Bob Morganstern heads our long range planning committee which has sought the advise of our congregants through a survey this past year.

Although, he is not present, I want to thank Barry Ogrin who has so generously given of his time, both as treasurer of our synagogue and music director for our children. If you are not aware he has moved to Florida, and his talents will be greatly missed. However, he is still working behind the scenes to insure our books are still in order.

Mike Kingston has stepped in to oversee our books and to maintain the everyday financial condition of the synagogue.

Elliot Urecki, a regular minyan goer, has done a beautiful job of maintaining the silver on our Torahs.

Lynn Clarke who helps maintain our library.

Sara Cohen frequently has taken it upon herself to provide a beautiful lunch for Shabbat morning services.

Cary Levenson who helps with our landscaping.

I would also like to recognize all those that help lead our services throughout the year: Ted Kanner, Trig Salsbery, Bernie Greisman, Steve Meyer, Gary Sheff, David Abramowitz, Justin Cohen, Donn Neurman., and all those I may have missed. Without these individuals it would be difficult to maintain the traditions at in our synagogue.

Our Chevra Haddisha continues to maintain the traditions of Jewish burial and contributes to a variety of projects, most recently additional paving to our cemetary, to provide an extra lane for continuous traffic and parking.

Our Men's Club under Bob Bloom and now Stuart Bloom has provided a variety of spirited speakers.

Along with supporting our Sunday and Hebrew School, our Ladies Aux

under Linda Bloom and now Millie Snyder has spent much energy on our kitchen, and provided a variety of programs for our congregation.

We welcome back Cantor Weiss and thank him for adding a very personal touch and familiarity to our services every year.

We must not forget our staff. Terry Cooper has the great task of making sure that our synagogue is clean and ready for use, and as in past years has enlisted his family with that daunting task.

Nancy makes sure that our synagogue is running and takes care of making sure that our congregants are aware of our activities. I am not sure what we would do without her in the office. In addition, she spends most of her extra time on the weekends to help with special events.

Although Marilyn has taken on additional responsibilities this year, she is still generously giving of her time to organize our Sunday School and teach Hebrew School. In addition to making sure her children are prepared, I am sure she spends significant energies to insure that Rabbi is ready as well.

Rabbi Urecki has proven year in and year out to be the glue that holds our congregation together. Remaining loyal to the traditions, but developing programs for our varied congregation. He has had an immense task preparing the large quantity of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, while maintaining an active post B/B Mitzvah program, and a variety of classes. His biggest innovation this year has been the e-mail newsletters. I enjoy receiving the various e-mails during the week which update our congregation quickly of the what is going on at the synagogue with a bit of commentary thrown in. If you have not already, please have your e-mail address added to the list.

I must also thank my family, Ellen, Frannie & Jenny who certainly gets to hear about what is going on at the synagogue, and specifically Ellen who arranges all of our schedules to accommodate board meetings, minyans, work, school, cheerleading, dance, etc.

However, I have 3 requests of you to help our congregation continue in a successful manner.

1. As Rabbi has stated on Rosh Hashanah, we are struggling with our

Minyans. A minyan committee has been formed, and has begun calling congregants to request a day in which they can commit to Minyans. As a result of those phone calls as Rabbi said in his e-mail the minyans have been lifted off of life support. In order to guarantee our minyans, we must rely on you. It takes 140 people a week to cover minyans. We are attempting to assemble 15 people for each service to insure that there will be enough individuals. Evening Minyans are only 15 minutes and mornings a half hour. Please try to rearrange your schedule 1 morning or evening a week to help maintain this tradition of our congregation. If you have a yahrtzeit, please ask a couple of people to come with you. I would like to thank Joe Abrams and Al Peck who are among our pillars that have maintained our minyan. Sam Wilan continues to attend as much as he is able and we thank him for his constant participation.

2. Equally as shocking and dismal is attendance at Saturday morning, perhaps the most important service in Judaism. We are lucky to make a minyan by 9:30, which will sometimes prolong that service for those that are on time. This service begins at 9:00 and usually ends at 11:15. It gives anyone an opportunity to share in the joy of Shabbat for at least a few hours, and without distractions of work or play. If you don't regularly attend, try to make a commitment to one Saturday morning a month or even every other month. You will have an opportunity to pray a little, learn a little torah, and experience a relaxing two hours, without the rush of daily life.
3. As you are already aware our seating has become very difficult to maintain. Many hours are spent bringing seating in, and insuring that the seats are safe. However these seats are falling into disrepair by the minute. I believe that it is necessary to have the seats replaced by next high holidays. Therefore our long range planning committee has begun to explore options for replacement of the seats as well as refurbishing the sanctuary. If you look around the main portion of the sanctuary you will note paneling is falling apart and quite a few repairs are necessary. At some point in the future a presentation will be made to the congregation regarding proposed renovations. Although we are attempting to retain the look and characteristic of the current seating, there may be significant changes in the seating. Please take the time to give your thoughts to our long range planning

committee chaired by Bob Morgenstern and the sanctuary renovation committee being chaired by Steve Rubin. As we have done with the addition to the synagogue, we will hold a congregational meeting to discuss as well.

As you are aware, this will take considerable funds to undertake. Fortunately, we have already received a significant commitment by Betty Schoenbaum to match funds raised for this project. If you have already given to the building fund for the social hall addition, please consider paying up that pledge and committing to a continued five year pledge. Only 20% of our congregation actually pledged to that portion of the building fund. If you are in the 80% who has not, please consider making a pledge this time around. This is a very important project to maintain our synagogue and provide additional comfort while participating in our services. Please do not wait to make pledge until you are individually asked. Let Steve, Bob or myself know that you are interested, so that we will be able to properly budget this project. This will be one of the most important projects undertaken by this synagogue in many years.

On behalf of my family I want to wish all of you a L'shana Tova and an easy fast.