



Carnegie Shul Chatter

May 31, 2018



Candle lighting 8:26 pm

Shabbat Services 9:20

Where Are We Going?

The following is based on the impressions of Ellen Roteman and may be one person's opinion only. (But maybe not...)

"Where Do We Go From Here?" That was the title of last evening's South Hills Jewish Pittsburgh program, a follow up to the February event unveiling the results of the 2016 Pittsburgh Jewish Community Study. After hearing remarks from several speakers, much data and numerous questions and statements from many of the 90+ South Hills Jews in attendance, the answer was quite clear.

We have no idea.

The contradictory opinions of featured speaker, Rabbi Danny Schiff, Community Scholar of the Federation's Jewish Community Foundation, and panelists representing the JCC, area synagogues, Federation and the unaffiliated left us

Where Do We Go From Here?

This Chatter's main article is one that is important for every Jew living in the South Hills to read.

But let's bring it even a little closer to home for the Carnegie Shul. Where does the Carnegie Shul Go From Here?

Are we content to struggle to achieve minyan on Shabbos?

Are we content to have one social program a year?

Do we have a way to attract new members?

What do we do when our leadership is ill, as Dr. Block was recently, and we have a hard time finding someone to lead services or read the weekly Torah portion?

How do we find a rabbi or chazzan to help lead the high holiday services for more than one year at a time?

How do we get people to attend services on the Festivals when Yizkor is being said?

What do you, as congregants, want your congregation to be?

Our shul's future isn't just the responsibility of the officers and board; it is also the responsibility of you, its members.

Let us know, Where Do YOU Want us to Go From Here?

with no clear answers and, more notably, the notion that many would be inclined to place personal and organizational agendas and allegiances ahead of coming together as a South Hills Jewish community to address larger needs.

But, let's start at the beginning. I was immediately struck by the enormity of Rabbi Schiff's opening comment: he stressed at the outset that, while he is employed by the Jewish Federation, the organization does not "endorse" his remarks. "That allows me to go where no rabbi or community leader dares go," he said. And, indeed, he did.

And much of what he had to say was in direct conflict with the current community building priorities of the organized Jewish community and its agencies.

After sharing statistics about community growth since the previous Community Study in 2002 – the Greater Pittsburgh area has approximately 49,000 Jews, 17% higher than in 2002, and with a larger millennial cohort than anyone expected – Rabbi Schiff went on to highlight three issues he feels are key.

Not surprisingly, the first was intermarriage. There is data galore saying that in-married couples are far more likely to set out to give their children a more meaningful Jewish life than their intermarried counterparts (to the tune of 86% of the former vs. 10% of the latter). And, yet, the organized Jewish community devotes massive amounts of money, time and energy to reaching out to intermarried couples and their families. Is it working? Will these couples and their children end up as involved Jews? The jury is still out on that one.



Times have changed since couples like the third eldest of Tevya's daughters and her Russian Eastern Orthodox fiancé sought – and did not receive – her father's approval for their union. Today, intermarriage is far more common – and celebrated.

"Can you be simultaneously welcoming to intermarried couples and still make the case that in-marriage is better for the Jewish community?" he wondered aloud. "As a community, we need to think of ways to raise Jewish children for whom it will be a natural decision to marry a Jew."

The second issue (or challenge) for the Jewish community is that, except for the Orthodox, synagogues have been losing members for decades – and data shows that younger people will continue this trend. Rabbi Schiff's bold statement: "The Reform and Conservative movements are dying. And this is not just here; it's across the country."



He suggested that congregations change their focus from courting new members to retaining the ones they already have. "They need to ensure that current members want to stay part of the synagogue. And

this will only happen if they perceive that the synagogue is serious about its mission to make Judaism part of people's lives.

"We've tried to make Judaism fun," he said. "But it's the serious stuff people need. We need activities sufficiently rich, deep and frequent to tie us to the tradition we cherish."

Congregations have long thought they must focus on bringing millennials into the fold, he noted. "They look at their current members and think, 'they're already here.'" But Rabbi Schiff suggests synagogues need to invest in those who are currently committed and involved. "In Jewish history it's often a small core of committed people who keep us moving forward. We need to invest in that core."

At the opposite end of the spectrum on the issue of engaging millennials was Raimy Rubin, manager for the Jewish Federation of the recent Community Study. He insisted that, despite what some believe, "Jewish millennials are not an apathetic group. They just engage in different ways." Basically, they are not "joiners" and seek to define Judaism and Jewish life by their own standards, engaging on their own terms. Such Federation-funded programs as One Table, which underwrites Shabbat dinners planned by groups of millennials for their friends and acquaintances, enables their group to create Jewish experiences that speak to them. "To a large extent, the money spent on this age group is working," he believes. "It's the responsibility of the community to provide funding and high-level programming, and look to the desires of self-organizing on the part of millennials."



Community-funded programs for millennials like this Shabbat dinner enable them to create Jewish experiences on their own terms.

Brian Schreiber, President and CEO of the Jewish Community Center shared more statistics about the South Hills Jewish community demonstrating that ours is a longstanding, stable and "mature" community. Data indicating that we have the lowest percentage of families with children under the age of 18 prompted him to suggest we need to think more about serving individuals in the 50+ age range. He also recommended that, in going forward, we need to consider the values and attitudes among community members. For example, South Hills Jews who chose not to send their children to Jewish preschool cited cost as the main deterrent. And, yet, our area is among the most affluent in the Pittsburgh area. "We need to think about how people view Jewish programs and activities, what they perceive to be the value of engaging in Jewish life."

Stacey Reibach, from Beth El Congregation, shared details of her personal story. Before converting to Judaism, she was "completely turned off" by a synagogue she viewed as extremely judgmental – and later became fully engaged in a congregation that "embraced intermarried families," which eventually prompted her to convert. She advised, "Turning your back on these families is not the answer."

David Weisberg, from Temple Emanuel, noted that Temple benefits greatly from the Community Study coinciding with the retirement of their longtime rabbi. "The data is helpful as we consider our needs for a new rabbi and what our members need and want from Temple."

Jonathan Fischer, who is unaffiliated, shared his perspective as a millennial. “I don’t belong to a synagogue, but I do feel immersed in Jewish life,” he began. “But I worry about this community. People have told me I need to move to Squirrel Hill to be part of a Jewish community and raise my kids Jewish. I don’t want to feel that way. I need to feel I have a home here and can raise a family Jewishly, that I have the resources I need out here.

“As things are, you won’t get my generation coming out here. If you want to keep your kids and grandkids in the South Hills, you need to make a Jewish community for them. I challenge you to give millennials something Jewish out here.”

The comments made by Rabbi Schiff and the panelists elicited a wide range of statements and questions from the audience. Among some of the most interesting and telling were the following:

- A number of people noted that the data was informative but that it is time for an action plan. Matthew Schwartz, Chair of South Hills Jewish Pittsburgh, suggested that focus groups might be initiated to continue an honest conversation in smaller, more manageable groups and to chart next steps.
- One woman called for those in attendance to “be the community” for millennials – and even invited Jonathan Fischer to her home for Shabbat. She insisted that welcoming people into one’s Jewish home and involving them in Jewish experiences is *everyone’s* job – not just a job for the congregations.
- Another agreed with Rabbi Schiff that people are looking for deeper Jewish content and mentioned that she helped start a serious learning program at her synagogue and it’s been very successful.
- An individual with connections to Chabad asked why there was no discussion of what the Orthodox are doing to engage people in Jewish life – and what others might learn from them. Indeed, in my opinion, the absence of Chabad representation on the panel (although perhaps this was just a matter of unavailability or circumstance) was “the elephant in the room.” Rabbi Schiff did respond, however, that the growth of the Orthodox movement dissuaded speakers to go too much in that direction, the implication being that we were there to discuss the things we needed to address or “fix.”

So, where do we go from here? Your guess is as good as mine.

Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one’s yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.



Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush in honor or in memory of a loved one, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, email mrmike7777@yahoo.com.

Important Information to Share!

A service of South Hills Jewish Pittsburgh

All You Need is Love...
and a simple saliva test.

1 in 2 Ashkenazi Jews is a carrier of at least one preventable genetic disease

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