**MINUTES**

**Ohavi Zedek Congregational Meeting**

**December 15, 2019**

**9:30 a.m.**

Moderator: Vivien Rabin

Recorder: Adam Bluestein

Other board members present:

Becky Wasserman, Bill Miller, Wayne Senville, Jessica Schechter Kane, Judy Rosenstreich, Karen Corbman, Sergey Shpaner, Jeff Priest, Mindy Evnin

Also present:

Rabbi Amy Small

Sarah Glassman (Executive Director)

Harvey Klein, Judy Hershberg (Trustees)

**Welcome/D’var Torah (Rabbi)**

Rabbi discusses the rivalry among the 12 sons of Jacob and encourages us to see it as a cautionary tale about the importance of feeling included in and connected to community, noticing the needs, personalities, and interests that we all bring.

**Approval of Minutes**

Review of Minutes from Congregational Meeting of June 2, 2019. No corrections. Basha moves to approve. Motion is seconded and passed with no opposing votes.

**Meet a Member #1**

Richard Finkelstein moved to Vermont in 2014 and is now managing membership outreach at OZ. A Vermonter since 2014. Contact him if you would like to help with the committee.

**Rabbi’s Report**

Rabbi is thrilled and delighted for Cantor Steve’s expanding music offerings. The singing community is growing and musicians are becoming engaged.

Rabbi will share details of the OZ Israel trip over the next week and at upcoming Israeli feast.

She worked two years on the itinerary, and the trip involved serious learning, conversation, and lots of fun. Enlightening for all who participated .

Strong OZ showing at recent USCJ convention, with 8 participants. Rabbi will make date to share insights. There is lots of innovation in prayer and music, and discussion about interfaith families. OZ won our second Shechter award, for the Nadav youth program -- just four congregations won awards out of 100 entries. There are concerns about upcoming World Zionist elections, especially issues of religious pluralism and Israel as home for all Jews. Voting for delegates is really important. Rabbi will send link to vote.

OZ is working through issues including interfaith marriage, responding to individual needs as much as we can. Issue of officiation at interfaith marriage is *the* hot-button issue, a hard problem and an issue of Jewish law.

Rabbi and small group are looking intro revamping OZ’s sacred space (physical). We have some proposed ideas for improvement to the space, but not a formal proposal yet. Board and Jeff Potash’s working group are/will be discussing things like pews vs chairs, flooring, central bimah, an updated feeling for sanctuary. We want to hear congregants’ voices about the space.

Future vision: What is OZ’s vision today? We need to work on that vision together -- it is not just the Rabbi’s vision. What are membership models, funding models, community opportunities, rituals to enhance what we do without alienating people?

**Cantor’s Report**

Cantor Steve is grateful to be a partner in leading the synagogue and thankful for welcome he has received from staff and congregation.

Nearly 6 months since starting the OZ singing community, there are 20-plus people each Sunday singing. Cantor wants to empower all musicians here to come together and perform, such as the Hanukkah band that will be leading a medley this Sunday a.m. If you want to play on Friday nights, let him know. Looking to Incorporate many instruments into services, bring joy.

Cantor will be doing a Hanukkah singalong at Fletcher Free Library.

March 7 will be Cantor’s installation ceremony; look for an announcement about performers at the event.

**Executive Director’s Report (Sarah Glassman)**

Sarah has now been ED for 5 months. She is helping envision future of OZ and is excited to see what takes us forward as a congregation.

Followup on DHS building security grant that Grace applied for: OZ did get approved for funding for buzzer/door lock, panic buttons, shatter proofing glass windowpanes.

Annual appeal -- look for letters that will be sent out next week!

**Meet a Member #2**

Brett Smith is a member of the Hebrew School Committee, with 3 kids at OZ HS.

He grew up in Utica attending a Reform congregation. He is in an interfaith marriage, raising kids Jewish. Food and holiday traditions are a big draw in Jewish life for them. This is their first year as OZ members.

**Financial Report (Bill)**

Sergey has agreed to be co-Treasurer, with Bill helping with accounting. In the future, starting in new year, we will pay an accountant to do regular work.

Discussion of document “OZ Finances at a Glance.”

Endowment/investing:

The Finance Committee just reviewed endowment. People have been interesting in a sustainable investment strategy, and we have moved 20% of endowment into such funds. We have not sacrificed returns as a result.

Deficit:

We are about $128k short of projected revenue for this year’s budget. Need to close gap in the second half. Will focus on fundraising and evaluating expenses and all sources of revenue. Fundraising is main tool to help right the ship now.

Disc of why the shortfall is $52k worse than shortfall predicted in June meeting. Negative surprises happen, but we can’t run a six-figure shortfall for long.

Dues are at about 90% of target, with about 90% of families pledging so far. We underperformed a bit on High Holidays (seat sales). “Program revenue” is about $120k short of goal.

Think about proactively contributing to help meet fundraising target of $1,700 per family.

Successes: Preschool and shuk are generating revenue. Partial funding for the Cantor position helps overall budget. We have successfully hired new Cantor and ED. We have implemented new financial procedures and oversight, such as two people now signing checks, and have strong accounting and bookkeeping group.

Vivien: It is clear we have an issue and need to raise funds. But it’s a marathon, not a sprint. We can’t raise $128k this year. We are going to do best we can. Next year, we will have to make difficult decisions.

**Comments/Discussion of Financials**

Rick: I lose sleep over finance. Is there low-hanging fruit? What about the 10% of missing pledge? Sarah has reached out to every member who hasn’t pledged, and she is interviewing those who have said they are not renewing.

Nancy: We got a grant for the Hartman Institute course the Rabbi is teaching. Grants could be important in making up debt.

Vivien: We can use help from anyone with experience in grant writing.

Discussion of USCJ affiliation cost and benefits. They ask for $20k per year; we currently pay negotiated $10k rate. Looking hard at this. Rabbi and Basha explains that USCJ offers workshops, individual consultations, chances to learn from national peers. Aware that Conservative movement position on interfaith marriage is hot button, but we don’t have other disputes/concerns. Also membership gives us platform and support, e.g. the Shechter award.

Building fund: Mold remediation work should come from our building fund, separate from general operating budget -- so, we can save $10k there. (Bill)

Why shortfall from High Holidays? Was it new way of charging for seating?

Bill: Most revenue comes from seats. We had good response in the first year of the new payment model, with many people paying extra. Now, we’ve slipped back to more “normal.”

For fundraising/pledges, make sure to get message out prior to year’s end. Also, look at use of capital and take a look at land behind synagogue for area that could be developed and turned into some capital.

Vivien: The board is making an effort to be transparent with financial situation. Contributing to the General Fund is important and most helpful way to improve overall picture.

**New Board Members and Trustee Votes (Vivien)**

Judy Hershberg is up for reelection as a trustee. Harvey moves to vote on her reelection, Michael seconds. No other nominations. Vote shows all in favor.

Karen Corbman’s board term is ending. We thank her and note that she is continuing to do other work for OZ.

Three current members are completing their first term: Adam, Nat, and Bill are up for re-nomination. Jeff Priest was appointed to board on July 1 and needs to be elected.

Two potential new members are introduced: Josh Kernoff and Rebecca Stern.

There are no additional nominations. Basha moves to vote on the full slate of nominations presented; seconds; ayes have it.

**Hebrew School Report (Naomi)**

This is Naomi’s 10th year at OZ. Her job has expanded -- she is not doing Nadav program, Hebrew School, and an alternative Hebrew School program, involving many different populations. Hebrew School has grown in last few years; current enrollment is 52.

A new 7th-grade curriculum in collaboration with Temple Sinai will study different approaches to Jewish practice through a range of activities.

Naomi is honored by the USCJ Schechter Award, and shares a student-made video about the Nadav program that was shown at the conference.

**Feedback Session**

There is a comment box open for submissions.

For discussion at tables, please address this question: What ideas do you for how OZ might attract Jewish individuals in our area who are not currently involved here?

Feedback (after break for discussion):

- Make services more accessible to families. Saturday morning is tough for kids.

- Test lower-cost membership for two years; make more like monthly gym memberships.

- Rabbi and cantor getting out into community and reaching out to unaffiliated Jews.

- The Hebrew School, preschool, and shuk are huge assets in reaching out to the community. How can we use them more? Do more preschool family outreach -- path to membership.

- Important to clarify where we stand on human rights in Israel.

- Do more JCC/non-religious things/mahjong?

- Consider fee-for-service activities, people willing to pay for specific things.

- Reconsider word “Conservative” -- it is not clearly understood.

- Replace sanctuary chairs w movable pews.

- Reduce membership cost.

- Examine religious vs. “cultural community” focus.

- Mentoring program, with free membership for a year?

- Publicize adult b’nai mitzvahs and promote these more as an option that engages and inspires people.

- Communicate our social justice mission and activities even more.

- Look for opportunities to work across congregations, aiming for affiliation. Could there be an LGTQ congregation that crosses groups.

Vivien reviews suggestions from last Dec. meeting discussions with updates.

**Meet a Member #3**

Ila Abramson moved to Burlington with her family about 14 years ago. Both her and husband Adam Bluestein’s kids attended OZ Hebrew School and had b’nai mitzvahs here. Ila had her (adult) bat mitzvah here in August.

**Preschool Report (Erika Geremia)**

This is Erika’s firstpresentation to the Congregational Meeting. She has worked in Jewish education for a decade. Preschool has been open since August 2017. Now has 5 classrooms, 6 teachers, and 30 students. The experience at Full Circle instills Judaism through arts and language development, music, weekly yoga, movement, with outside time every day. Kids spending time in the kitchen, too, and Erika would love to open up activities to other family members. All are welcome come by 10 am Fri mornings for the Shabbat service with the kids. An upcoming event w Adult Ed, on talking w children about racism, will be part of a series of discussions for all members.

**Committee Reports**

Interfaith Social Action Committee is working to move the needle on social justice in community -- members and the greater community. We don’t need to share the same politics. Programs are doing direct things -- providing food -- but also looking at changing systems and directing attention to communities vulnerable to hate speech and violence. Contact Michael if interested. (Michael Schaal)

The Events Committee is not fundraising but “friend-raising.” All welcome to participate. There are events all year, lunch-and-learn once a month, and annual Yiddish theater trip to Montreal. There is a new Trivia Night and upcoming Hanukkah party cosponsored with the Hebrew School. Please join us. (Judy Hershberg)

Kiddush Committee is trying to have a kiddush lunch after all services. They need donations to preserve program. (Judy Danzig)

Fern Hill offers housing for low-income seniors who get a subsidy for rent. They have made major changes there in last few years, including refinancing, a building addition, and rehab of existing space. (Lila Shapero)

Adult Education Committee: Handout with listing of upcoming classes. We will be doing a Jewish film series in collaboration with Temple Sinai, UVM Hillel, in Jan, Feb, and March. Feen Lecture series will host writer Dalia Lithwick this year, March 22. (Nancy Sugarman)

Gemach Committee works with pastoral team and clergy to help people in need. See green cards on tables and sign up -- we need large list of people saying ahead of time they might be willing to do something. Join email list so you can be contacted when needs come up. (Karen Corbman)

Library: Suzi Wizowaty has been working to transform the library into a welcoming place for things that people want to read. She welcomes suggestions -- what should a library here at OZ be?

**Announcements, misc.**

When you need to say Kaddish, are sitting shiva, please let the cantor know. This helps ensure that we can assemble a minyan. Contact minyan captains to let them know if you are available on certain evenings.

At 11:44 pm, Lila moves to close meeting, Gary seconds. Movement to adjourn unanimously approved.

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