

Stronger



**A Strategic Plan for the
Future of Temple Emanuel**
2023–2027

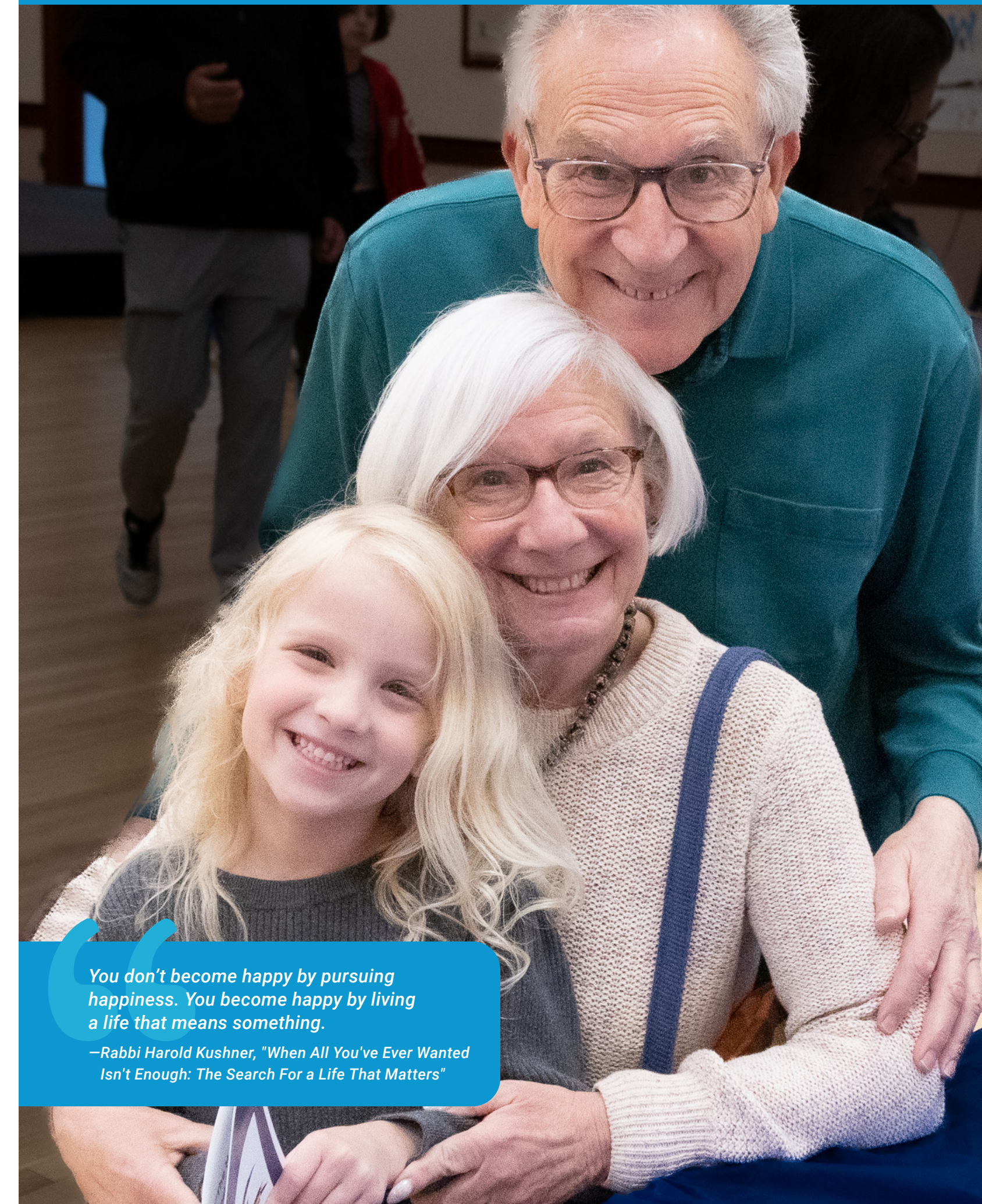


May our spiritual home hold us through all the good and bad, the joys and sorrows. This sacred place helps us live our lives with strength, resilience, and positive energy. Let's celebrate love—of our shul, our friends, God, Torah and mitzvah, and the beauty and warmth of Jewish living.

—Letter from our clergy team to our congregation, May, 2023

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You don't become happy by pursuing happiness. You become happy by living a life that means something.

—Rabbi Harold Kushner, "When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough: The Search For a Life That Matters"

Introduction

We are proud to present this Strategic Plan for the Future of Temple Emanuel.

First, a word about the present. The good news is that Temple Emanuel is thriving today. The size of our congregation (1,457 families) has never been larger. Our Annual Appeal (\$1.8 million) has never been higher. Our services, classes and programs are robustly attended, in person and online, every day and every week. If parking challenges are any guide, the pandemic is more and more in the rearview mirror.

So why do we need a Strategic Plan? The answer is clear. As President Kennedy famously observed, "The time to fix the roof is while the sun is shining." While the sun is shining on us now, we need to be mindful of the headwinds in front of us: a shift in affiliation away from the Conservative Movement; a decline of religion in America; and an extraordinary increase in costs due to the need for additional security after Pittsburgh, providing for expanded digital and on-line programming in a post-COVID world, and attending to the demands of an aging building, to name just a few.

Something so precious, so meaningful, that runs so deep as Temple Emanuel must be constantly renewed and strengthened. Only by doing so will our shul continue to be for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren what it has been for us: a warm and meaningful spiritual home. This Strategic Plan is about taking Temple Emanuel from strong to stronger, keeping it the spiritual home for our future generations.

Over the last year, we engaged the community through surveys, focus groups, town halls, and numerous conversations. We heard your voice and while we should maintain and build on our strengths, there is opportunity to increase engagement, invest in our schools, remove financial barriers to membership and increase our reach through digital offerings.

The Strategic Plan sets forth **Four Priorities** that build on our rich history and current foundation, while allowing us to innovate for the future and strengthen our community:

- **Deepen Engagement**
- **Build Our Jewish Future Here**
- **Get Digital Right**
- **Secure Our Financial Future**

Our shared vision is that all our members, across generations, will feel that Temple Emanuel is a spiritual anchor throughout their lives. This Strategic Plan is intended to help realize that vision.

Please join us!



Our Core Mission

- Inspire our members with a love of God, Torah, and Israel
- Transmit a love of Jewish living and learning from generation to generation
- Build lasting relationships that sustain us in hard times, share joy in good times, and maintain friendships at all times
- Sanctify ordinary days through mitzvot that heal the world and provide meaning to our lives

Our Motivation to Develop a Strategic Plan: Why Now?

In developing this Plan we asked hard questions: How do we engage with Judaism today? What resonates for our families, across all ages and stages?

In the following pages, you will see how this Strategic Plan:

- Builds on what Temple Emanuel already does well
- Considers our role and responsibilities to our members and to the greater Jewish community
- Addresses gaps where we must be even stronger
- Envisions what a modern, thriving and multi-generational Jewish community will look like, and
- Establishes a clear and achievable roadmap to get there, together.



Our Seven Gates to Meaningful Engagement with the Temple

We are over 1,450 families – more than 4,000 people in our community. Our members range in age from newborn to 101. Diverse in our interests, politics and lifecycle needs, we share powerful common bonds through Jewish rituals, generational connections, and our supportive community.

The guiding principle behind the Seven Gates is simple: *All members are honored and invited to engage with Judaism on their own terms.*

We encourage every member to enter through the gate that feels right to them. The energy seen in Shabbat Alive, Minyan Ma'or, Yisod, to name just a few examples, shows how successful we can be. To build our spiritual future, we must strengthen and reimagine the Seven Gates for a 21st century world.



Community



Music



Israel



Shabbat and Prayer



Learning



Social Action



Life Cycle Rituals

The Headwinds Before Us

The external trends impacting congregations everywhere affect us as well. Our Strategic Plan recognizes, and is designed to address, these headwinds.

Shift in Affiliation Away from the Conservative Movement

The 2020 Pew Research is troubling: in the past fifty years more than one-third of Conservative synagogues have closed, leaving only 540 Conservative synagogues today. For every person who has joined Conservative Judaism, about three have left. As a result, it is more important than ever to sustain multiple pathways of engagement for all our members.

Decline of Religion in American Life

Americans uniformly indicate that religion is less important to them today. In 2006, 16% of Americans were religiously unaffiliated. Today that number is 27% and rising. (PRRI study *Religion and Congregations in a Time of Social and Political Upheaval*). The Jewish community, including our own, is not immune. We see that young families in particular are challenged by competing priorities and demands on their time, making it difficult to connect deeply with a religious community.

Increased Costs

Like most synagogues everywhere, Temple Emanuel is facing rising costs for reasons beyond its control. Increasing antisemitism has forced shuls to spend precious resources on security. The demand for hybrid operations has significantly increased our costs: the need to reach people where and how they want to be reached requires that we ensure in-person engagement while enhancing our digital connections. Additionally, living in an aging building requires ongoing maintenance expense.



Our Priorities

Our four priorities connect to our core mission of strengthening our sacred community, as this graphic illustrates:



PRIORITY 1

Deepen Engagement



Temple Emanuel will broaden, deepen, and sustain connections within the community at all life stages.

Community engagement for every age and stage is at the heart of Temple Emanuel.

Rabbi Ron Wolfson, author of *The Spirituality of Welcoming and Relational Judaism* and Scholar in Residence to Temple Emanuel, shared that if our members make five to seven friends, they will stay at Temple Emanuel forever. We are blessed with a large and diverse community and recognize that members want choices. Our goal is to create engagement opportunities and provide the right level of staff support for each gate.

Key Initiatives

- Increase participation in religious services and programs through:
 - Dynamic Shabbat experiences
 - Programming for adults 35-50
 - Congregation-wide leadership and volunteer opportunities
 - Expanded education programs for all ages

TIMELINE

Year 1

- Engage member committees on inclusion, engagement, and adult education
- Launch 3 dynamic community-wide Shabbat experiences
- Pilot program to encourage volunteerism
- Increase targeted programming for adults age 35-50
- Evaluate educational offerings to identify gaps and increase opportunities for those 50+ including classes and lectures

Year 2

- Expand community-wide Shabbat experiences
- Continue to engage lay leadership/committees
- Explore new adult education models and partnerships

Year 3

- Focus on membership engagement
- Optimize and expand programming
- Leverage Shabbat for community-wide engagement

Year 4

- Evaluate gaps in programming to ensure all members are reached
- Evaluate educational offerings based on real-time data and community needs

PRIORITY 2

Build Our Jewish Future Here



Temple Emanuel will be known as the place for young adults and families to find joy and meaning in being Jewish.

Many members say that they felt most connected to Temple Emanuel when their children were young. As the cost of living has increased and daycare and education expenses rise, many young families have two working parents with lots of competing priorities. Temple Emanuel aims to make it easier and more attractive for young families to build their Jewish future here.

Religious School Vision

- The Temple Emanuel K-8 program will be **the** premier school to send your children for a high caliber and meaningful supplemental Jewish education
- Increased enrollment from inside and outside of Newton
- Our “after-school” hours, and transportation option will make our program easier for families to access
- Our curriculum, assessment tools and teaching styles will ensure all students who graduate from our program are “Jewishly literate”

Key Initiatives

- Create quality educational programs for every child
- Design a Religious School that inspires middle grade students
- Build a world class team of talented professionals to engage our teens

TIMELINE

Year 1

- Implement modifications to support working families including expanded preschool hours
- Build and equip staff to increase engagement
- Pilot Pre-K Sunday School
- Initiate new Hebrew assessment
- Pilot 12th grade trip to Israel
- Update policies for reduced payment for members under 36

Year 2

- Launch Religious School 2.0
- Create teen committees
- Pilot revised programming based on committee priorities
- Explore renovation to expand preschool
- Launch marketing plan to increase enrollment
- Pilot 4th grade retreat

Year 3

- Create curriculum and space to support a transitional kindergarten if needed
- Evaluate and expand Hebrew learning
- Expand and update programs

Year 4

- Assess progress to goals and identify gaps
- Review program engagement data

PRIORITY 3 Get Digital Right

Temple Emanuel is a place to find people, purpose, and connections. Getting digital right will leverage technology to strengthen relationships and ensure that each member gets the content they seek in the way that feels right for them.

COVID changed how people engage with the Synagogue. It required Temple Emanuel to create new ways for congregants to still share in community. For example, members who are ill or uncomfortable driving at night can attend services, listen to speakers, or say kaddish. We need to further build and enhance methods of connection that are aligned with how members want and need to engage.

In addition, our members increasingly consume Jewish content—about Israel, about challenges and opportunities in American Jewish life, about the weekly Torah portion or regular Talmud study—in short, on demand bite-sized podcasts. We need to do more of that.

By smartly utilizing livestreaming, Zoom, social media, mobile apps and other digital tools, more people will discover and participate in everything Temple Emanuel has to offer: to learn Torah, to pray, to be inspired, to find community, and go out into the world and make a difference.

Key Initiatives

- Use digital tools to more effectively build community and reach potential members
- Upgrade technology infrastructure for engagement

TIMELINE

Year 1

- Evaluate existing infrastructure and digital footprint
- Build a digital marketing and communications strategy
- Pilot campaigns aligned with other priorities
- Make website updates
- Create a roadmap for technology investments and upgrades
- Pilot a mobile app

Year 2

- Personalize outreach
- Adopt key platforms and tools
- Evaluate digital marketing data
- Upgrade high-priority building technology

Year 3

- Create an accessible resource library
- Finish upgrades to building technology
- Assess need to build a mobile app with greater functionality

Year 4

- Continue to improve resource library
- Evaluate use of technology to support organizational goals

4 Secure Our Financial Future

PRIORITY



Temple Emanuel will fortify its financial foundation to ensure its future.

A strong foundation requires financial security. Temple Emanuel faces a continuous challenge to manage the fiscal pressures that all synagogues, and especially large dynamic ones like Temple Emanuel, are confronting. This priority recognizes these challenges and seeks to proactively address our long-term financial health.

Key Initiatives

- Plan for a comprehensive campaign to secure funding for key areas, including security for our building, improving our technology and maintaining our infrastructure
- Identify and secure grant funding
- Manage costs by aligning with key priorities
- Reduce or eliminate financial barriers for membership
- Leverage the investments in Deepen Engagement and Build Our Jewish Future Here to attract new members

TIMELINE

Year 1

- Convene committee to discuss comprehensive campaign to support Strategic Plan goals
- Benchmark and review evolving and emerging membership models
- Cultivate and steward emerging Legacy gifts

Year 2

- Launch comprehensive campaign based on committee recommendation
- Invest in seeking grant funding
- Launch new member campaigns

Year 3

- Continue to secure funding to support Strategic Plan goals

Year 4

- Evaluate whether initiatives have resulted in more new members and deeper engagement



Our Outcomes

By 2027, Temple Emanuel will be stronger together and have:

- **Reached all cohorts of members by offering programming at every age and stage**
 - 10% increase in member engagement
 - 350 members participating in our Geshar programming for adults 35-50 years old
 - Increased member retention
- **Engaged, highly satisfied younger members**
 - 30% growth in preschool students
 - Increased membership retention after preschool graduation and B'nai Mitzvah
 - Increased satisfaction with preschool, Religious School, and Chai 385
- **Leveraged technology**
 - Updated building technology to improve access
 - Grown engagement across digital platforms—livestreaming, social media, and mobile app
- **Secured financial sustainability**
 - Launched a comprehensive campaign to secure our financial future
 - Ensured no financial barriers to membership
 - Grown our membership
 - Increased grant funding

Implementation

Investment

While many aspects of this Plan can be executed with our current resources and budget, areas of investment will be necessary.

Increase Staff

This Plan calls for an increase in engagement personnel to strengthen relationships and improve engagement across all segments of our membership.

Invest for the Future

In addition to hiring staff, the Strategic Plan seeks to secure capital investment for our critical security, digital infrastructure and building maintenance needs. Capital will also be required to increase the preschool space needed to accommodate more students.

Ongoing Investments

As described in each priority, there are opportunities to strengthen our community by investing in programming. These include such items as strengthening our religious and preschool programs through increased outreach, transportation, and experiential learning, retreats for 4th grade families, and curated learning opportunities for adults. And at the same time, we also want to eliminate financial barriers to being a part of our Temple Emanuel community.



Noah learned: When you hear the thunder, it's too late to build an ark.

Conclusion

Thank you for reviewing the Strategic Plan. Despite headwinds, we have been strong. Implementing the Strategic Plan will enable Temple Emanuel to be even stronger for the next generation. We look forward to partnering in the holy work of our community and helping Temple Emanuel move forward from strength to strength.

Chazak, Chazak, V'nitchazek:
Be strong, be strong, may our strength carry us into the future.



Get Involved
 <<< SCAN HERE

Strategic Planning Committee Members

- | | |
|---|---|
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