

A Place to Call Home:

An Analytical History of Congregation Shalom of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Ordination**

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

2008 / 5768

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Digest

The goal of this thesis project is to take an analytical look at the history of Congregation Shalom and chronicle its change and growth in comparison to other synagogues and to the larger Reform movement in the United States.

Chapter One will focus first on the growth and movement of the Milwaukee Jewish community following World War II and the need for a liberal synagogue on the far northeast side of Milwaukee County. We will then study Rabbi Harry B. Pastor, his time at Milwaukee's first Reform synagogue, Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, and his group of followers who broke away from Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun following his departure. Finally, we will examine the creation of Congregation Shalom, document the early years of its inception, and compare its creation to that of other suburban synagogues of the 1950s.

Chapter Two will further examine Congregation Shalom's early years. This chapter will demonstrate what types of issues were most important to the young synagogue as it grew, purchased land, built its first building and found its voice within the greater Milwaukee community. This chapter documents the Social Action programming led by Rabbi Pastor and the synagogue leadership throughout the late 1950s. Finally, we will chronicle a Rabbinical Crisis in the late 1950s and the congregation's response.

Chapter Three will demonstrate how the congregants of Shalom created meaning in their lives during the complex decades of the 1960s and 1970s. We will document the congregation's physical, spiritual and educational growth and carefully analyze the

congregation's response to the various national crises and issues in the Milwaukee community during these turbulent times.

Chapter Four will focus on a new era for Congregation Shalom, the leadership of Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro. This chapter will document and analyze the explosive growth of Congregation Shalom throughout the 1980s. We will examine the cause for the growth, the congregational leadership's response to the growth, and determine how that rapid growth affected the congregants, lay leadership, and clergy of Congregation Shalom.

Chapter five will discuss Congregation Shalom's mission to maintain its sense of warmth and intimacy with membership over 1000 member units. This chapter will analyze the changing infrastructure of the congregation and its metamorphosis from a loosely-run medium-sized congregation to a large congregation that operates as a small business. Through a study of the changing educational, spiritual, emotional and social needs of Reform Jews throughout the United States, we will chronicle Congregation Shalom's responses to its congregants as it professionalized its leadership.

Finally, the summary and conclusion will identify some of the major trends in American Reform Judaism from 1951 to the present and demonstrate that Congregation Shalom is and has been a microcosm of American Reform suburban Judaism.

To Rabbi Ron, Cantor Karen, and the entire Congregation Shalom Family.

There are many people without whom this thesis project would not have happened. First, I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Jonathan Krasner. Dr. Krasner endured draft after draft of everything from my thesis proposal to the various chapters -- each time, with patience, understanding, and valuable insight. I want to thank the entire Shalom family, especially Marc Cohen, Cantor Karen Berman and Rabbi Ron Shapiro for their time, their willingness to do almost anything to help me. I want to thank my parents, grandparents and siblings, but especially my mom, Candy, who diligently and lovingly read and edited my work in this project and throughout all of my time in school. I also would like to thank Lauren Cantor for her encouragement and her many reminders to complete each chapter.

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Preface

In the early summer of 1951, a small group gathered in the basement of David and Sylvia Pasch and signed a charter to create a new Reform synagogue, Congregation Shalom. The new synagogue was to serve the growing population of Jews living on the North Shore of Lake Michigan, a burgeoning group of suburbs formed to the north of Milwaukee, Wisconsin following World War II. Today, Congregation Shalom, led by Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro, the congregation's second senior rabbi, is the largest of three Reform synagogues in Milwaukee. Shalom's Founding Rabbi, Harry B. Pastor, and a dedicated group of congregants built and cultivated the congregation. They created Shalom as a house of study, a house of prayer, and a house of gathering. From its creation to the present, the congregation has been committed to intellectual curiosity and learning, to the elevation of the spirit through creativity and originality, and to maintaining an intimate, warm, friendly and personal atmosphere.

Since May of 2007, as I have been studying and compiling the history of Congregation Shalom, I have come to know my home congregation in a way that is usually reserved for those people who shared in building the congregation from its inception. As I spent my free time pouring over Shalom board minutes, articles in the Shalom Shofar, many of Rabbi Pastor's and Rabbi Shapiro's sermons, audio and video tapes of celebrations, musicals and groundbreakings, yearbooks, slides, newspaper articles, correspondences, photo albums, and many interviews, I have become increasingly proud of Congregation Shalom. As the congregation prepares to celebrate its 60th anniversary in June of 2011, may it continue to be a place of strength, of warmth and of creativity.

Chapter 1

A New Vision

In the aftermath of World War II, there began a period of unprecedented economic and population growth in the United States. Returning soldiers and growing families fueled a housing boom that would change the way the American middle class would live. "New suburbs that sprang up to meet their housing needs followed traditional subdivision practices. However, the builders' search for the cheapest land located the new and low-priced settlements on the outskirts of the metropolitan areas, and placed the young veterans into one-age, one-class communities."¹

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was similar to other American cities of the time. Young veterans were eager to leave the city, looking for inexpensive housing with more space for families to grow. Two examples of this housing boom were the villages of Whitefish Bay and Fox Point. Whitefish Bay, just north and east of the City of Milwaukee along Lake Michigan, was first settled by Native Americans, fishermen and farmers in 1842.

About 40 years later, beer baron Fredrick Pabst purchased much of the lakeside land of Whitefish Bay and turned it into a lakeshore resort. However, when the once popular resort shut down in 1914, that land was divided up into 17 residential lots which formed the new nucleus of Whitefish Bay. "Whitefish Bay had a burst of home building in the 1920s and a bigger boom in the late 1940s and early 1950s."² The population

¹ Gans, Herbert. "The Origin and Growth of a Jewish Community in the Suburbs." *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*. The Free Press. New York, NY. 1958. p. 205-206

² Historical information and statistics provided by the Village of Whitefish Bay

statistics well illustrate the northward move. In 1940 the population of Whitefish Bay was 9,651. In 1949 the population was 13,840, and by 1956, the population had climbed dramatically to 19,500.

While the village of Fox Point was smaller and younger, having been incorporated in 1924, it saw a similar rise in population throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. This population shift to the newly developing and quickly growing suburbs was clearly seen in the American Jewish community as well. "American Jews, stimulated by similar housing aspirations and needs, participated in this latest expansion of the city. In the new suburbs, they set up a distinctive type of Jewish sub-community. The new Jewish suburbanites are young members of the second generation (i.e., the first native-born one), and their children. Although they may be geographically and socially more mobile than their peers who remained in the city, they are typical in other respects, being mostly business and professional in occupation and overwhelmingly middle class in style of life."³

Echoing the greater American Jewish community, many of these second generation Milwaukee Jews were less observant than their parents, leaving kashrut, daily davening, and city living to pursue the American dream with a house in the suburbs. However, many of these Jews remained members of a synagogue community. With Milwaukee's Jewish population at nearly 30,000 people, there were relatively few options for synagogue affiliation. Until the 1920s, the center of Jewish life in Milwaukee was Walnut Street from 3rd Street through 12th Street. On, or adjacent, to Walnut Street

³ Gans, Herbert. "The Origin and Growth of a Jewish Community in the Suburbs." *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*. The Free Press. New York, NY. 1958. p. 205

were many kosher butchers and fish markets and all of the Jewish shops. However, as the socio-economic level of Milwaukee's Jews began to change, an exodus from the area occurred. Many of the "Russian" immigrants—the Eastern European Jews—then settled on the far West Side of Milwaukee, and a number of Orthodox synagogues followed.

In the area, there was one conservative synagogue on Sherman Boulevard named Temple Beth El headed by Rabbi Louis J. Swickow.

On the East Side, where much of Milwaukee's large German population lived, was the Temple Emanu-El-B'ne Jeshurun, which was founded as Temple Emanu-El in 1847, and merged with Congregation B'ne Jeshurun in the 1920s. At that time, the congregation moved just north of downtown (though still in the city) to Kenwood Boulevard and was led by Rabbi Samuel Hirschberg and Rabbi Joseph Baron, who was first hired as an Associate Rabbi. There was continued growth at Congregation Emanu-El throughout the 1930s and 1940s as Jews became more Americanized and continued to move to the East Side of Milwaukee. Near the end of the 1940s, Emanu-El had over 1100 families, ran a vibrant Sabbath School, and was considered one of the largest Reform congregations in the Midwest. As was the case in many German Reform congregations around the country at the time, Emanu-El's well-established German-American population often adopted a somewhat patronizing attitude towards their Eastern European brethren whose immigration and acculturation to America occurred later. Emanu-El, though never considered a "Classical Reform" synagogue, was quite a formal congregation. Its wealthy membership dressed in their finest accoutrements. The services were dignified and decorous, and focused around a lengthy intellectual sermon given by

their rabbi. Occasionally, part of the service was even conducted in German, particularly during the afternoon Avodah service on Yom Kippur.

The congregation of Emanu-El understood its role in the community as one of elite leadership, employing powerful, intellectual rabbis to serve its distinguished congregants. Historically, the senior rabbis of Emanu-El (and later Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun), the largest congregation in the city, were conceived of as the senior rabbis of Milwaukee. Rabbi Joseph Baron, known for his scholarship embraced this role to the hilt, reveling in the high status that he cultivated for himself both within the Milwaukee Jewish Community and the larger general community. In the tradition of the senior rabbis at Emanu-El who came before him, he was an established scholar and an elegant ambassador for the large congregation.

Harry Pastor comes to Milwaukee

In the summer of 1947, the board of Temple Emanu-El-B'ne Jeshurun hired Rabbi Harry Bernard Pastor to be the assistant rabbi. Pastor, unmarried at the time, was originally from Kiev, Russia, and moved with his mother, first to Cincinnati, and then to Peoria, Illinois, before coming to Milwaukee. At Emanu-El, Rabbi Pastor's duties included administering and running the Religious School, the Junior Congregation, and the Young Adult Group in addition to bimah responsibilities and some pastoral work. As an assistant rabbi, it appeared as though Rabbi Pastor and Temple Emanu-El were a good match. Rabbi Pastor was known for his warmth and sincerity and related well to the children in the religious school. However, as time passed it became apparent to some that Rabbi Pastor and Temple Emanu-El were not right for each other in the long-term. Some

members of the congregation liked Rabbi Pastor as a person, but did not like him as a leader. "He was a very nice man, but he didn't have much charisma on the pulpit," one former congregant said. Though he was a smart man, Harry Pastor was a different type of rabbi to those that had served Emanu-El in the past. He was younger, single, and exuded personal warmth and informality. The more informal, warm, and welcoming rabbi was far different from the powerful intellectual community leader the congregation expected.

There is an anecdote that one day, after playing tennis at Lake Park, just down the block from the Emanu-El Kenwood building, Rabbi Pastor came to his office at Emanu-El in shorts and tennis shoes. A number of congregants saw him there and considered his dress to be "an indelicacy at least and an indecency at most."⁵

At the same time, Rabbi Pastor was not entirely happy at Congregation Emanu-El-B'ne Jeshurun. He was a man who didn't like anything "big," according to Congregation Shalom's current rabbi, Ronald Shapiro. "He didn't like big government; he didn't like big business; and he didn't like big congregations."⁶ Rabbi Pastor liked making personal connections and doing pastoral work. For Pastor, a congregation consisting of 1150 families was just too big. However, during his first three years at Emanu-El, Pastor created a good-sized following of mostly younger congregants in their forties. They admired Rabbi Pastor and were drawn to his warmth and openness. Unlike their parents' generation, they cared less about communal status and wanted a rabbi who would reach out to them. With these supporters behind him, in the early summer of 1950, the board offered Rabbi Pastor a contract for a three-year term. Rabbi Pastor requested a one-year contract instead.

⁵ Personal interview with Rabbi Francis Barry Silberg

⁶ Personal interview with Rabbi Ronald Shapiro

Meanwhile, Rabbi Joseph Baron's health began to fail. By March of 1951, it was apparent that the quite ill Rabbi Baron would most likely be stepping down and retiring as Senior Rabbi in the near future. The board of the congregation referred to this as "The Rabbinical Problem."⁷ While many members of the congregation, including some on the board of the Temple, very much liked and supported Rabbi Pastor they concluded that he lacked the gravitas or community status that a senior rabbi of the largest congregation in Milwaukee should embody. Therefore, he could not be their senior rabbi.

Rabbi Pastor Leaves Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun

The synagogue's annual meeting on May 20, 1951 proved momentous. Not only did it seal the departure of Rabbi Pastor, but also it set into motion the events that culminated in the establishment of a breakaway congregation on the north shore. The congregants decided not to renew Rabbi Pastor's contract by a vote of 567 to 200.⁸ Doris Chortek, a lifetime member of Congregation Emanu-El Bne Jeshurun, was a young adult who was present at the annual meeting that May. "There were a group of men, spoken for by Herman Williams, who threatened to walk out if Harry Pastor's contract wasn't renewed. When the vote took place, and it was clear that Rabbi Pastor's contract would not be renewed, that group of men got up and left the room. Soon after that, the new congregation was formed."⁹

⁷ Minutes, Congregation Emanu-El Board Meeting, April 1951. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

⁸ Minutes, Congregation Emanu-El Annual Meeting, May 20, 1951. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

⁹ Personal Interview with Doris Chortek

North Shore Congregation Founded

Around the same time as this annual meeting was held, as rumors circulated that Rabbi Pastor's contract might not be renewed, there were murmurings within the Jewish community that another Reform synagogue was needed to serve the increasing Jewish population that was steadily moving to the North Shore of Milwaukee. Soon after, the murmurings turned into real action. Earlier in May of 1951, a small group had convened and began writing a constitution for a new congregation to be formed. While the project to create a new congregation to serve the North Shore had been discussed and even planned prior to this time, the cadre of congregants from Congregation Emanu-El-B'ne Jeshurun who were admirers and followers of Rabbi Pastor, saw this transition at Emanu-El (i.e. the non-renewal of Rabbi Pastor's contract) as the catalyst to make their dream a reality. In all, there were 15 member units (some couples, some singles) who became "founding members" of The North Shore Temple. In the home of David and Sylvia Pasch, in early June, 1951, those 15 founding member units signed the charter for the new synagogue. The document was signed by: David and Sylvia Pasch, Jacob and Irene Beck, Harry Sheer, Florence and Iz Abrams, Rose and Ed Meldman, Rosalyn G. Levin, Ethel and Herman Williams, Adeline and Leonard S. Shapiro, Donald and Mildred Hamilton, Sarah Blinder, Sophie and Milton Smuckler, David and Phyllis Goodman, Paul and Fanny Spector, Dr. Donald and Mildred Ausman, and Harry L. and Eleanor L. Arnold. There were other members from very early on who didn't sign the charter. In July of 1951, Congregation Emanu-El reported 60 membership resignations, many of whom joined the new congregation including Ed Zien, Carrie Paschelles, and Misses Nachman.

At an Introductory Meeting held June 26, 1951 at Whitefish Bay High School, close to 300 people attended to hear about the new congregation. The statement of principles was shared. The following is a partial reprint. For the full text, see the Appendix.¹⁰

The formation of the North Shore Congregation had its roots in the continued growth of the Jewish population, together with the general population, along the North Shore area in recent years.

It was not the result of a sudden decision on the part of a few people, but a long-felt need; nor was it the result of a fundamental cleavage in an existing congregation. The actual history of our organizational efforts proves otherwise.

The first step taken by the active group which sparked the formation of the North Shore Congregation was to confer with the leaders of Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, asking their advice and seeking their reaction to the move. They were met with complete accord and with friendly guidance. These friendly relations continued, despite an erroneous newspaper story...

(8) The emphasis in religious services shall be on content rather than the form; on creativeness and originality; the stimulation of the mind and elevation of the spirit.

This document was well received. People in attendance were enthused and energized by the idea of creating a new synagogue that spoke to their vision.

¹⁰ See Appendix A

¹² Ibid

Mentioned in the statement of principles (Introducing: THE NORTH SHORE CONGREGATION) was an infamous article which had run in the Milwaukee Journal called, "Group Splits from Temple: Rift Over Rabbi Pastor at Emanu-El-B'ne Jeshurun." This article cited overcrowding and allegiance to Rabbi Pastor as the main reasons for the organization of the new congregation and caused a backlash in the community. The article quotes members of the new group saying "the machinery of Temple Emanu-El is so large that it detracts from the spiritual family relationship, which should be a part of synagogue life."¹² While evidence shows that some of these statements were, indeed, part of the impetus for starting a new congregation, the context of the greater Milwaukee Jewish community, which affected decision making just as significantly as allegiance to Rabbi Pastor, had been left out of the article entirely. From a public relations standpoint, the article was harmful for both the new congregation and Congregation Emanu-El. Part of the harmful nature of the article was that there were real tensions at Emanu-El following the group that left the congregation. Some of the younger adult members of the congregation felt a close bond with Rabbi Pastor that they had not felt with other rabbis of the congregation. A lot of those same congregants felt that Rabbi Pastor was treated poorly by the congregation.

Many members who remained at Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun felt betrayed by the group that left the congregation. In the congregation's considerable history, there had never before been a group that broke away. Some in the congregation liked that Emanu-El was the only Reform synagogue in the city and took special pride in their congregation because of that.

While the “erroneous” newspaper article seems only erroneous in that its scope was far too narrow, it was, nonetheless, a damaging article to both congregations. The new congregation wanted a clean start, with no association with their parent congregation, and Emanu-El wanted a more positive reflection of its inner-workings in the public light.

Therefore, a countering statement was issued in the pages of the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle in July of 1951. While the author of the rebuttal was anonymous, he or she claimed to speak on behalf of the Milwaukee Jewish community. The rebuttal said, in part:

“There has been some wild and irresponsible talk concerning the internal affairs of the Congregation Emanu-El B’ne Jeshurun. Idle rumors of friction and schism are completely without foundation. A normal, healthy, and friendly movement has gained some momentum, which, if it progresses with patience and foresight and is not hampered by haste and pretentiousness, may very well result in the establishment of a very much-needed new congregation on the far east side...”¹³

Looking back at the Statement of Principles, the final enumerated point (number 8), is particularly interesting and evident of the changing American population who wrote it. These people were actively looking for more content within their religious services, more creativity, more originality, and less “meaningless” formality. For this new group, ceremony without explanation and meaning, was in itself, meaningless. Rabbi Jacob J. Weinstein of Chicago spoke to the group at an early congregational meeting. He echoed their beliefs. According to an article in the Milwaukee Journal, “Rabbi Weinstein told his

¹³ Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, July 1951

audience that he concurred 100 percent in the group's desire 'to increase the warmth of the Jewish service and to place emphasis on content rather than form.' Warning that 'religion is caught not taught to children,' the Chicago rabbi pointed out that 'adults must participate in services as well as send their children to Sunday School'."¹⁴

David Goodman, chairman of the policy committee, spoke at the meeting as well. He said, "We hope our ritual will feature increased warmth in four ways: spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social... If three terms could be used to describe our type of liberal Judaism they would be positive, creative, and active... Within the framework of liberal Judaism we can practice a religion that combines the best of the American dream with the best of our Jewish faith."¹⁵ This younger, post-war generation was clearly eager for a more "hands-on" type of Judaism than they were able to find at their old congregation. They wanted to delve deeper into Jewish concepts and get away from the pomp and circumstance of their German Reform roots.

The crucial introductory meeting for the North Shore Congregation was held Tuesday night, June 26th. Between that meeting and the following Sunday, July 1st, was an intense membership drive. Those days of hard work proved fruitful. By July 5th, there were officially 180 members (87 families) in the congregation. Those families and more prospective members attended another important meeting on Sunday, July 1st in the evening, which was considered the first regular meeting of the congregation. The most important issue covered during this meeting was the selection of a rabbi for the congregation. A search committee made up of Jacob Beck, Harry Sheer, and Arthur Levin, addressed the congregation at length. Regarding the search for a rabbi the

¹⁴ Milwaukee Journal, June 28, 1951

¹⁵ Congregation Shalom archives

committee announced, "After ardent and diligent consideration from all angles and aspects possible, we of the Rabbinical Committee report that the North Shore Congregation is confronted with the choice of two alternatives: (1) An unknown or part-time Rabbi to be brought in from a different section of the country. (2) The selection of Rabbi Harry B. Pastor as Spiritual Leader."¹⁶ The committee then continued to thoroughly analyze the first option. Analyzing the Rabbinical Committee speech now, it is clear that the committee was solely interested in having Rabbi Pastor serve the congregation. The following questions were asked of an unknown rabbi: "Will an unknown Rabbi be willing to head a new group, which in itself entails considerable pioneering and an inexhaustible amount of courage and energy...? Will an unknown Rabbi be willing to adapt himself to the statement of principles that have been set forth by your steering committee...? An unknown Rabbi may only be judged as to his qualifications by hearsay or recommendation from the various agencies available for such information... During these summer months most rabbis are inactive in their various pulpits and cannot be heard." All in all there are six lengthy points discussed regarding hiring an unknown rabbi. There was not one among them that could be considered positive. Before further discussing Rabbi Pastor, the committee restated its position regarding him: "Now before presenting alternative #2 be it hereby understood, that at a meeting held at the home of Mr. David R. Pasch, at which meeting the steering committee and the original founders of North Shore Congregation directed the Rabbinical Committee to call upon Rabbi Harry B. Pastor to invite him to become the Spiritual Leader of North Shore Congregation if selected at a general meeting of the congregation.

¹⁶ Rabbinical Committee speech July 1, 1951

And the committee was further instructed to ascertain Rabbi Pastor's reaction to the statement of principles and also as to what salary arrangement can be worked out with him. Be it further understood that this committee report on alternative #2 is by the direction of the steering committee."

The group then went on to list ten different points justifying the selection Rabbi Pastor. They discussed everything from his successes at Temple Emanu-El, to his honors as a rabbinical student, his full endorsement of the statement of principles, his civic standing in the Milwaukee community, his interfaith work with other clergy, and his willingness to lead and shape a new congregation. The committee closed with a full endorsement of Rabbi Pastor. "The committee feels that if given a free hand he will be a dynamic and stimulating force in this congregation. We feel that in view of the size of this congregation there will be a close and personal relationship between Rabbi and Congregation. We know that Rabbi Pastor will not only be a good Rabbi, but will also be a good friend as well as a heart warming counselor in time of need. His sermons will be timely and interesting to such an extent that Friday evening services will be an invigorating adventure in religion. We of the committee are recommending unanimously that a one year contract be offered to Rabbi Harry B. Pastor, if he will accept this challenge." Rabbi Pastor did accept the challenge. "We have come to build," he said, "but we ourselves are being built thereby."¹⁷

With Rabbi Pastor in place, momentum continued to build. At the next big meeting, Sunday, July 15, 1951, there were several very important agenda items to cover. The first of which was to adopt the constitution and elect a board. David R. Pasch was

¹⁷ Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle July 6, 1951

voted president, Arthur A. Levin, first vice president, David Goodman, second vice president, Henry Arnold, treasurer, Mrs. Jacob Beck, recording secretary, Daniel Howard, financial secretary, and Mrs. Delbert Wile, corresponding secretary. Fifteen trustees were also chosen that Sunday. They were Isador Abrams, Jacob Beck, Herman Eisenberg, Robert Gill, Donald Hamilton, Alexander Lakes, Sam Langer, Edward Meldman, Dr. Leonard S. Shapiro, Dr. Milton M. Smuckler, Paul J. Spector, Aaron L Tilton, Herman Williams, Edward Zien, and Judd Post. At the same time, Harold Willenson and Rosalie Horowitz were elected presidents of the Men's and Women's Clubs respectively.

Congregation Shalom

Also on the agenda for the July 15th meeting was the picking of an official name for the congregation. Since the congregation's inception a month earlier, its founders had stated that the name "North Shore Congregation" was only temporary. From July 15th onward, the North Shore Congregation would be known as Congregation Shalom. As was the case for many new synagogues that split from larger ones, the name "Shalom" was picked. Shalom, meaning peace or wholeness, was quite appropriate at the time, as the congregants felt that they were making themselves whole and creating a new peace in the community. "Shalom" was also an ideal for the new congregation, specifically peace between the parent congregation and its offshoot. For the following years, there was little "shalom" between the congregations. Rabbi Pastor and his congregation had little interest in congenial relations with the place that they felt had treated him so poorly. Evidence shows that Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun reached out to Shalom in the early

days, but Shalom was quite tentative in reciprocating. The relationship, while cordial, was rocky for many years.

First Buildings

Once Congregation Shalom had a name, a rabbi, and a board, it needed a home. In Whitefish Bay, slightly further south than the congregation's future permanent home, was the former building of the Bay Shore Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at East Hampton Road and N. Wildwood Avenue. The Lutheran church had outgrown its small building, which Shalom planned to use for Friday night services and other small gatherings. Religious School would take place off site, at nearby Cumberland Elementary School for the younger students and at Whitefish Bay High School for the older students. As the High Holy Days of 1951, or 5712, approached, the congregation made arrangements to use the Moose Lodge for worship, which was much further south than the congregation. As a gesture of good will, the Moose Lodge was offered free to the congregation for the High Holy days. The congregation announced that seating for the High Holy Days was available to all congregation members, and in keeping with the principles of the congregation, there would be no assigned seats. In addition to the regular High Holy Day services and the children's services, there was a dinner dance planned for the night following Yom Kippur at the Holiday House.

The Bay Shore Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, the Moose Lodge, and the Whitefish Bay School District were all generous and helpful to this fledgling Jewish group. One important attraction for Jews to move to these developing areas was the openness of the larger community to the Jewish community. In other parts of Milwaukee,

on the far West Side in places like Brookfield and Wauwatosa there were still “gentlemen’s agreements” that strictly limited the number of Jews who could live in the area.¹⁸ While there may have been a few scattered instances of antisemitism in the North Shore area, the climate was one of vast warmth and acceptance.

The Congregation Starts to Grow

By the middle of July, the congregation really started to take shape. With a well-liked Rabbi in place, a building secured as a first home to the congregation, membership continually growing, a fully staffed and organized religious school, and considerable finances pledged by enthusiastic members, it is hard to believe that the congregation was just over a month old.

Religious School Formed

September of 1951 saw continued growth for Congregation Shalom as the membership climbed to 441 voting members in 218 families. From those families, the Religious School opened on September 23rd with just over 200 children. kindergarten through eighth grade. A full high school with Confirmation classes began soon after. Rabbi Pastor took charge of the vision of the school and created its first curriculum. An article to the congregation said, “Rabbi Pastor, as director of the school, has put into effect a curriculum which embodies the best in modern pedagogy.”¹⁹ In his annual report at the end of the first year, Pastor reflected on what made this new religious school a unique entity:

¹⁸ Personal Interview with Dr. Donald Caine. October 9, 2007

¹⁹ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Shalom Shofar, October 1951 *Congregation Shalom Archives*

In our work this year we have tried to make our school truly a religious school, and not merely a place for teaching Jewish history. Each classroom session and each Assembly Program was preceded by prayer. Throughout the year, we had a series of Special Friday evening Service of Worship in our Temple for Children and Parents, which we considered to be as much a part of the training of our children as the Sunday morning sessions, for we wanted our children to know that they were a vital part of the spiritual program of our congregation, and not just a student body set apart unto themselves. At the same time, we wanted them, above all, to enjoy being Jewish; therefore, in addition to the Special Children's Services in connection with each Holiday, we had wonderfully enjoyable holiday parties and programs also.

In addition to concentration on our spiritual purpose, we needed also to concern ourselves with educational methods and it was always our endeavor to use the most modern and advance educational methods possible in presenting our religious material. To cite an example, we have striven to use our Audio-Visual department to the highest degree. One of our devoted members, Mrs. Joseph Picker, conceived and carried out a project whereby our students contributed in honor of their birthdays to an Audio-Visual Fund. with which we have been able to purchase a great number of film-strips, a film-strip projector, a portable phonograph, a public address system, and many phonograph records and picture books. And our Men's Bowling League have presented to us one of the finest sound-movie projectors available. Thus we have been able to enliven our classroom instruction and our Assembly programs with vitally interesting film-

strips and motion picture films with sound and in color, in line with the most advanced techniques of the most modern public school.

Another important point we have stressed is the close connection between home and school. As the holidays came around, we sent printed material into the home to help the parents observe the Jewish holidays in such a way as to strengthen the spiritual teachings of the school...²⁰

A New Synagogue Environment for Milwaukee Jews

As the school year began and the High Holy Days of 5712 approached, Rabbi Pastor started working to align the board's eight principles, his vision for the congregation, and the congregation's excitement and pride over this new endeavor. One of Rabbi Pastor's first goals was to create warmth in the congregation, referring to the congregation as the "congregational family." One congregant, Ellen Abrams Blakenship, daughter of Iz and Florence Abrams, fondly remembers Rabbi Pastor and services in Shalom's earliest days in the small chapel in Whitefish Bay. "Rabbi Pastor was always so warm and welcoming. He and my parents were very close. I even called him Uncle Harry, which I know might be disrespectful for a rabbi, but he allowed it... Services were also very warm. Everyone knew each other in those days and everyone looked forward to the oneg following the service. Women in the congregation would bake for the oneg and would bring these beautiful linens for the tables."²¹

In light of the principles that were produced by the board of the congregation, Rabbi Pastor knew that they were expecting some sort of innovation—some creativity

²⁰ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Annual Report, May 18, 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

²¹ Personal Interview with Ellen Abrams Blakenship

and intellectual stimulation during the services. He and David Goodman wrote an article in the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle: "At Shalom we have a Liberal type of service featuring a restoration of some traditional ceremonials and the introduction of several new forms, which have become widely accepted by other Liberal groups throughout the country. The creative urge has been strong among Liberal congregations, and as a result the services have taken on new beauty and warmth. The key note is a 'positive identification with things Jewish'." ²² In a report to the congregation, Rabbi Pastor wrote, "A conscious effort has been made to breathe vitality, variety, personal warmth and intense interest into our Services by providing for a high degree of participation by our members... by presenting special prayers to mark important events in the personal life of our member families."

In May of 1952, Pastor's innovation is clear and is reflected the special services that took place in the new congregation. "Examples of special services held during the past year are: Special Family Services for Children and Parents, in connection with various Jewish Holidays; 'Ask the Rabbi' Sessions; Sisterhood Sabbath; Men's Club Sabbath; Inter-Racial and Inter-Faith Sabbaths; a Special Service of Jewish Music and services for the next two Fridays to come; a Creative Youth Service prepared and presented by our Temple Youth Group, including a High School Graduation exercise; and then, on the Friday before Confirmation, a special service of Consecration for the Parents of the Confirmation Class." ²³

The Politics of Harry B. Pastor

²² Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, September 28, 1951

²³ Annual Report – Rabbi Pastor, May 18, 1952

As the congregation began to establish itself, Rabbi Pastor would occasionally deliver a timely political sermon. There was an article written in the local paper about his Rosh Hashanah sermon for 5713 (1952). The article, entitled "Rabbi Attacks McCarthyism: Harry B. Pastor Talks at Jewish New Year Services," detailed Rabbi Pastor's plea to the congregation to fight the injustice of McCarthyism. According to the article, "Rabbi Pastor's sermon was a strong plea for 'pioneers of truth' who would not be afraid to break from the past and accept progress and change. He charged that 'men have been afraid of the truth and have resisted it through the centuries.' Men of privilege have fought truth as a threat to the status quo, and the masses have resisted it because it would 'disturb their thinking.' Fear of truth has brought intolerance and threatened civil liberties. He quoted Justice William O. Douglas of the United States Supreme Court as saying, 'There probably has not been a greater period of intolerance in our history... We departed from our standard of civil liberties and borrow the philosophy of the enemy we detest.' 'What he was referring to without naming it, was the murky miasma of McCarthyism, which is polluting the atmosphere of our fair land, shutting off the oxygen of free and open discussion without which democracy cannot breathe, and choking off the blood in the lifeline of our liberty... In the name of defending democracy, we are in danger of destroying democracy. In the name of combating totalitarianism we are in danger of gradually making ourselves over in its image'." Upon delivering this sermon, Rabbi Pastor showed another side of himself to the 900 people in attendance. This sermon set the tone for social action within the congregation that took clearer shape in coming years.

Congregation as Social Community

Along with social action and spirituality in services, Congregation Shalom sought to define itself socially as well. According to Ellen Abrams Blankenship, “The social life of my parents and their friends really revolved around the Temple. They had many dinner dances; always lots going on.”²⁴ From the very early days, the Men’s Group and Sisterhood got together and produced and rehearsed plays for the congregation at the auditorium of the Henry Clay School. The first play was called “Forecast” written by congregant Milton A. Hoffman, directed by Jerry Callner, and produced by Mrs. Hoffman. The play is a humorous take on the formation of the congregation. The description reads, “In the play, Jeremiah—as a part of his duties—must keep track of new persons and groups on earth. He bids Shalom send a representative to account for themselves and to list some of their plans that justify their organization’s existence.”²⁵ This show is the beginning for many plays and musicals created by congregants throughout Shalom’s history.

Social life at Shalom extended much farther than the bounds of the synagogue and even further than the stage. In October of 1951, and many times after, Rabbi Pastor, who lived with his mother at the time, opened up his home to congregants for informal receptions as a chance for new-comers to get to know each other and their rabbi. In 1953 Harry Pastor married Cylvia, a woman he met in Chicago. Harry formally adopted Cylvia’s children and helped raise them as his own. However, his marriage to Cylvia changed his role in the congregation as she was seldom willing to host congregants in their home or become involved in the Temple in any substantive way.

²⁴ Personal Interview with Ellen Abrams Blankenship

²⁵ Whitefish Bay Herald, November 1951

There were often parties at other congregants' homes and at various restaurants and clubs around Milwaukee as well. The Brotherhood of Temple Shalom organized a weekly luncheon at a hotel downtown, where many of the members had offices. They also had a "Men's Club Bowling League" which started almost immediately after the congregation was formed. Their standings were frequently published in the congregational newsletter, "The Shalom Shofar." The congregation's "Contract Bridge" club was also featured occasionally in the newsletter. Shalom offered lectures from secular leaders in the community. Finally, there were many out-of-temple activities for children, parties for the youth group, and dinner-dances for all, including the "Hannukah Hop"—all of which were well attended.

Outgrowing their Surroundings

With worship services that were unique in Milwaukee, an innovative religious school, and a new social scene, Congregation Shalom grew, and grew rapidly. With the congregation in official operation for only six months, the membership exceeded 275 families.

It quickly became clear that the location on Wildwood Avenue was too small to meet the needs of the congregation. While the board of Shalom never planned for the Whitefish Bay location to be their permanent home, the rapid growth of the congregation led them to start investigating land purchases in November of 1951. While there was no immediate plan to break ground on a plot of land, the board decided that it would be wise to purchase land earlier rather than later. The Land Committee, consisting of Paul Spector, Herman Eisenberg, and Harry Sheer, was informed that land suitable for

building a temple was rapidly becoming non-existent on the North Shore. In a confidential letter to the congregation on December 11, 1951, President David Pasch wrote about the site upon which they were in the midst of negotiating. "The site is an excellent one, so located as to anticipate the movement of the population by the time we are able to build—which may not be for many years. In selecting the site we also took into account the fact that over 50 percent of our members live north of Hampton Road, and another 35 percent live between Capitol Drive and Hampton... We secured a total of 650 front feet by about 215 feet depth for \$6000. This is an area toward which several other congregations are gravitating and which promises to become a North Shore religious center... at present a bus running along Lake Drive stops within two and a half blocks of our location."²⁶ Pasch included a special note to the congregation about the value of the land. "Even if Temple construction never materializes on this site, the purchase still remains a good investment, according to the judgment of the combined real estate brains of our congregation."²⁷

The decision to build in northern Fox Point was surprising to some congregants, as very few people lived that far north. Ellen Abrams Blankenship remembers: "To me, it seemed like there was nothing out there at all. Nothing was built up there yet. I remember thinking when I was little that it was a long drive from Whitefish Bay."²⁸ There was, in fact, very little built that far north at that point. Richards Street, which soon after became the northern extension of Santa Monica Boulevard, had only a handful of homes at that time. This made the purchase and preparatory costs manageable to the congregation.

²⁶ Shalom Archives, Letter to Congregation, December 11, 1951

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Personal Interview with Ellen Abrams Blankenship

Measured in feet, the land that lost \$20 per front-foot in Fox Point would have cost \$60 in Whitefish Bay. Moreover, the area had a number of churches that had recently moved there. When negotiating, the committee decided to buy more land than was necessary. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, suburban synagogues tended to be low buildings with large footprints, unlike their parent buildings. The committee wanted to ensure that there would be room for an ample building to be built, and room for expansion in the future. They also purchased one extra plot of land for a parking lot—something that was uncommon at older synagogues in city atmospheres.

The foresight of the building committee was remarkable. Fox Point quickly built up around the site of Congregation Shalom and the Jewish community followed. While the board reiterated to the congregation that constructing a building was a step that was still distant in the future, there was a lot of excitement surrounding the purchase of the land. President David Pasch made this telling statement in a letter to the congregation dated January 10, 1952: “We know that everyone looks forward to the day when we will have our own Temple, but of course we can only progress toward that goal by degrees, guided by our best judgments and limited by our size and finances. The land we will soon acquire is to us what the homeland of Israel has meant to our fellow Jews elsewhere in the world. Every Jew needs, besides his own home, a spiritual home in whatever country he lives. Our Temple will be this to us, and we can work toward that end through the forthcoming years as the next big goal of our lives.”²⁹

1952 and 1953 saw much growth in Congregation Shalom. Programming, services, and religious school all continued to grow in quantity and quality. Programs like

²⁹ Shalom Archives, Letter to Congregation, January 10, 1952

“Rabbi and Minister Trading Places for a Day” and more interfaith and interracial dialogues and mixers continued to blossom. Considering the social milieu of the 1950s, as well as the state of Civil Rights in the country, these programs were both highly innovative and highly progressive. Purim celebrations organized by the Temple Youth Group and a multitude of different Passover community Seders kept temple members busy and involved.

A Home for Shalom

At the end of 1952, with temple activity in full swing, a new campaign came on the horizon called “A Home for Shalom.” With the congregation now at 325 families, the time was right to start a campaign to build a permanent home on their plot of land in Fox Point. Under the leadership of Shalom’s second president, Edward Meldman, the fundraising drive began. The goal for the drive was to raise \$150,000 to build a basic structure. Again, the board looked to the future and planned to build in phases. First, they would erect a chapel, social hall, and classrooms. Expansion would follow in later years. On November 22, 1952 there was a large fundraising dinner at the Astor Hotel. With excitement buzzing for a permanent home for the nomadic congregation, \$70,120 was raised at that one event. Confidence grew among members that their goal was indeed in reach.

The campaign pushed forward through the rest of 1952 and into 1953. Momentum kept building as the congregation pushed to meet its objective. With the growing numbers and continued enthusiasm, there was no doubt that the funds would be raised. Finally, the goal was met, and in early spring of 1954, the congregation had an architect and building

crew in place. Then, in a dramatic ground-breaking ceremony on May 16, 1954, each child in the congregation took a small shovel and together they dug the first piles of earth for the foundation of Congregation Shalom on Santa Monica Boulevard.

In four short years, a nucleus of dreamers had grown to more than 325 families. Services, programming, and social activities were in full swing, with Rabbi Pastor at the forefront of it all. Excitement swelled and hopes for the congregation's continued success were high as ground broke for a permanent home for Congregation Shalom.

Conclusion

The post-war period was a time of tremendous growth both physically and spiritually for the American Jewish community. All over the country at that time, there were new suburban congregations breaking away from the machinery of large older congregations. These breakaways from larger congregation can be understood as the post World War II generation maturing and determining that at that point in history they wanted something that was their own. A transition started in the 1950s that is still in motion today from the grandiose, powerful but often cold pulpits of the past, to an intimate, warm and welcoming atmosphere. While ritual was still extremely important to the younger Jews who created these new synagogues, finding real meaning in those rituals became far more important.

The developing suburban frontier was an exciting place full of new possibilities, new hopes, new dreams. It was those very hopes and dreams that became the foundation for American Judaism as we know it today.

Chapter 2

The Early Years

Through the middle of the 1950s unprecedented synagogue growth continued to mark suburban landscapes throughout the United States. As these post-war suburban synagogues began to solidify themselves as permanent entities, American Jews began to feel a real sea change. According to Arthur A. Goren in his article, *A Golden Decade: 1945–1955*, he wrote, “One could confidently point to a baseline that demarcated American Jewry from what had existed prior to 1945 and that would hold, for the most part, during the decades ahead.”³⁰ Jonathan Sarna described the decade similarly. “American Judaism took root in new locations, addressed new communal needs, reached out to new constituencies, experimented with new ways of drawing in members, and in the process, became ever more variegated and multiform.”³¹

Between 1955 and 1960, the congregation fought to keep up the energy and excitement of the very early days, while at the same time beginning to create a new identity as an established, stable entity in the Jewish community. They maintained the energy of the congregation in a number of ways. During this early era, a home was built for the congregation, social action sermons and programming became important aspects of Shalom, synagogue music was refined and rewritten, all with Rabbi Harry Pastor, at times a troubled man, leading the charge.

³⁰ Goren, Arthur A. “A Golden Decade: 1945-1955” *The American Jewish Experience*. Edited by Jonathan Sarna. 1986, 1997 p.301

³¹ Ibid

By 1955 Congregation Shalom had permanently taken root in one of those new locations—Fox Point, Wisconsin. The construction of a Shalom building, a place to gather to worship, study, and socialize, which began in 1954, signified the beginning of a new era for the congregation. Gone were its early days of wandering from building to building along Milwaukee's North Shore. With a centralized office and phone number, a place to permanently keep ritual objects, a central study for the Rabbi, and a sanctuary, social hall, and classrooms to call their own, Congregation Shalom began the second phase of its existence.

Congregation Shalom Builds a Permanent Home

In 1954, Donald L. Grieb and Robert E. Rasche, who had designed buildings on Sherman Boulevard and a series of "Kohl's" grocery stores, were hired as architects for Congregation Shalom's building project. As the process moved forward, the architects envisioned "a contemporary one-story structure to harmonize with the new development surrounding this lot... The building will add to the cultural, religious, and social activities of the North Shore community."³² This type of structure, a one-storey, low building with an emphasis on function rather than form fit the synagogue building trend of its time. According to Rabbi Daniel H. Freeland in an article called *Why Temples Look the Way They Do*, from the 1840s through the 1930s synagogues were generally quite elaborate structures built somewhere near the business districts in center of the city. These were built primarily by immigrants to the United States who sought to impress and "win the respect of their non-Jewish neighbors by integrating the best architectural forms of the

³² Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, April 1954

day.”³³ Freeland argues that following World War II and the aforementioned move of many Americans to suburban life, synagogue buildings changed dramatically. Members of these synagogues were for the most part born in America, and as a result built “American style” buildings. Freeland says of synagogues built in this time, “As with neighboring churches, economy ruled the day. The result was a low, squarish synagogue sanctuary with cinder block walls. The space was “warmed up with lots of wall-to-wall carpeting, conspiring with the porous cinder block to make the human voice virtually inaudible without the aid of a sound amplification system. This new sacred space featured a large *bimah* area to accommodate the increasing number of individuals who would participate in worship: volunteer choirs, large confirmation classes, bar mitzvah celebrants and their families, the fifth grade Hebrew class, etc.”³⁴ Taking advantage of the large tracts of land available in suburban settings, often these buildings were built out horizontally with lots of clear, non-stained-glass windows that allowed the natural setting to become a backdrop.

Congregation Shalom’s construction fit the national trend in suburban synagogue buildings in many ways. The building was constructed in phases, with the first phase consisting on a social hall to be used as a sanctuary and a multi-purpose room, a kitchen, library, office space, and classrooms. The social hall, which would later become the permanent sanctuary, was a large open space with a tall vaulted ceiling that sloped slightly lower on the east side of the room where the large raised bima and ark were installed. The west side of the room featured a series of tall windows with Judaic artwork

³³ Daniel H. Freedlander. “Why Temples Look the Way They Do.” *Reform Judaism* (Fall 1994) 35-36

³⁴ Ibid

on the outside. "...Shalom is said to be a modern interpretation of an ancient design. Five stainless steel forms of the Star of David are mounted on the window mullions at the street end of the nave."³⁵ Along with the social hall and kitchen, the plan called for 13 first-floor classrooms with windows that faced east and west on their respective sides of the hallway. Historian Jonathan Sarna writes, "The new synagogues, some of them grand palaces of Judaism ornamenting the suburban landscape, others more modest and nestled in the woods, served educational, cultural, social, and recreational functions in addition to worship."³⁶ Shalom was a combination of both of those types of structures, with low ceilings and clean lines and some areas, and more architectural innovation in others. While economy was of the utmost concern, natural light and added space were very important.³⁷ Even the parking lot was an important feature of the new Temple. "Large kitchen facilities, social halls, meetings rooms, an educational wing, a central professional office, a gift shop, and... a huge parking lot, sought to make the synagogue a hub of all cultural, religious, social, and recreational life in the Jewish community—a true synagogue-center."³⁸

As construction was underway with the new facility, the congregation still planned on two sessions of religious school: one on Saturday and one on Sunday, in order for the whole student body to fit in the building. As was the case in synagogues all over the country, there were honor dedication opportunities all over the building. If a congregant so desired, he or she could dedicate the Ark (\$10,000), a Torah (\$1000), a

³⁵ Newspaper Article, *Congregation Shalom Archives Vol 2*

³⁶ Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism*. 2004. 291-295

³⁷ See Appendix B

³⁸ Sarna, Jonathan. *American Judaism*. 2004. 291-295

Perpetual Light (\$1000), the Organ (\$2500), the Rabbi's Study (\$1000), the Library (\$3500), a classroom (\$1000) etc.

Though the building was not yet finished in the fall of 1955, enough of it was completed that the congregation was able to hold High Holy Day services at their new site. Members swelled with pride as they announced to the community that they would be housing their High Holy Day worship in their own building. President at the time, Fred Sanders, wrote, "This lovely fall of 1955 we will cross the threshold of our new magnificent Temple. Hard work, determination, enthusiasm and sacrifices in time and money made this glorious dream come true."³⁹ On Friday, September 16, 1955, Shalom congregants flooded through the front doors of the foyer of their new temple for Rosh Hashanah Services. Rabbi Pastor preached a sermon entitled, "Bless this House."

Throughout the first eight months of use, the temple building continued to have finishing touches applied. Finally, at the end of May, following the completion of finishing details around the bima, Congregation Shalom held a Dedication Weekend to officially inaugurate their building. As was expected, the congregants of Shalom took particular pride in the achievement of constructing their own building. As was the case in similar young suburban congregations around the United States, there was a particular sense of pride surrounding the opening of the building. The builders of the congregation were quite proud to have created something new—a congregation unlike the ones that served previous generations. Within the walls of the new congregation they sought to create and maintain a warmth and closeness that was not possible before. They sought to

³⁹ Sanders, Fred. Letter to Congregation, Summer 1955

create a space that would include the natural settings of the surrounding space—a yard in which children could play; a parking lot in which to park.

As part of the dedication ceremonies, many children in the congregation wrote and presented poems about the new Temple Shalom. The following is by Joan Winston, Grade 7:

Our Temple is a fine one,
It stands so straight and tall.
It's proud of its religion.
And loved by one and all.

The services are wonderful;
The people all attend.
I can't think of a better place
For us our sins to mend.

Halleluiah, we love our Temple dear.
We couldn't think of a better place
If we thought a thousands years.⁴⁰

This child's poem further demonstrates the cultural shift that was occurring in the middle of the 1950s around the country. Jews were starting to feel that they were an authentic and important part of the community. No longer was Judaism something

⁴⁰ Winston, Joan. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

practiced by immigrants in a dark downtown building. They had light and airy buildings next to churches. They were proud that they were American Jews—as much a part of society as their non-Jewish neighbors. In an excited article in the *Shalom Shofar* in February of 1952, declaring the fundraising drive for the new building almost complete, there is a section called, “Respect.” The article says:

We are also buying “Respect.” We are no longer a nebulous, mysterious “race” without representation in the community, but an organized religious group, proud of the faith into which we were born or converted, and practicing our religion with a conviction that wins respect from those around us.

There is no better way to give concrete evidence of this affirmation than to work enthusiastically toward the eventual creation of an edifice that will put us on par, some day, with other religious groups.⁴¹

Shalom in the Larger Milwaukee Community

It is quite clear from this statement and others that building a Temple meant much more to the congregants of Shalom, and for that matter Jews around the country, than a place to hold services. The building demonstrated that they belonged; that they were part of a larger culture. Congregation Shalom’s acceptance in the larger community was very important to the members of the congregation. By the time the construction on the building had concluded, it appeared as if Shalom had carved out a permanent niche in the North Shore community. Moving to the new building meant moving out of the many places Shalom had inhabited during the early years of its existence. Donald Hamilton,

⁴¹ *Shalom Shofar*, February 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

chairman of the House and Property Committee wrote a number of heart-felt thank-you letters to community organizations that supported Shalom during the first four years of the congregation's life. Among others, he wrote to the Board of Directors of the Bay Shore Evangelical Lutheran Church, which had been the congregation's small home. He wrote, "It has only been through friends like yourself that our congregation has been able to grow as fast as it has in the past four years. We certainly appreciate all you have done for us as the chapel on Wildwood has been one of the factors that have held us together these past years..."⁴² Rabbi Pastor too wrote a heart-felt letter to Pastor Riley of the church. "I want to express to you, at this time, on behalf of my congregation as well as myself, our deep and enduring gratitude for your kindness and cooperation in making it possible for us to have a spiritual home during these past four years... We feel that you and your congregation have shown real brotherhood in action in enabling us to use the facilities of your little Chapel and therefore the experience of holding our services there has been a doubly enriching one. We hope that our friendly relations may always be maintained in the future as in the past..."⁴³

Interfaith Relations

The brotherhood among faiths mentioned by Rabbi Pastor is something that Congregation Shalom strove for from its very beginnings. This desire to make close connections with Christian congregations is a well-documented trend of the 1950s. This dialogue was often achieved by rabbis and ministers preaching on each other's pulpits

⁴² Hamilton, Donald H. Letter to Bay Shore Evangelical Lutheran Church. August 11, 1955. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁴³ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Letter to Pastor Riley. August, 1955. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

about universal issues and interfaith dialogue. Rabbi Pastor spoke occasionally at the Plymouth Congregational Church in the early days, and later at the North Shore Congregational Church, near to Congregation Shalom on Santa Monica Boulevard. These sermons were often given and received warmly, as Rabbi Pastor often gave sermons that would appeal to a universal audience. In one particular sermon, Rabbi Pastor discounted the idea of “chosenness” for the Jewish people. He said, “I don’t believe that God has any favored people. All human beings are equal in His eyes. I do believe that various peoples have different kinds of talents and contribute different kinds of genius to the world. The ancient Romans were great in government and law, the Greeks in art and philosophy, the Jews in ethics and religion.”⁴⁴

While most interfaith programs involved only the rabbi or minister preaching, there were occasionally bigger programs. From Shalom’s inception, it participated in a multi-congregational Thanksgiving Service. In November of 1951, a notice went out to the congregation advertising that Rabbi Pastor would be among the ministers conducting the special service at Plymouth Church. The congregation warmly received this program and attendance increased each year. In November of 1955, with the new building in place, Shalom joined with the North Shore Church and the newly formed Congregation Sinai for the new “Union Service of Thanksgiving.” The following year, congregants turned up in droves to welcome members of the North Shore Church and Congregation Sinai to the United Thanksgiving Service in the Shalom sanctuary. Later, a partnership between Congregation Shalom and North Shore Presbyterian Church resulted in an annual Thanksgiving service that continues to this day.

⁴⁴ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

Interfaith programming was not just limited to once a year. There was a Shalom Interfaith committee that was set up in the congregation. David Goodman, Director of Publicity, wrote a message in the Shalom Shofar called "What is Interfaith?" He wrote, "We hear much about interfaith activity these days, and big plans are being made for major Temple projects along this line. In fact, interfaith work is listed among the cardinal principles of our congregation. However, we hope that no one loses sight of the fact that ultimately the best job of interfaith work is done by each one of us as individuals, in our relations with our non-Jewish friends and associates; that we should not give up our outside associations entirely in favor of Temple activities; and that daily contacts between Jew and non-Jew are the only way in which a relationship based on mutual respect and genuine affection can be built and maintained."⁴⁵ Goodman was looking for Shalom congregants to be emissaries of Judaism to the larger community. It is quite interesting that he emphasized the importance of non-Jewish associations over solely Jewish friendships, which two generations earlier was unheard of.

In February of 1952, in the congregation's first six months of existence, they set up an Interfaith program and service held at the Milwaukee Downer College Auditorium. The Milwaukee Sentinel ran an article describing the significance of the event: "The congregation has planned the unprecedented open service in a unique effort at interfaith understanding. The February 22 date falls in National Brotherhood Week."⁴⁶ The Friday evening program started with a religious service led by Rabbi Pastor, and then featured a musical interlude before premiering the congregation's second original play, "The Wall Falleth," written by Mr. and Mrs. Milton Hoffman and Jerry Callner. "The Wall Falleth"

⁴⁵ Goodman, David. Shalom Shofar, January 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁴⁶ Milwaukee Sentinel, February 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

was described as, "A touching human drama told with humor and emotion, in which the bonds of brotherhood between two faiths weather a crisis because they have been founded upon the Desire to Understand."⁴⁷ The congregation warmly welcomed their many guests at the College Auditorium. Chairman of the committee, Abe Parelskin addressed those present. He said, "This is our interfaith Sabbath—we trust it will be a genuine experience to all of you. Wouldn't it be wonderful, ladies and gentlemen, if each day of every year all of us could practice the golden rule? It would prove to all the world our sincerity for brotherhood and democracy. God grant us the strength and courage to carry on in this all important effort."⁴⁸ This interfaith program set the tone for the congregation's future commitment to interfaith programming.

Interracial Programming

While interfaith programs were expanding all over the United States, Rabbi Pastor and Congregation Shalom were ahead of their time and ahead of other Reform congregations in dealing with interracial issues. Rabbi Pastor and members of Congregation Shalom introduced an "Inter-Racial Service" in February of 1952. A smaller event, but well attended by congregants, the Shabbat service featured a speech by William V. Kelley, the executive secretary of the Milwaukee Urban League, and the Urban League Choir under the direction of Professor J. Howard Offutt. While there is no official response from the congregation in print, it appears as though the congregation supported Rabbi Pastor in inter-racial endeavors. According to long time congregant and

⁴⁷ Flyer, Interfaith Service, February 22, 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁴⁸ Parelskin, Abe, February 22, 1952. Address to congregation. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

Past President of the congregation, Jackie Gilbert Askot, “Rabbi Pastor was always passionate about social action issues. He often spoke about issues like racism and other intolerant acts.”⁴⁹

In the section of the Shalom Shofar, the monthly newsletter, called “Our Rabbi in the Community,” the congregation proudly supported Rabbi Pastor as he attended an “Inter-Racial Protest Meeting against the bombings in Miami, Florida, held at Mt. Zion Baptist Church.”⁵⁰ A year later, during Brotherhood Week of 1953, congregants Milton Hoffman and Arthur Ortenberg wrote another original Shalom play called “Shock,” starring an African American Milwaukee actor named William Mosby. “Shock,” which was written, produced, and directed by congregants of Shalom and performed immediately after regular Friday night services led by Rabbi Pastor, is a story of prejudice and racism in America. The advertisement for the play—the story of a young white patient and an African American surgeon—said, “A message of vital importance—an unforgettable experience—a drama that opens the curtains to lay bare the ever-present struggle for the brotherhood of man.” Over 1000 people attended the Friday night show. For the first time in the congregation’s history, a serious play with a strong message was produced. The young idealists who made up the constituency of Shalom wanted to be taken seriously. The community heard them loudly and clearly.

Shalom and Politics

Throughout these years of the congregation’s existence, members began to solidify themselves and their ideals as both liberal and progressive. Rabbi Pastor shared

⁴⁹ Personal Interview with Jackie Gilbert Askot

⁵⁰ Shalom Shofar, February 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

this vision. Though his true strength was in his warmth and openness in his one-on-one pastoral interactions, Rabbi Pastor gave a number of heartfelt political and spiritual sermons on issues most important to him. Just as the congregation supported his stirring sermon opposing McCarthyism at a time when public opinion was split, so too did they follow his lead on other issues.

Pastor gave a spirited sermon to the American Association of University Women in 1952 and said, "The only antidote to the fission of the atom is the fusion of humanity... 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.' These truths are simple and clear, but prejudice is too tempting to resist... In the long, hard road to success people find a short cut. They feel that they can make themselves superior by looking down on someone else. People are subtle about this ego motivation. [Ego motivation] can be one of the elements in exploding humans off the face of the earth..."⁵¹ The sermon, which was meaningful enough to have been reprinted, said, "prejudice is a narcotic." Pastor warned about prejudice and scapegoating of all kinds, "...to categories of race, religion, and nationality."⁵² Throughout his tenure on the Shalom pulpit Pastor often spoke passionately about prejudices in society, about Jewish culture and assimilation, and about Judaism as a faith of optimism and light.

The congregants of Congregation Shalom, like American Jews more generally, took their dual roles as Americans and Jews seriously. According to Arthur A. Goren in his article, *A Golden Decade: 1945-1955*, "On domestic issues, [American Jews] aligned

⁵¹ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Sermon in Neenah Wisconsin. February 21, 1952. *Congregation Shalom Archives*.

⁵² Ibid.

with the liberal-centrist position and upheld America's role as defender of the free world. Within the Jewish community, the divisive issues of the interwar years—class differences, the intergenerational tensions between immigrant and native-born, conflicting notions of Jewish identity, the assimilationist-radical depreciation of Jewish life, and the strident polemics over Zionism—were vanishing or were gone all together.”⁵³ In the post-war period, Jews embraced universal American values as Jewish values and built their new Jewish identities on those values. “...Jewish communal participation in American politics in the decade beginning in 1945 became widespread and was found acceptable.” Congregation Shalom was no exception to the rule.

Shalom Sings: Music in the Community

Under Rabbi Pastor Shalom continued to mature and grow. As the congregation's foundation became solid, members of the board and the larger congregation wanted to make a permanent impression on the larger community of Milwaukee; they wanted to make a name for the congregation. One way in which this was accomplished was through music. While the congregation had no Cantor in its early days, the volunteer choir was substantial. Upon its founding, one of the main principles of the congregation was the desire for content over form; the desire to be involved and engaged in services rather than sitting as an observer. There was a clear trend of having a volunteer choir and no Cantor in congregations that desired more participation, a more active role in praying. Harry Perlstein, chairman of the Music committee wrote in 1954, “One of the many great accomplishments of Temple Shalom has been the successful formation of a volunteer

⁵³ Goren, Arthur A. “A Golden Decade: 1945-1955” *The American Jewish Experience*. Edited by Jonathan Sarna. 1986, 1997 p.304-305

choir of 24 participating members. It was only after their official debut at S'lichos Services (another Shalom first) that the congregation realized the immense wealth of possibilities that were contained in this truly fine musical organization."⁵⁴

Shalom was quickly becoming well-known for its fine music. Two congregants, June Brazy and Jacob Beck, along with Rabbi Pastor, raised the congregation's status again with the hiring of Mr. Max Janowski, a famous liturgical composer and musician from Chicago to direct and train the Shalom choir. Perlstein reported, "Mr. Janowski's reputation as a composer, director, pianist, and organist is wide spread and known throughout the land. His musical compositions are part of the liturgical repertoire of almost every Synagogue and Temple. The man's musical genius and brilliant personality has been the inspiration and driving force behind the volunteer choir, and responsible for its phenomenal development. The choir is now performing regularly at Friday night services and adding immeasurably to the beauty of the services... [He and the choir] will bring 'nachas' and joy to the congregation and our Jewish community."⁵⁵

Max Janowski directed the growing choir to sing liturgical music at Friday evening services, and some more general Jewish musical pieces. Along with the adult choir, Max Janowski conducted a children's choir as well for children in 4th through 8th grade. "[The children] received choir robes and badges to show their position in the synagogue's activities. Special choir parties were held and before long, there were waiting lists of children who wanted to be part of the choir."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Perlstein, Harry. Report on Music Committee to the Temple Board. November 21, 1954

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Gilbert-Askot, Jackie. The Pastor Years. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

With Max Janowski as director of the choir, the congregation set out once again to elevate their status in the Milwaukee Jewish community and the larger secular community. On March 19, 1955, the Congregation Shalom Choir, along with a ten-voice choral group from Janowski's home congregation of K.A.M. in Chicago, Cantors Maurice Levy and Pavel Slavensky, and Soprano Beatrice Horwitz, performed the "Festival of Jewish Music" before a crowd of 1,300 people at the Shorewood Auditorium. This would become an annual tradition that attracted many of Milwaukee's most distinguished personalities. Advertised in the local secular newspapers and broadcasted on television, the concert was seen by many non Jews and helped create a bridge to the non Jewish community of Milwaukee. Helping illustrate that the concert was indeed a function of Congregation Shalom, Rabbi Pastor appeared on stage with the choir and gave program notes preceding each musical piece.

In the following years, the festival continued to grow and was often designed around a specific theme. In the second year of the festival, 1956, the congregation publicly showed its support of Israel and Israeli arts by adding a number of Israeli songs to the choir's repertoire. "Liturgical music, much of it the compositions of Janowski, and Israeli folk songs will be featured but this year the Israeli music will be enhanced by the dancing of a young Israeli pair, Ruth and Zev Segal, who are in this country temporarily while Zev completes his studies for a doctorate at Chicago's George Williams College. Zev and Ruth formed their dancing team during Israel's War of Independence when he was a Haganah fighter and she was in an entertainment troupe at the front."⁵⁷ In its third year, the festival grew even larger and featured two guest choirs from Chicago

⁵⁷ "Congregation Shalom Choir to Offer 'Festival of Jewish Music,' April 14." *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*. March 16, 1956

congregations and the world-famous Cantor Moshe Koussevitzky, known as the Cantor of Warsaw. Innovative music in and out of the synagogue became of the utmost importance to the members of Shalom as the congregation continued to define its identity in its early years.

Growth Continues

While the congregation continued to establish a firm foundation in the Milwaukee community, the financial situation of the congregation itself was shaky. At a time when there was little money left in the bank, a prime piece of real estate just north of the Temple became available and the leadership of the congregation saw an opportunity to expand their small parking lot. Like many new suburban synagogues, Shalom was effectively forced to engage in this costly capital project while lacking a solid financial support base. The staff, including Rabbi Pastor, were paid low salaries; the building needed additional ventilation in the classrooms; and the growing religious school demanded more resources. Without a significant number of older, more established congregants, Shalom was constantly dealing with budgetary crises. The difficulties were ultimately addressed through a few large donations and the establishment of a sliding membership fee scale that significantly increased the dues of the wealthiest congregants.

While finances remained an issue, the congregation continued to attract young families in the Milwaukee area and steadily grew in the later part of the 1950s. By April of 1958 membership was at 440 families, with over 650 students in the religious school. With concerns about space, a motion was made and seconded at the April board meeting to temporarily close membership until after the High Holy Days. They planned on

creating a waiting list. Members would be added as soon as there was room for them. An Evaluation Committee, made up of past presidents of the congregation was created to determine whether or not a permanent membership cap should be set. The committee recommended that a congregational vote be taken. They wrote, "...after careful study [the Committee] has come to the conclusion that the physical plant and facilities, insofar as they relate to the Sabbath, High Holidays and related services and the religious school services, are adequate for a membership of up to 500 family units. It is therefore the considered judgment of the Committee, and it recommends to the Board and the congregation, the adoption of a resolution limiting the membership of the congregation to 500 family units."⁵⁸ The committee included a page of important notes that accompany the letter to the board. Among the notes in favor of the decision, the committee discussed the UAHC recommendation that a 500 member congregation is the most desirable size. They discussed a newer young congregation in Milwaukee, Congregation Sinai, and their need for new members. In the final point the committee spoke of the possibility of the membership reaching 500. "It is conceivable that if and when we do reach the 500 mark, our congregation might take steps, in cooperation with the other congregations in the community, to help organize a new congregation in our vicinity. This is a moral obligation, which we should assume for the reason that religious services should always be open to all who seek them."⁵⁹

Among the negative points presented for capping the membership, the committee discussed the financial burden on current members and the ever-increasing budget. There

⁵⁸ Evaluation Committee letter to Board of Directors. July, 1958. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁵⁹ Ibid

was also some concern that capping the membership may end up splitting families whose adult children want to join the congregation.

Finally, the committee proposed that membership would not hit 500 families within the next five years, given regular attrition and new membership rates. By then, they argued, two other congregations, Beth Israel Temple and Temple Sinai, will have erected buildings in the near vicinity. "This will undoubtedly take some members from us, so that the closing of membership will not take effect within the immediate future."⁶⁰

The proposal to limit membership of Congregation Shalom became a hot topic at board meetings throughout the late summer and autumn of 1958. Some board members believed that along with the physical limitations of the building, having a membership that exceeded 500 families would detract from one of the congregation's original aims to create a compact, well-knit group. One of the impetuses for the creation of Shalom, and many congregations like it, was to move away from the machinery of a large congregation. Other board members felt that limiting the congregation to 500 families would put a financial burden on the congregation and would limit the congregational resources. They felt that limiting membership was unfair to potential members in the Milwaukee community who were looking for a congregation like Shalom and a rabbi like Harry B. Pastor. Originally in August of 1958 the motion to limit membership was raised and seconded by the board, but was then tabled, as the board had to make a determination as to whether or not the motion required a congregational vote. After a close study by the legal experts on the board it was determined that the board members themselves could pass such legislation while staying in the prevue of the constitution. Finally, in November

⁶⁰ Ibid

of 1958, after much debate the board voted. "...Because of the controversial nature of the issue, a closed ballot was proposed. The votes were tabulated and the motion to limit membership was defeated."⁶¹ While no written evidence exists, anecdotal evidence indicates that Rabbi Pastor was in favor of capping the membership of the congregation, as he preferred a more intimate setting. As a result of this discussion, a small group of congregants became displeased with Rabbi Pastor. This group of congregants started with complaints that Congregation Shalom was not Rabbi Pastor's first priority. They felt that he was not adequately attentive to the needs of the congregation. These complaints marked the beginning of a heated debate on whether or not to keep Rabbi Pastor as the spiritual leader of Shalom.

Rabbi Pastor's Personal Tragedy

The beginning of 1959 was a hopeful time for Congregation Shalom. Innovative services and programs were often introduced. The religious school was full, far beyond capacity, at over 700 students. Membership was steadily increasing to around 460 member families. Rabbi Harry B. Pastor had much for which to show pride. Unfortunately though, for all the pride Rabbi Pastor had in his congregation he also felt an immense amount of sadness in his personal life. Harry's adopted son Sherman, his wife's son from a previous marriage whom he loved as his own, was diagnosed in the fall of 1958 with brain cancer. Prior to his diagnosis Sherman was an outstanding student on the honor roll, an Eagle Scout, president of his school's youth council and a member of the youth group of Congregation Shalom. Following his diagnosis, Sherman, who was a

⁶¹ Minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting, November 5, 1958. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

senior in high school, spent the last two years of his life fighting his illness at the Wisconsin General Hospital in Madison before dying in October of 1960. Throughout that time, Harry drove back and forth constantly between Milwaukee and Madison, trying desperately to continue to run the congregation and to be there for his family when they needed him most. Many congregants admired Harry's strength during those terrible times.

Rabbinical Crisis at Shalom

Realizing the strain on Rabbi Pastor's time and his financial resources, at a Board Meeting on May 6th, 1959, a motion was made by Harry Samson and seconded by Harold Rosenthal that his salary be increased by \$1200 for the year. Pastor's salary, which was considered low for the time, had only been raised once since the 1954–1955 budget. After some discussion, a vote was taken and the motion to increase Rabbi Pastor's salary increase was defeated by a large margin. According to Harold Rosenthal's recollection of the May meeting, "Bob Gill, a Past President got up and said 'I guess that tells you something. Maybe we don't want Harry Pastor as our rabbi'."⁶²

Following the meeting, rumors started circulating among members of the congregation that there was a faction of people who no longer wanted Harry Pastor as their rabbi. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reconstruct the controversy over Rabbi Pastor's employment because the board minutes between June 1959 and May 1960 have been removed from the Congregation Shalom archives. We must therefore rely solely on interviews.

⁶² Personal Interview with Harold Rosenthal

In response to the meetings and rumors, the president, Daniel Howard, apparently organized a group of seven people to form a committee to determine whether or not Shalom would keep its founding rabbi. The committee met throughout the summer listening to arguments in favor of and against keeping Rabbi Pastor. The committee heard testimony in favor of Rabbi Pastor staying describing him as a personable clergyman and gifted teacher. Many came to support Rabbi Pastor and described him as the backbone of the congregation, its founder and its guide, but there were also some who spoke negatively of him. Some accused him and his wife of a lack of propriety. Pastor was criticized for his golf outings on Shabbat afternoon, while his wife was derided for wearing shorts while shopping. Others seemed to paint Rabbi Pastor as selfish because he wanted an increase in salary in a time of deficit spending and allegedly wasn't doing enough for the congregation. Still others took issue with his style, particularly his lengthy Sabbath sermons. Supporter Harold Rosenthal remembers Harry Pastor during those months. "Harry was a rock—to take that kind of crap from the temple while losing his son... he was a strong, strong man."⁶³

On May 24th Rabbi Pastor addressed the congregation at the annual meeting. While he did not directly mention this situation in his remarks, they seem clearly directed to both factions of the congregation. Pastor said, "All the benefit of all [my] training and all [my] experience, plus all the devoted and loyal efforts and diligent labors of which I am capable, I have gladly lavished on this beloved Congregation. Being human, I know only too well how far from perfect I am, but believe me, I am deeply proud of what I have done and what I have built. On the other hand, no one builds alone—and so I

⁶³ Ibid

express to each one of you who has given me support and cooperation and encouragement in so many fine ways, my heartfelt thanks. May God bless you each one, and may all of us together, working shoulder to shoulder in unity and understanding, continue to build an ever stronger spiritual structure, which we shall be proud and happy to hand on to our beloved children.”⁶⁴

Following the summer of meetings, the special committee voted overwhelmingly to keep Rabbi Pastor in his post. Then, at the board meeting in September of 1959, there was an attempt by board member Dave Miller to make peace between the two opposing factions. According to Rosenthal, Miller said, “Now that this whole thing is over, let’s get together and figure out where to go from here so we can make peace for Shalom.” At that point, President Daniel Howard got up, and while pointing at Rabbi Pastor said, “not while he’s our rabbi.” Afterward, a small group of board members got up and left, including the current president and two past presidents of Congregation Shalom, Robert Gill and Jacob Beck.

Unfortunately, the chasm between the supporters of Rabbi Pastor and those who wanted him out only widened following that September meeting. In October, an anonymous group identifying themselves as “The Committee of Two Hundred for Shalom” wrote a vicious and biting letter on Shalom stationery to the entire congregation. “Shalom, Shalom V’ayn Shalom,” the letter starts, “Peace, peace, but there is no peace.”⁶⁵ The anger felt by both sides is clear as the letter continues. “...when an individual knows not how to greet his fellow member, knows not whether enough

⁶⁴ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Rabbi’s Annual Report. May 24, 1959. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

⁶⁵ Committee of Two Hundred for Shalom. Letter to Congregation. October, 1959. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

harmony exists so that they may greet each other in brotherhood, then indeed there is no Shalom in Shalom. Responsibility for this unhappy state of affairs must be placed upon our spiritual leader, Rabbi Harry B. Pastor. His first and foremost obligation should be the welfare of his congregation. But was it and is it?"⁶⁶ The letter goes on to accuse Rabbi Pastor of causing the rift in the congregation because of his desire for a salary increase. He is then accused of packing the Board with people who would swear their allegiance to him. The letter then quotes Rabbi Pastor in a statement that he categorically denied ever making. "At a luncheon he voiced this sentiment, 'If I go I shall go down fighting and take the walls of the temple down on my shoulders with me'... Those who have worked closest with the Rabbi have been the first to be alienated by his inadequacies. Yet they had worked and would have continued to work, had not the Rabbi and his rabid, short-sighted advisers created an untenable climate permeated with distrust simply to fulfill the Rabbi's personal gain... Be sure to attend the most important meeting of the year... Sunday nite, November 8, 8:15pm at the Whitefish Bay Women's Club."⁶⁷

Of course, this letter was tremendously hurtful both to Rabbi Pastor and to the Shalom community, as the letter was leaked to the press as well. When contacted by reporters from various local newspapers, Rabbi Pastor responded, "There was not a single word of truth in the accusations. I have the utmost confidence in the decency and fair-mindedness of the overwhelming majority of the members of our congregation and I believe that the ultimate outcome will prove that confidence to be completely justified." Rabbi Pastor sent a letter to the congregation expressing similar feelings. "There is no

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid

truth in any accusation against me contained in that document, and the quotation attributed to me is a complete and utter fabrication.”⁶⁸

Soon after, a note arrived from the Committee of Two Hundred indicating that the November 8th meeting was cancelled, as it would result in further harm to Congregation Shalom.

Two days later the Board of Trustees of the Congregation sent a letter to the congregation saying, “A small minority of members, unfortunately in positions of relative influence, has carried on a persistent harassing attack upon Rabbi Pastor over a period of several years.” The letter goes on to explain that those board members elected at the annual meeting in May were elected overwhelmingly by the congregation in fair way, clearly permissible under the constitution of the congregation. Finally, the letter informs the members of a congregational meeting on November 15th to vote on the renewal of Rabbi Pastor’s contract.

The Rabbinical Committee voted unanimously to renew Rabbi Pastor’s contract for five more years. The Board of Trustees voted 20 to 12 in favor of renewing Rabbi Pastor’s contract for five more years. The congregation voted 362 to 170 to keep Rabbi Harry B. Pastor as rabbi for five more years. It was then apparent that a clear majority of the congregation wanted to keep Rabbi Harry B. Pastor as their spiritual leader. As a result of the 1959 saga, 60 families left Congregation Shalom. Many went back to Congregation Emanu-El. Some went to other congregations in the area. Seven officers, including the president, three vice presidents, and a secretary of the Board resigned their

⁶⁸ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Letter to Congregation. November 3, 1959. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

positions on the board, but remained members of the congregation. Other board members filled their jobs in the interim, and a new election was held in May of 1960.

While this was perhaps the most trying time in Congregation Shalom's history, the congregation was able to heal and move forward into a new decade wiser, full of hope, and full of pride. According to Rabbi Pastor as told by Rabbi Shapiro, after the Committee of Two Hundred (actually about 60) left the congregation, Rabbi Pastor never again had any problems with the congregation. Following Rabbi Pastor's retirement several families that left following the scandal returned to Shalom.

Conclusion

As the turbulent 1960s began and American culture moved from innocence to adulthood, Congregation Shalom entered its tenth year in a similar position. Gone were the early days filled with uncertainty about the congregation and its place in Milwaukee's larger Jewish community. By the early 1960s Shalom was a well-established entity among the houses of worship in Milwaukee's North Shore. As the rabbinic crisis of 1959–1960 came to a close, the congregation began to heal its wounds and move forward.

Chapter 3

A Quest for Meaning

In Autumn of 1964, as the members of Congregation Shalom prepared to begin the congregation's "bar mitzvah year," it was apparent that the world around them was changing dramatically. Gone was the decade of "sober serenity" of the 1950s, replaced with the turbulence, uncertainty, and upheaval that defined the 1960s. With the Civil Rights Movement, the Feminism Movement, the Vietnam War, and a general atmosphere of counter-culture permeating American culture, more than ever before people needed their houses of worship to be more than dogmatic—they needed religious institutions that advocated for their values and principles. Under Rabbi Pastor's leadership, Congregation Shalom answered this call with the creation of a Social Action Committee that flourished through the early 1970s.

Because of this work to create relevance and meaning in times of tumult, Shalom continued to grow slowly throughout the 1960s through the middle of the 1970s. In this third chapter, we will delve further into Congregation Shalom in the 1960s and 1970s. We will examine the congregation's response to the social issues of the time, its dedication to the State of Israel, its changing liturgical style, the expansion projects of its building, and its innovative religious and Hebrew school. We will see that the members and staff of Congregation Shalom attempted to imbue their lives with meaning through each of these endeavors. While the world around it continued to change, Congregation Shalom evolved as well, defining itself in new ways in the 1960s and 1970s.

Social Action at Shalom

The early 1960s felt to many like an extension of the decade that preceded it. It was later, near the middle of the 1960s that the United States began to drastically change. In his article, *The Turbulent Sixties*, author Jack Wertheimer wrote, "Despite the postwar expansion of religious institutions, religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom concluded, 'Jews like other Americans, would discover that the religious revival had provided very feeble preparation for the social and spiritual tumult of the 1960s...' The convulsions of the 1960s transformed the mid-century contours of Jewish religious life."⁶⁹ Religious life at Congregation Shalom changed slowly but dramatically over the course of the 1960s. By the 1960s the congregation was firmly established, conflicts within the congregation had been healed and membership kept slowly increasing. American Jews in general and Shalom congregants in particular were operating on a more universalist platform. While the congregants of Shalom were still concerned about their synagogue and the broader Jewish community, their concern about the world around them forced them to think nationally.

In a report to the congregation entitled, *Justice, Justice Shalt Thou Pursue*, the newly formed Social Action Committee reported on the social action projects that had occurred in the group's first year of existence, 1963–1964. The first project was to set up a fund for donations from Shalom to specific social action projects and organizations. "In the Fall of 1963 the Board of Directors set up the Social Action Fund, to which contributions have been made in the same manner in which memorial or other funds are handled. This Social Action Fund is being used to support worthy causes that are in the

⁶⁹ Wertheimer, Jack. "The Turbulent Sixties." *The American Jewish Experience*. Edited by Jonathan Sarna. 1997. p.330

tradition of the long-established historical principles of Prophetic Judaism. A contribution from the Fund was made to the Conference on Religion and Race.”⁷⁰ Along with the fundraising that the group did, the Social Action Committee was active in the community as well. Members of the congregation marched at a protest rally in the city of Milwaukee. “protesting the murders of innocent Negro children in Birmingham, Alabama.”⁷¹ A convention of the then Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Chicago, featuring the speaker Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., sparked interest in a number of congregants at Shalom. The focus of the Chicago convention was on race relations in the United States during the 1960s. As a result of that conference, the Social Action Committee invited Mr. Lloyd Barbee, the President of the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to be a guest speaker at a Friday evening service. “Mr. Barbee’s talk, *It Happens Up North, Also*, was presented at an Oneg Shabbat following the service.

While it was clear that the Social Action committee was increasing the congregation’s awareness of national issues, its chairman felt it had a long way to go. “All the above make only the slightest ripple in our contemporary ocean of social problems. It is our feeling that each individual must take an inventory of himself each day, every week, at the end of the month... and then sum up at the New Year, and ask himself, ‘What have I done to make this world a better place to live for myself and my neighbor?’”⁷²

⁷⁰ Kittower, Saul, Chairman of the Social Action Committee. Report to Congregation. May, 1964. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

The congregation responded positively to the social action efforts of the committee. As a result, over the coming years a number of programs were put into place. A year later, in May of 1965, the Social Action Committee reported on much progress in educating the congregation about social issues. "A synagogue which isolates itself from the fundamental issues of social justice confronting the community and the nation is false to the deepest traditions and values of Jewish heritage. We are deeply indebted to our Rabbi, whose social sensitivity has helped narrow the gap between word and deed, between confession and commitment. It is largely through his efforts that contemporary social issues have become an indispensable part of our synagogue program."⁷³ The report then goes on to discuss the formation of the North Shore Council on Human Relations, an interfaith and interracial coalition set-up by the Social Action Committee. There is an emphasis in the report on the close relationship between Shalom and the Padon Baptist Church.

Along with the formation of the Council, there were also a series of discussion groups to take place in congregants' homes. The goal was that a congregant would pick one of three categories for discussion. He or she would then sign up for that specific discussion group and attend three lectures and discussions with the same people. The program was called, "Judaism: Religion of Escapism or Social Responsibility?"⁷⁴ The pamphlet hints at the fact that Jews living in the suburbs of any city were removed from the social problems of that city. It asks the following. "Does Judaism simply mean attending a Synagogue and observing Jewish ritual in a tranquil suburbia or does the Jew

⁷³ Kittower, Saul. Chairman of the Social Action Committee. Report to the Congregation. May, 1965. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁷⁴ Direct Mail Pamphlet. Congregation Shalom Social Action Committee and the Milwaukee Jewish Council. 1966. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

also have a role to play in the solution of the critical issues of the day? If you are not an escapist and believe the Jew in suburbia must be informed and concerned about segregated schools and housing, political extremism, and the threat of assimilation, you will be interested in our home discussion series, which will give you an opportunity to question the experts and discuss these topics with your fellow members of Congregation Shalom.”⁷⁵

The program had three main categories. First, a committee discussed “Political Extremism.” They asked the following questions during their discussion: “Can a ‘good Jew’ be a member of an extremist group? Does political extremism present a special threat to the American Jew? What are the goals of these groups and who belongs to them?” While the discussion group itself was slightly left of center, this group seems to have been concerned with extremism both to the left and to the right of the political spectrum.

The second group studied civil rights and sought to answer four main questions in their discussions: “We are of course concerned about safeguarding the civil rights of Jews. Should we be as concerned about the civil rights of non-Jews? How do we feel about Negroes moving into our ‘lily-white’ suburbs and schools? Do Negroes have justifiable reasons for being anti-Semitic? What are the real problems facing the Negroes in their struggle to give their children the same ‘good things’ we strive to give ours? Are they justified in using picketing, boycotting, and other direct methods to achieve these aims?” Finally, the third discussion group studied “The Vanishing American Jew. Will freedom and acceptance result in the assimilation and eventual disappearance of the

⁷⁵ Ibid

American Jew? What are the facts? What would the world lose if Judaism were to disappear? Is there a conflict between maintaining the Jewish identity and being part of the community?"⁷⁶

While there are no written records of the attendance of these discussion groups, they were reportedly well-attended. During this period of time, many Jews who were living in suburban areas like the North Shore of Milwaukee felt disconnected from the turmoil that was happening in nearby cities. While Milwaukee was full of demonstrations, particularly regarding segregated housing on Milwaukee's South Side, the Northern suburbs were out of the loop. There are records of some Shalom congregants who participated in protest rallies. However, these discussion groups gave the congregation a safe venue in which to discuss the problems in the world around them. These discussion groups, and presentations like them, made up the bulk of the social action of the congregation.

In the late 1960s the Social Action Committee and the Adult Education Committee combined their efforts and formed one large committee. This meant that while the social action programming was almost solely in the form of adult education, many of the adult education programs of the time were about social action issues. The joint committee saw its role as bringing information to the community, and leaving the rest to the congregants themselves. "In social action, the Committee attempted to bring to the attention of the Congregation some of the burning questions of the day—Vietnam—and a better understanding of human relationships and co-operation with all our brethren. Our Rabbi gave many sermons where he tried to bridge the gap between word and deed

⁷⁶ Ibid

concerning our commitment that our Jewish Heritage teaches the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.”⁷⁷

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Rabbi Pastor gave numerous passionate sermons on issues of social action. For a few years in the 1960s, he conducted worship services on local Milwaukee TV station, WTMJ-TV. In a sermon he gave on the air on February 9, 1964 he said, “An idea of God in the mind is not enough! Real religion is far, far more than an intellectual abstraction! Real religion is deed as well as creed; and in order that a religious concept in our head may lead to a religious action of our hand, a connection must be established between the two—and that connection leads through our heart. The motive power of Religion is not merely mental, it is largely emotional; it requires the right kind of feeling.”⁷⁸

While some of the congregation agreed with Rabbi Pastor’s declaration that Judaism must be a religion of deed, others felt that educating themselves and others in the community on the issues of the day was action enough. At the same time though, there were members of the congregation who did not understand at all the depth of some of these issues in the United States, especially racism. Following the aforementioned presentation by Lloyd Barbee of the NAACP of Milwaukee, and the question and answer period that succeeded it, Rabbi Pastor felt he had to give a sermon about White suburban Milwaukee Jews and their prejudices towards the African American community in Milwaukee. Pastor was troubled by some of the questions raised by congregants during the presentation. On November 15, 1963, Rabbi Pastor gave a dramatic sermon called *We*

⁷⁷ Annual Report 1967

⁷⁸ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Sermon, February 9, 1964. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

Pay for Our Prejudice, which was intended to help the congregants understand and change their prejudices. “All of us are ambivalent, and even self-contradictory in our attitude toward our black-skinned brothers. We Jews are strong believers in human brotherhood, and in every community in America our people stand in the forefront of the fight for human rights. And yet—and yet—we have many doubts and questions in our minds about the social and moral behavior of the Negroes in our community, and about their mental ability and their own desire to better themselves. I am going to express some of these doubts and ask myself these questions and try to answer them in my own mind. I sincerely hope that you will listen in.”⁷⁹ As Rabbi Pastor wrote, there was a clear discrepancy between the action of the Social Action Committee on behalf of the congregation and the congregants themselves. While the congregation always maintained a liberal mindset and members were eager to learn about and strengthen race relations in Milwaukee, Rabbi Pastor understood that there were still some deep-seated prejudices, and the only way to overcome them was to confront them directly. That was the goal of this sermon. He continued the sermon with a series of questions that he asked himself aloud from the pulpit, echoing questions that he had earlier heard directly or indirectly from congregants. After raising the questions, he thoughtfully answered them—in many cases drawing parallels and contrasts to the Jewish community as well.

“The first question I want to raise is this: Why don’t the Negroes in Milwaukee do more for themselves to better themselves? We Jews came to this country as poverty-stricken immigrants, and lifted ourselves by our own boot-

⁷⁹ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Sermon, November 15, 1963. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

straps; we took advantage of American opportunity, we educated ourselves and our children, and we climbed up the ladder of life in America by leaps and bounds. Why doesn't the Negro take advantage of his educational opportunities and do the same?

As I ask myself this question and try to answer it, I first of all offer a prayer of thanks to God that I was so smart that I chose the right ancestors; that I insisted on being born to Jewish parents. For I have inherited a love of learning, an intellectual interest and ability, which was developed by my ancestors over a period of 3,000 years. And even my grandparents in the ghettos of Europe kept their intellectual interests alive and their minds keen and alert with the study of Bible and Talmud. So, after I congratulate myself on picking the right ancestors, I become more serious and say to myself: Harry, don't be so smug and self-satisfied with your interest in education, and your ability to take advantage of it, and to improve yourself. You are the lucky beneficiary of what countless ancestors have done for you—you did not create all this by yourself!

And then I contrast my good fortune with the background of my Negro brothers. I remember how the White people invaded the homes of their ancestors in the savage jungles of Africa, captured these poor people by violence, transported them like animals across the sea, and sold them into slavery in this great free land. I try to think what a violent wrench it must have been to be uprooted from a primitive society, and to be brought into a so-called civilized culture, without any preparation, and to try to adjust to this culture while you are kept in the chains of a slave. Then I remember how these poor, ignorant, degraded

slaves were freed, without any educational preparation for freedom, and then how the White man made a mockery of this freedom by putting the Negro back into a new kind of slavery, an invisible kind—the slavery of second-class citizenship—and again opportunities for first-class education and advancement were denied to him. And then I remember how very many of the Negroes in this Milwaukee community are recent immigrants from the South, that they came here completely illiterate, or, at the most, with a very low grade-school education.”⁸⁰

Rabbi Pastor then goes on to discuss the problems with raising a family in a run-down neighborhood and how it affects the psyche of those who live there. “But the Negroes could not move out—they were locked in the ghettos—and by this time the buildings in which they lived were truly unfit for human habitation. And so I think of the home in which I live and the hovels into which the Negroes of Milwaukee are crowded and pushed and I begin to have some compassion for their condition.”⁸¹ As the sermon continued, Rabbi Pastor continued to illustrate the real struggle for life and livelihood in the African American community of Milwaukee in the 1960s. He painted a disturbing, but realistic picture for the congregation that night, clearly showing congregants that their attitudes and actions can have serious results, both positively and negatively. Following a quote from Booker T. Washington, Rabbi Pastor concluded:

“We can’t keep the Negro living in squalid ghettos, and we cannot keep him deprived of equal educational and employment opportunities, and we can’t

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid

keep him the victim of social discrimination without lowering the spiritual, moral, physical, and economic level of our whole community. If we do nothing to help our Negro brothers; if we wash our hands of their problems, which are our problems, we will pay the price, in our community, of increasing crime and illegitimacy and disease—and we will be affected by these things, as well as they. And we will even pay financially, because we will derive less taxes from their neighborhoods, and we will pay for more services to their neighborhoods, as long as we keep them locked in those dismal ghettos. And, above all, we will pay the price in loss of human resources in our community, in the loss of all the tremendous talent and contributions these people will be able to make if we help them to reach that level.⁸²

This was an extremely bold and brave sermon for Rabbi Pastor to give in the early 1960s. On one Friday night in November, Rabbi Pastor was able to help his congregants confront their own prejudices, analyze them, identify their origins, and work to expunge them—to truly work for racial equality in Milwaukee. The congregation's response to the sermon was overwhelmingly positive—so much so, that the sermon was referred to repeatedly in the annual report of the congregation in 1964. (Coincidentally, the sermon was given one week prior to the Kennedy assassination.) Throughout the 1960s, often on the High Holy Days, Rabbi Pastor spoke often about racism and worked with the Social Action Committee to match actions with words.

⁸² Ibid

During the High Holy Days of 1968, arguably the most turbulent year in modern American history, Rabbi Pastor gave a series of action-based sermons that had a particularly pastoral quality to them. On Yom Kippur morning in 1968, he gave a sermon called, *Put it Down in Black and White and Tell it like it is.*⁸³ In this stirring sermon, Pastor discussed the irony of the African American community's anti-Semitism on a national level, and an appropriate response to it. Rabbi Pastor began by explaining the origins of the anti-Semitism from the African American community citing a minority of Jewish merchants and landlords around the country who had given Jews a bad name. Following the description of the anti-Semitism, Rabbi Pastor argued that the most important issue to discuss is the Jewish reaction to the anti-Semitism from the African American community.

"Now I want to make it quite clear that I am not advocating that we should condone Negro anti-Semitism. We should fight it—and fight it hard—but not with hatred. We must fight it with understanding. We must realize that the most effective method for counteracting Negro anti-Semitism is not to back away from the battle for Negro rights, but to struggle all the more actively against the conditions that make the Negro feel so frustrated and feel so inferior, for only when we overcome these obstructions will we remove the root causes of that prejudice which the Negro is directing against the Jews."⁸⁴

⁸³ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. "Put it Down in Black and White and Tell it like it is." Delivered October 2, 1968. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

⁸⁴ Ibid

Pastor then concluded his High Holy Day sermon with a strong instruction that the congregation guard against “anti Negroism.” One can see the parallel that Rabbi Pastor drew between the hatred of Jews and the hatred of African Americans. Following the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and general racial tensions that continued to mount near the end of the 1960s, Rabbi Pastor felt that he had to address racism during the High Holy Days of 1968.

Throughout the 1960s, there was a palpable change that could be felt from the pulpit as Rabbi Pastor became more comfortable delivering politically heated sermons. Shalom congregants, with an established and well-respected congregation in place, continued to become increasingly excited about turning to the outside world and confronting national issues.

Rabbi Pastor dealt with many of these heated issues in a direct manner. In October of 1964 he delivered a sermon that was a stinging criticism of the “Radical Right.” Pastor said, “I am not... speaking about partisan politics or political personalities; I am not here to tell you that you should vote for this party or this candidate—that is your business—not mine. But I’ll tell you what is my business: to discuss certain moral and spiritual issues with which the present presidential campaign is concerned. I cannot discuss them all, but I shall discuss with you tonight that issue which I consider to be the most important moral issue in the entire campaign—and that is extremism—the extremism of the Radical Right.”⁸⁵ Pastor then described the Radical Right as “wolves in anti-Communist clothing.” He said that organizations like the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, the National States Rights Party, the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade and

⁸⁵ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. “Extremism: The Real Issue in the Coming Elections.” Delivered October 23, 1964. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

others are destroying the American landscape. “They claim to be fostering Americanism, but the methods they use result in exactly the opposite—in destroying the Democratic spirit.”⁸⁶ Pastor continued to rail against these Radical Right groups. “We must remember that these people are sick—they are filled with hatred and hostility to a frightening degree—and just as they hate liberals, or anyone who disagrees with them in ideology, so they tend to hate anyone who differs from them in race or religion, especially the Negroes and the Jews. I do not say that every extremist group is openly anti-Negro or anti-Semitic, but I say that almost all of them are.”⁸⁷

The danger of extremism is one example of many sermons that Rabbi Pastor gave during this period. While no full-text sermons that deal directly and only with Vietnam still exist today, one can see in Rabbi Pastor’s notes that he gave many sermons on that very issue. In his Rosh Hashanah sermon in 1968, Pastor delivered a pastoral sermon reflective of the intense pain of the era. The sermon, *God is not dead, He is hiding Himself*, spoke academically at first, about different conceptions of God and the problem of evil in the world. It was particularly meaningful to the congregation, as just two months earlier, Lt. John L. Abrams, son of founding and active members Iz and Florence Abrams, was killed in Vietnam. John’s death severely shook the congregational family. Even in this pastoral sermon, Rabbi Pastor called for action to stop the violence and hatred. “If we stop thinking of the sorely suffering people of Vietnam as an ‘it,’ as a bunch of ‘commies’ and ‘coolies,’ and we begin to think of them as our brothers, then we will be determined to put an end to the wanton destruction of their lives and their land, to bring peace and reconstruction to their country—and then in the new and wholesome

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

relationship that will be established between them and us, God Himself will be revealed and present.”⁸⁸

As the 1960s came to a close, the Social Action Committee began to lose steam. However, issues of civil rights, women’s rights, and poverty continued to be important to Congregation Shalom. In 1970, Rabbi Pastor was quite pleased to have a female Student Rabbi helping him for the High Holy Day services. The Student Rabbi, Sally Priesand went on to become the first female rabbi in the United States. Congregants at Shalom felt a sense of pride that they were on the cusp of a new movement. Interestingly, the congregational literature referred to Sally Priesand as, “Student Rabbi Sally Priesand,” or “Rabbi Sally” rather than as “Rabbi Priesand.” While this may have been done to emphasize that the congregation was employing a female Student Rabbi, it also referred to her by her first name, which was not the established practice with Rabbi Pastor. While many people in the congregation referred to Rabbi Pastor as “Harry,” (even the children), in print his name was always “Rabbi Pastor.”

The committees of Congregation Shalom worked together on the problem of poverty in Milwaukee. In the summer of 1970, along with Congregation Emanu El B’ne Jeshurun and Congregation Sinai, Congregation Shalom co-sponsored an “Urban Internship,” a social action intern. The social action intern, Rabbinical Student Ron Shapiro, who eight years later would be hired as Shalom’s first Associate Rabbi, spent the summer working on poverty issues while living and working in the inner city of Milwaukee. Rabbi Shapiro recalled, “The committee from the three congregations felt it

⁸⁸ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. “God is not Dead, He is Hiding Himself.” Delivered September 23, 1968. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

important for the congregations to have a connection with the inner city, as so many of them had moved to the suburbs.”⁸⁹ As the Urban Internship Social Action Intern, Ron Shapiro and his wife Judy spent the weekdays in the inner city of Milwaukee and Fridays and Saturdays in the three Reform congregations, bringing the issues of poverty and education to the forefront of the congregations.

Through social action learning, sermons and action, some members of the Shalom community were able to find new meaning in their lives. These programs and sermons helped the suburban congregants keep abreast of the situation for their fellow human beings in city centers across the country. Social Action was an important, meaningful aspect of Congregation Shalom in the 1960s and 1970s.

Israel

From the time of its inception, Congregation Shalom was involved in some way or another with Israel. Support of Israel was another way congregants of Shalom made meaning in their lives during troubled times. Like many in many congregations around the United States, throughout the 1950s Shalom worked to raise money for the fledgling state of Israel. One of the earliest events in the congregation’s history was an Israel bond drive, which included a sponsorship dinner. While the support of Israel was not one of the stated principles of the congregation at its inception, Rabbi Pastor spoke passionately about the importance and safety of Israel. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Israel advocacy became more central to the congregation’s mission, as congregants worked even harder to raise funds to support Israel. Following the 1967 Six Day War, the larger

⁸⁹ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald Shapiro. October 9, 2007

community's opinion of Israel began to change with both negative and positive consequences. While to some Israel and its army were seen as heroic and brave, others began to see Israel as an aggressor attempting to expand its borders. On Yom Kippur morning of 1969 Rabbi Pastor gave a passionate sermon in defense of Israel, attempting to teach the congregants to be Israeli emissaries to their non-Jewish friends. He said, "And now we have a new extreme—the new left, the extreme radicals of the new left, including many Jewish young people who claim that Israel is an imperialistic aggressor against the primitive, naïve natives of Arab lands... And you and I have to be, each of us, a committee of one, first of all thoroughly informed about the facts, and secondly becoming a source of information to others who simply do not have a source of information of real truth of the situation."⁹⁰

American Jews felt they needed to represent Israel and Congregation Shalom was no different. In his lengthy Yom Kippur sermon, Rabbi Pastor strongly defended Israel's political actions. As the sermon drew to a close, in defending the need for a Jewish state, Rabbi Pastor referred to the Holocaust—a subject that would more frequently be studied in the coming decade. Pastor said, "Now I'll tell you why we need a Jewish state. I'll tell you why as I think of what happened in the days of Nazi Germany when Jews were sailing the seas in leaky boats and drowning by the hundreds of thousands. When they came to the shores of this country and other countries and they were driven back to Nazi Germany to be destroyed because no country would let them in. That's why. There must

⁹⁰ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. "Is Israel Safe in Israel?" Delivered Yom Kippur 1969. *Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society*

be some place on the face of the earth where a Jew can go and be accepted without question—and there is now: in the state of Israel.”⁹¹

Along with Rabbi Pastor’s Israel sermons, the congregation continued to support Israel financially. There were many fundraisers, including art shows and dance performances by the Temple Youth Group which were well attended. In 1970, at a meeting at the home of Rabbi Harry and Cylvia Pastor, a goal was to raise \$150,000 for the upcoming Israel Bond Drive. The fundraising happened throughout the Fall of 1970 and concluded at their goal on December 17th with a gala event featuring singer Nehama Lifschitz.⁹²

In the fall of 1972, just following the High Holy Days, Rabbi Pastor took a six-month sabbatical and traveled to Israel. It was well known among the congregation that Rabbi Pastor was terrified of getting on an airplane, so the trip to Israel was all the more meaningful. According to anecdotes, some of the congregants worked hard to convince Harry to actually purchase the plane tickets to go to Israel. He wanted to help the congregants to feel a bit of what Israel was like, and wanted to encourage their travel to the Holy Land.

In his first letter he wrote, “When I was granted the great privilege of a Sabbatical, believe me, my gratitude was great indeed; but when I set foot on the holy soil of Eretz Yisrael, then I felt toward all of you an indebtedness which cannot be described in words... What a thrill it was to rise through and above the clouds into the blue sky and bright sunlight, and to look down on the soft, white fleecy floor below! ... When I arrived at the hotel I could not think of going to bed. I had to walk along the

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Congregation Shalom Archives

street that ran beside the seashore, and breathe the Israeli air, and see and hear my people walking and talking in their old-new language in their old-new land."⁹³ Pastor continued to write to the congregation and described the many places he visited around the country. In each letter he expressed his wonder and awe at being in such a holy place.

Following Rabbi Pastor's trip to Israel, the congregation became even more involved in Israel support. Saul Eichenbaum, Principal of the Religious School, attended a Reform Jewish Educators conference in Jerusalem and spoke fondly about his journeys there.⁹⁴

Many congregants recall Yom Kippur of 1973, when between the early Yom Kippur service and the later one, news trickled in that Israel was under siege. Rabbi Pastor put aside his original sermon. Jackie Gilbert Askot wrote, "But in a moving and dramatic gesture, he put aside his notes and spoke from his heart about Israel's need to survive. No one who was there can ever forget the emotion and the passion with which the Rabbi spoke. The congregants were reminded once more of the qualities that made Rabbi Pastor the kind of man they chose to be their spiritual leader."⁹⁵

As the 1970s progressed, Israel continued to be an important issue for Rabbi Pastor and the congregation. Supporting and learning about Israel was another way congregants made meaning in their lives.

Liturgical Style

⁹³ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. Letter to congregation. October 23, 1972 *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁹⁴ Lensky, Phyllis. "Local educator returns from Israeli trip" *The Post*, February, 1976. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁹⁵ Gilbert Askot, Jackie. "The Pastor Years." *Congregation Shalom Archives*

Another way many congregants connected to Jewish tradition and made meaning in their lives was through worship services and music. Music and worship at Shalom were comparable to many similarly sized Reform synagogues around the Midwest at the time. *The Union Prayerbook* was used and often a soloist and/or a choir sang on a Friday evening service. A formal hidden choir loft was added to the sanctuary to accommodate the large choir. Starting in 1961 when a guest Rabbi led the High Holy Day services, the congregants began hearing Sephardic Hebrew, which became the norm for most prayers by the early 1970s. While some members maintained the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew with which they were familiar, it was clear that Sephardic Hebrew pronunciation would become the regular practice of the congregation. This was the case in many Reform synagogues around the country at the time, as many were eager to align themselves with Israelis who spoke modern Hebrew with the Sephardic pronunciation.⁹⁶

Music directors in the synagogue were never long-term at Shalom up until the late 1980s. Max Janowski was the Music Director at Shalom through the late 1950s along with Thelma Taglin who taught music in the Religious School and compiled many musical resources for the congregation. Following Janowski, there were a number of Music Directors hired, none of whom worked particularly well at Shalom. The first of which was Cantor Pavel Slavensky, a Cantor from Chicago, who was hired to come monthly to Shalom. His tenure was brief, and soon after, the Congregation hired Mr. Harold Green, who was an organist, to be the Music Director. Under Harold Green, the music program continued steadily, without much change or innovation. However, one innovation, was the Children's Choir, under the direction of Thelma Taglin, that sang

⁹⁶ Meyer, Michael A. "The New American Reform Judaism" *Response to Modernity*. Wayne State University Press. Detroit, MI 1995. p.374

music for all the Family Services and Interfaith concerts. The Children's choir became well known in the community and Shalom's music book, edited by Thelma Taglin, *Shalom Sings*, was sold at synagogues around the country.⁹⁷

As late 1960s and 1970s progressed, congregations around the United States became more eager to change worship styles and experiment with completely creative liturgies. Historian Michael Meyer teaches, "For American Reform Judaism, the seventies was a period of intense liturgical creativity."⁹⁸ Rabbi Pastor was known for writing new and creative liturgies for special occasions. Shalom was one of the first Reform congregations to implement a *Slichot* service at the beginning of the High Holy Days. Near the end of the 1960s, Rabbi Pastor encouraged even more creativity from the congregation. He got more than he asked for, as a number of congregants expressed interest in playing rock style music for services. On April 14, 1967 Shalom debuted the first "Rock'n'Roll Shabbat" worship service in its history, led by the Temple Youth Group.

In a letter to the congregation a few days before the service, Rabbi Pastor wrote, "We are having a Service of Worship, which will be different from any we have ever presented in our history as a Congregation, and any which I have ever conducted as a Rabbi... The music for the Services is based on traditional Chassidic melodies, but the rhythms will be accented in the fashion most congenial to modern youth, and will be accompanied by the instruments that are their favorites: electric guitar and drums... You

⁹⁷ Receipts for *Shalom Sings*. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

⁹⁸ Meyer, Michael A. "The New American Reform Judaism" *Response to Modernity*. Wayne State University Press. Detroit, MI 1995. p.375

will be sorry if you miss this Service.”⁹⁹ The congregation came out in droves for the service and had overwhelmingly positive things to say about it. According to an article in the Milwaukee Journal, “White-haired Mrs. Fred Zolen said, ‘I’m all choked up. I’ll never say ‘darn teenagers’ again!’” Rabbi Pastor expressed similar sentiments. “It’s been a unique experience and being an old fuddy-duddy I had some misgivings about it, but the young people have shown us that the oldest religion in the Western world... can still be expressed in the language most familiar to modern youth. They have been inspired and we have been inspired.”¹⁰⁰

Other creative services were introduced during this time as well. In October of 1969, a “Sabbath Service of Worship in Poetry” was presented, with liturgical poetry by Lucille Frenkel. The poetry of the service was intended to deepen the connection with the prayers and give congregants new and different ways to express their emotions at a trying time in our nation’s history. One such poem appears below:

The Tragedy—A Comment

When will they lend us the leisure
That our sons may write our sweet verses?
For all our sons are poets –
Their matures sing of poem-thoughts,
Their lives compile like stanzas.
And when will the world permit us
Our sons to live in quiet?

⁹⁹ Pastor, Rabbi Harry B. “Letter to Congregation.” April 11, 1967. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹⁰⁰ Dannheisser, Nancy. “Rock n Roll in Synagogue Inspires Adults.” *Milwaukee Journal*. April, 1967

And when will the world acknowledge
That men were meant for learning,
And not for waging war!
And when will they cease the hating,
So our sons may rest from turmoil?
Oh, when will Man grow in wisdom,
So that all may thrive in peace?¹⁰¹

Many of the congregants at Shalom enjoyed having a new and different way to express themselves during worship services. Creative services became an important part of Shalom's worship.¹⁰² This was yet another way congregants were empowered to imbue their lives with meaning.

In 1968 the worship at Shalom changed dramatically as the first full time additional clergy member was hired. Cantor Charles Julian from New York was hired in 1968 as a full time Cantor at Shalom. Cantor Julian became the Music Director and provided new depth and scope for liturgical music at Shalom. He also had educational responsibilities, as he taught in both the Religious School and Hebrew school. Cantor Julian stayed at Shalom for two years until he left to pursue another position.

With Organist Harold Green and soloist Sol Zitron in place, Shalom's services continued to be quite musical, with two female voices and Sol Zitron singing at almost every service. However, in 1972 Harold Green resigned and the congregation was again

¹⁰¹ Frenkel, Lucille, "Sabbath Service of Worship in Poetry" Prayer packet, October, 1969, *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹⁰² Many creative service packets can be found within the Congregation Shalom Archives

without a Music Director. The president at the time, Mel Gilbert, organized a rotation that throughout the summer, the youth in the congregation would pitch in and lead services in rock music with their guitars, flutes, and voices. That Fall, long-time congregant and Music Committee Chairman Alfred Cahn took over as Music Director with a new vision for liturgical music. Cahn envisioned services with beautiful, simple music that would enable the congregation to participate by singing along. "In the past there was too much atonal music, too much new music. There were too many melodies that the congregants couldn't follow. We plan to remedy these things beginning this Fall."¹⁰³ While it seems there was an attempt to make the music more participatory, it is clear that this goal was not fully met until much later in the congregation's history.

Religious School

Many congregants made meaning in their lives by teaching the next generation. At the end of the 1950s, it was clear that the Religious School of Congregation Shalom needed to be reorganized. In the fall of 1960, the school began to change dramatically as Saul Eichenbaum was hired as Principal. Eichenbaum, who taught Religious School for 11 years, was also the Vice Principal of the Whitefish Bay Public School System. From the beginning of his tenure in the position, Eichenbaum was determined to provide the students of Shalom with an innovative and effective method of Jewish education. Throughout the 1960s, Saul Eichenbaum along with Rabbi Pastor and the Religious School Committee purchased new cutting-edge textbooks regarding Jewish traditions, music, holidays, history, connections to Israel, and more. Early in that school year

¹⁰³ Gendelman, Lynda. Musical Rebirth Happens at Congregation Shalom. *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*. Summer 1972

Shalom helped create an organization called the "Eastside Hebrew School," which was a combined school with other East side congregations to begin Hebrew education in preparation for bar or bat mitzvah. In the first year only a handful of students from Shalom participated in this voluntary program. But throughout the next few years participation grew steadily. By the beginning of the 1964–1965 school year it became apparent that many congregants of Shalom wanted their children to learn and use the Hebrew language.

A Department of Hebrew Studies was established at the congregation with Rabbi Pastor, Mrs. Benjamin Elbaum, and Mrs. Maurice Lerner at its helm. Together with other interested members they planned a four year curriculum for children aged 9–13. Matching the congregation's values at the time, seven global objectives were implemented in creating a Hebrew program at Shalom: "(1) Training in reading and writing Hebrew (2) Mastery of basic vocabulary (3) Elements of grammar (4) Ability to read and comprehend the Prayerbook and Bible (5) Ability to understand Hebrew conversation (6) Recognition and appreciation of Hebrew as it takes its place in enriching our Jewish way of life (7) Integration, whenever possible, of our Hebrew program within our Religious School program."¹⁰⁴ One can see from these principles that liturgical and spoken Hebrew were taking on increasingly important roles in the congregation's identity. By the end of the first year of the mid-week Hebrew School there were 100 students enrolled. Within the next few years the program was so successful that it became a standard part of the religious education at Shalom. Some of the goals of the program were not reached. Students never had a fluent understanding of conversational Hebrew,

¹⁰⁴ Weber, Michael, VP in Charge of Hebrew School. Letter to Congregation. May, 1964. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

and there was little integration between the Hebrew School and the Religious School. However, it was felt throughout the membership that the Hebrew program was an invaluable asset to the congregation.

Building Expansion and Beautification

With enrollment around 500 students in the Religious School and growing enrollment in the Hebrew School it became apparent that the congregation was physically running out of space. Coat closets were being used as classrooms, books were scattered all over the building as there was no one official library. Office space was even being used as classroom space. At the same time, members of the congregation were eager to make their sanctuary a more refined and permanent prayer space. The Sanctuary, which until early in 1963 had removable seating, was connected with the social hall and could be opened up to be one large room. In early 1963 permanent pews were installed in the eastern half of the Sanctuary facing the bima, and gold carpeting was installed. The installation of permanent pews and carpeting dedicated the Sanctuary as permanent sacred space. Upon completing this project it was determined that a separate social hall and bigger kitchen would need to be constructed in the near future.

Just as the first renovation to the Sanctuary was near completion, President Paul Spector appointed a special committee to review the building needs and plan for expansion. It was decided that a new facility would be added to the south side of the current building. The structure was to be one and one-half stories high, with eight steps leading down to one section of the building and eight steps leading up to another section of the building. The plan called for six new classrooms on the ground floor, storage space

and space that could be finished as a youth lounge, a large, new social hall, a larger new kitchen, larger cloak rooms, expanded office space, a permanent library space, and more administrative space. Much like the first time the congregation built, they slowly raised the money for the project and were able to complete it early in 1968. President Harry Samson was instrumental in the building's completion.

On March 15, 1968, President Isador Abrams invited the congregation to the dedication ceremony for the new structure. He was careful to indicate that Shalom would remain a warm and intimate place, even though its walls had been expanded. "More than just a handsome structure, it can become, with our love and proper utilization of its fine facilities, a warm, inviting social and cultural center—a valued adjunct to our place of worship."¹⁰⁵ Along with the new facility, a permanent library, the Sherman Pastor Memorial Library, opened and was dedicated in 1970. The library quickly became an invaluable resource to the congregants of Shalom and the greater Jewish community.

With the new structure in place, the congregation began again to operate as normal. With permanent seating in the Sanctuary and a social hall at the South end of the building, the congregation really felt that they had created a permanent sacred space. However, many congregants felt that the Sanctuary needed still more beautification. In 1970 Isador and Florence Abrams donated a beautiful stained glass window which stretched from the floor of the bima to the ceiling in memory of their son Lt. John Leon Abrams who was killed in Vietnam. The window portrays Jacob's dream from the book of Genesis, in which Jacob dreams of a ladder to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it.

¹⁰⁵ Abrams, Isador. Letter to Congregation. March, 1968. *Congregation Shalom Archives*.

Just five years later, in the middle of the 1970s, another beautification project began, which would inspire a dramatic renovation of the Sanctuary. Congregant and then amateur artist Suzi Derzon, designed a series of needlepoint projects to beautify the sanctuary. The first of the projects was to design needlepoint backs for the chairs on the bima, each one representing a different Jewish holiday. "I didn't know enough about them [the Jewish holidays]. I took Hebrew lessons. The rabbi helped me a lot. I had to study."¹⁰⁶ While Suzi Derzon designed the project, she did not make the needlepoint chair backs on her own. Members of the sisterhood donated many hours working on each of the eight chairs. To keep the stitching uniform, each chair had only one person working to complete it. Upon the dedication of the chairs in May of 1976, congregants commented on how much color and life they brought to the space. Before long, money had been contributed to give the entire Sanctuary a facelift inspired by Derzon's designs. According to the article in the *Milwaukee Journal*, "In the synagogue, one improvement led to another until the whole room's interior was remodeled. Ceiling beams were installed. Siding was removed from the side walls and the lighting was changed. The narrow steps to the pulpit area were extended across the entire front of the room. These were carpeted and the same kind of carpeting was used down the middle aisle. The weave of the carpeting has a needlepoint quality and it's a medley of colors in the deep coral family. New pulpits of walnut were designed and built. The center of interest, the Torah ark, was redesigned with handsome walnut doors. Potente Studios of Kenosha, a religious design firm did much of this remodeling work; Mrs. Derzon was a consultant to Eugene

¹⁰⁶ Roberts, Patricia. "Needlework inspires Remodeling Project." *Milwaukee Journal*.

Potente. 'I designed the handles on the doors of the Ark' she said."¹⁰⁷ The Ark door handles are representations of the letters 'lamed' and 'vav' intertwined. "The numerical value of these two letters is thirty-six. According to Jewish tradition there are thirty-six righteous men in each generation."¹⁰⁸ One of the two menorahs which flanked the Ark was taken down and in its place a Hebrew passage from the book of Micah was installed in dark bronze. "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Large eleven-foot tapestries line the inside of the doors of the Ark and feature the Lions of Judah. "Since they are toothless, their guardianship is spiritual, not physical."¹⁰⁹

By the end of 1978, a project that started as an idea to add a splash of color to the sanctuary turned into a full-fledged remodeling unequaled since the building opened in 1955.¹¹⁰ The congregation felt that its prayer space was enhanced and dignified. The renovation of the sanctuary, and before that the school building, were indications that the congregation's leadership wanted to again demonstrate to the membership and to the larger Jewish community that Shalom was something of which to be proud. In the sanctuary, the new colors, woodwork, and lighting warmed up the space even more. The physical prayer space now helped forward the congregation's mission of a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The renovated school building was large and airy, with an eye toward innovation. The congregation was again quite proud of its accomplishments.

Conclusion

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Derzon, Suzi. "The Sanctuary" Descriptions of renovations. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ See Appendix C

Throughout the 1960s with the turbulent world ever-changing around them, and the looming apathy of the 1970s, the congregants of Shalom found ways to make meaning in their lives through Social Action, Education and Worship. As Shalom continued to grow and mature throughout these decades, the ways in which the staff and congregants created meaning in their lives evolved as well. Gone were the simple days of dinner dances and services in the rented church. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s members of Shalom looked to their community to elevate their spirits and make their community, the country, and the world a better place.

Chapter 4

Redefining Shalom

A New Rabbi

As Congregation Shalom began its 25th year on Milwaukee's North Shore, its leader, Rabbi Harry Pastor celebrated his 65th birthday with the entire congregation. The congregation continued to grow slowly through the middle of the 1970s and stagnated at around 600 families by the end of the 1970s. It soon became clear to the board of trustees of the congregation and to many congregants that Rabbi Pastor was slowing down, becoming less able to fully serve the congregation as he once had. Health problems plagued Rabbi Pastor as he aged, and problems with his legs made it hard for him to stand from time to time. Late in 1977 the board of Congregation Shalom decided to form a rabbinical search committee to hire an Assistant Rabbi. The committee put together a packet of information about Congregation Shalom and sent it to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (known today as the Union for Reform Judaism), from where it would be distributed to potential rabbinic candidates. However, due to a clerical error, the application ended up with the applications for Associate Rabbis, rabbis who already had some experience as pulpit rabbis rather than new ordainees. The committee interviewed a number of interested candidates and offered the job to one of them. That candidate ended up taking a job elsewhere in the country. Soon after, the committee met Rabbi Ron Shapiro, and according to long-time member Jackie Gilbert Askot, "Everyone who met

Ron loved him immediately.”¹¹¹ There were a number of people involved in interviewing Rabbi Shapiro who remembered him from his days as the Urban Intern in the summer of 1970. Soon after the interview process ended, Rabbi Shapiro was offered the job as Associate Rabbi of Congregation Shalom.

Ron Shapiro was born in the late 1940s to a loving family in Minneapolis Minnesota. Jewish culture, learning, and religious observance were very important to his family. From a very early age, Ron entertained the idea of becoming a rabbi. He enjoyed sitting in synagogue, praying in Hebrew and speaking in public. Judaism was an important dynamic in his life. In high school Shapiro became active in BBYO and eventually worked his way up to a leadership role in the region. Though his speaking and leadership skills began to develop in high school, his interest in becoming a rabbi had subsided by then.

Following high school, he went to the University of Minnesota, where he planned to major in Political Science and History, with an eye toward going to law school. This greatly interested him. However, between sophomore and junior year of college, in the summer of 1967, Ron went on a United Jewish Appeals (UJA) University Study Mission. During this trip, Ron’s group traveled first to Europe for a few weeks, and then spent time in Israel. It was there, during that trip, that Ron Shapiro’s interest in becoming a rabbi was rekindled. “It was July of 1967,” he said. “The war had just ended. There were still live shells and mines at the Golan. We were escorted everywhere by heavy military guards. It was such an impressionable time for me. There was a palpable feeling of euphoria in Israel that summer. It was contagious. There was a feeling of surprise even

¹¹¹ Personal Interview with Jackie Gilbert Askot. December 10, 2007

among the Israelis who were there—so much excitement... the might of the Jew. It was such an inspiring time.”¹¹²

Ron Shapiro returned to Minneapolis that fall and began teaching and running youth groups at Temple Israel. He developed a relationship with a Reform rabbinical student named Leigh Lerner who became Ron’s mentor while working in Minneapolis. As a result of that relationship, the Reform movement’s strong bent toward social action, and Ron’s evolution as a liberal Jew, Ron Shapiro applied to HUC-JIR and began studying to be a Reform rabbi in 1969. He was ordained in 1974.

That first trip to Israel following the 1967 war, helped shape Ron Shapiro’s rabbinate. He worked from then on, to bring that exuberance and excitement about Judaism to everything he did, and to every congregation he served. He was the Assistant Rabbi in Rochester, New York for four years, when he learned that a job would be available at Congregation Shalom in Milwaukee. Rabbi Shapiro recalled, “I met Rabbi Pastor a few years earlier when we co-officiated a friend’s wedding at HUC in Cincinnati, where the bride was from Congregation Shalom... I found him an immediately a warm and caring man... That summer in 1970, Judy and I really loved Milwaukee and thought it was a great city in which to live... I didn’t anticipate a life in Milwaukee until I saw that Rabbi Pastor was looking for an Associate Rabbi and it seemed as if he would have been interested in retiring when he was 70 years old. So I thought this would be a place where Judy and I could settle.”¹¹³

In the summer of 1978, Rabbi Ron, Judy, and their son Benjamin Shapiro moved from Rochester, New York to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to become the second full-time

¹¹² Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro. October 9, 2007

¹¹³ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ron Shapiro. October 9, 2007

rabbi in Congregation Shalom's history. Throughout the 1980s and up to the present, Congregation Shalom and Rabbi Ron Shapiro have become virtually synonymous with each other. Almost immediately, Ron's vision and leadership for the congregation became its driving force. In this chapter we will document the growth of Congregation Shalom in the 1980s, and analyze how Ron Shapiro's vision for the congregation enabled a dramatic change throughout his tenure.

Change Begins

As the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s faded, Congregation Shalom stood in a new place in the Milwaukee Jewish community. With the excitement of starting a new congregation a distant memory, in the mid 1970s Congregation Shalom became an astoundingly quiet place. Rabbi Pastor felt that a congregation should serve basic functions: pastoral care, spiritual care, and education. His dislike of everything "big" shaped the way he ran the synagogue. In 1978, a record clean-up revealed there were 550 member families in the congregation. At the same time, there was almost no programming happening in the building during the week. The congregation celebrated life-cycle events and the Religious and Hebrew schools met, but the congregation felt the lack of a creative spirit.

With the hiring of Rabbi Shapiro, this began to change. Almost immediately, he was put in charge of programming and innovating the synagogue. Rabbi Pastor continued to do many life-cycle events, but put Rabbi Shapiro in charge of cultivating creative programs especially for young families and youth. "When I came in 1978, Rabbi Pastor

really gave me much of the responsibility of running the day to day operation of the synagogue. I was even the principal of the Hebrew School,” Rabbi Shapiro recalled.¹¹⁴

Young Family Programming

In the late 1970s, there were two programs developed by Rabbi Shapiro that began to change the face of Shalom. The first was the creation of *havurot*, small groups within the congregation. The Havurah movement was a product of the late 1960s and 1970s, when many younger congregants felt lost in larger congregations. The concept of the Havurah movement came from a group in Somerville, Massachusetts, that created a new community “...devoted to fellowship, peace, community, and a ‘new model of serious Jewish study...’ The idea, borrowed in part from Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1968), was to jettison the bourgeois middle-class values of suburbia and to re-imagine Judaism.”¹¹⁵

However, as time passed, the counter-culture groups soon moved from the margin of Jewish society to the mainstream. Historian Jonathan Sarna writes, “Reform and Conservative synagogues put the *havurah* idea to work within their own institutions to promote the ‘humanization and personalization’ of worship and the democratization of synagogue life. In place of the large formal synagogue service, these *havurot* adopted sixties-era ideals, including egalitarianism, informality, cohesive community, active participatory prayer, group discussion and unconventional forms of governance.”¹¹⁶ At Shalom, these groups, some of which still meet today, met socially, sometimes with some

¹¹⁴ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ron Shapiro. October 9, 2007

¹¹⁵ Sarna, Jonathan D. “Renewal” *American Judaism*. Yale University Press. New Haven, CT and London, England. 2004. p.320-321

¹¹⁶ Ibid

religious programming, and every member of the *havurah* was a member of Congregation Shalom. While the vast majority of these *havurot* died out over time, some continue to actively meet and innovate thirty years later. The formation of these *havurot* helped spark a new excitement in the congregation among its younger members and even began to draw in new members.

In the Shalom Shofar of October, 1978, an article called "A Havu-What?" was published by Rabbi Shapiro and the newly formed *Havurah* committee.

"If you seek to enrich the Jewish experience in your lives; if you wish to share Jewish 'happenings' with your children; if you desire to meet more Jewish friends within the congregation, the a havurah is for you.

A havurah is a Jewish fellowship group comprised of a limited number of people within each group. In this manner, a small number of people may come to know each other well and benefit together by Jewish celebration.

We hope to create family havurot (plural for havurah), havurot for single adults, or havurot for couples. The variety of activities that may be planned are limitless. Some groups plan a family retreat; some may plan family holiday celebrations; others may seek to plan social service programs..."¹¹⁷

A careful look at this brief article illustrates the changing mission of the congregation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With Rabbi Pastor nearing age 70, almost all of the synagogue happenings were coordinated by Rabbi Shapiro. This document

¹¹⁷ Schuckit, Dr. William, Chair of the Havurah Committee. *Shalom Shofar*, October 1978. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

alone demonstrates Ron Shapiro's desire to serve his members in a new way. In 1978 Congregation Shalom began evolving from a synagogue that served its congregants on Shabbat, in times of need, and for life-cycle events, to a synagogue that was becoming a social and educational center for its members.

Along with the havurot, there was increased programming during the week at Congregation Shalom. Starting almost immediately after he was hired, Rabbi Shapiro, in conjunction with the Sisterhood, started teaching weekly classes designed to bring new life to the temple halls. One course was called *Women of the Bible*. "The course will explore the colorful lives of those women who forged the birth and growth of our faith. Further, students will explore the human lives of these women. What were their joys and sorrows, hopes and concerns?"¹¹⁸ Along with the Sisterhood class, a group called "Shalom Seniors" was also formed. The name was then changed to the "Young at Heart Seniors" and then to the "North Shore Group." The group met monthly for lunch and lectures with the rabbis and other teachers. Rabbi Shapiro and Rabbi Pastor worked together to make sure they were serving the older members of the congregation who had been its founders 30 years earlier. However, a tension was introduced in the congregation that exists today as well: How does a congregation alter its programming, liturgy, and music in a way that is both forward-thinking and innovative and at the same time still familiar for the older congregants?

Throughout the end of the 1970s, this new and innovative style of programming caught the attention of many congregants, and rumors of a reinvigoration of Congregation Shalom were heard throughout the North Shore. By November of 1979, a

¹¹⁸ Kagen, Marlene, Sisterhood President. Shalom Shofar, October 1979. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

year after the havurah concept was introduced, there were a number of successful havurot that met regularly. Rabbi Shapiro wrote in 1979, "...Jewish education may take the form of informal gatherings, as well. The congregation can now proudly state that its many havurot enable people to join together and discuss Jewish issues."¹¹⁹

Along with the havurot, Shalom began building a nucleus of involved and interested young families by offering family retreats at the Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute, just west of Milwaukee. This type of programming was quite innovative and was perhaps the clearest catalyst for change in the congregation. The first of these family retreats was held during 1979. Rabbi Shapiro wrote, "Congregation Shalom has recently experienced a highly successful Family Retreat. Thirteen families joined together to share the splendor of a Shabbat at Camp Olin Sang Ruby. Together we studied, prayed, danced, laughed, and enjoyed the pleasure of each other's company... Another retreat for families with older children is being planned for this January. The reason for this planning: Jewish study must be nurtured so that we may pass on this magnificent treasure to our children and their children's children. We hope and we pray to achieve this noble endeavor."¹²⁰ Sherman Abrahamson, President of the congregation also wrote about the retreat. "My family and I enjoyed ourselves along with the other twelve families who participated. I know that there were new friendships made over the weekend and a reawakened warmth for Judaism..."¹²¹

These family retreats were effective in rallying the young families of the congregations for a number of reasons. First, the retreats enabled the participating

¹¹⁹ Shapiro, Rabbi Ron. Shalom Shofar, November 1979. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Abrahamson, Sherman, President of the Congregation. *Shalom Shofar* November, 1979.

families to connect with other temple members in a deeper and richer way than saying hello at Oneg following a service. Rabbi Shapiro and the congregants who planned the retreats sought to make each one a meaningful experience, where people could explore Judaism in a safe and encouraging way. Many of the congregants who participated in the earliest family retreats had never before experienced Shabbat as a complete unit of time. This helped enable them to understand and appreciate their Judaism in new and different ways. Most importantly, these weekend retreats allowed the congregants to spend time with Rabbi Shapiro in an informal setting.

While these types of programs were new to the Shalom community, more informal programming like camp retreat weekends were becoming the norm among the baby-boomer rabbis. Many of the young rabbis who were ordained in the early 1970s were products of the Reform movement camping programs. They understood the power of intimate prayer and spirituality in a camp setting. It was at the Reform movement camp that many young people made connections with rabbis as mentors, and later became rabbis themselves as a result. "More than any other Jewish camp, Union Institute emphasized direct contact with rabbis as a central feature of its program. Visiting rabbis were treated as celebrities... They taught the ninety-minute study sessions, led regular 'bull sessions' with participants, and were the camps' dominant personalities... Union Institute thus promoted closer relations between rabbis and young Reform Jews. Over time, it also stimulated many young people to enter the rabbinate."¹²²

¹²² Sarna, Jonathan. "The Crucial Decade in Jewish Camping." *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping*. Edited by Michael M. Lorge and Gary P. Zola. The University of Alabama Press. Tuscaloosa, AL. 2006

It is clear that Ron Shapiro and other rabbis of the baby boomer generation were highly influenced by the informality and the rabbinic presence of the Reform camping movement.

Closeness Through Informality

While Shalom had always prided itself on being a place of warmth and comfort, Shapiro brought a new level of closeness and camaraderie to the congregation. With the young Associate Rabbi and his family in the congregation, young people in the congregation began to see the rabbi in a closer and more informal way. During the weekend retreats suits and ties were exchanged for sweaters and Green Bay Packers attire. Rabbi Shapiro often played basketball, tennis, and football on those weekends and with congregants at the Jewish Community Center of Milwaukee. Back at Shalom, Rabbi Shapiro worked to make the sanctuary a more informal place. This was achieved in a couple of different ways. First, he would play guitar on the bima during services. This started out as something done occasionally, but later he would play guitar during services every Friday night. "Some people hated it, and a lot of young people really liked it; they thought it was unusual... It was really helpful in loosening up what was sort of a rigid structure, and it brought a certain dynamic that was important. It was almost Israeli... that sort of positive enthusiasm after the sixty-seven war reached Shalom at that point."¹²³

Rabbi Shapiro's informality on the bima could be felt in other ways as well. He often spoke spontaneously and joked with the congregation. As Ron Shapiro later became the Senior Rabbi, the style on the bima changed dramatically. Stanley Schickler, who

¹²³ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ron Shapiro. October 8, 2007

served as Rabbi/Educator during the middle of the 1980s remembers when Milwaukee Brewer Paul Molitor had a 39-game hitting streak. During that time, whenever there was a game played on a Friday night, the Temple janitor, Jim Wang, would stand in a doorway between the library and the *bima*, so only the rabbis could see him, and would hold up signs after Molitor got a hit. Whichever rabbi was at the lectern at that moment had the privilege of announcing the hit to the congregation. Rabbi Schickler commented, “It was the sort of place where you could do that.”¹²⁴ Ron Shapiro commented, “Sort of a change in style occurred. My manner was different than Rabbi Pastor’s. His was a little more formal. He had a good sense of humor and told good stories and jokes, but his manner was more reflective of the 1950s in terms of the position of the rabbinate vis-à-vis the synagogue. I tried to break that down by more spontaneity—that was important to really spend as much time as possible glorifying the character of the individual who was being addressed at that moment, for example at a bar mitzvah. We made a certain change to personalize the bar mitzvah as much as possible... I think the atmosphere changed. There was much more participation, people became more involved.”¹²⁵

Through the informality of these weekend retreats, the congregants of Shalom grew closer to Rabbi Shapiro and his family and understood the rabbinate in a new way. Everyone called Ron Shapiro, and later his assistant rabbis, by their first names. Rabbi Shapiro was not alone in this informality. The desire for a more informal rabbi was at the core of Congregation Shalom and many other suburban synagogues that sprouted up in the 1950s.

¹²⁴ Personal Interview with Rabbi Stanley Schickler. February 7, 2008

¹²⁵ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ron Shapiro. October 8, 2007

Ironically, in the 1950s, Rabbi Pastor was selected to build Shalom because he was more informal, more friendly than his predecessors at Emanu-El. But as a result of the 1960s and the changing role of the rabbinate, Rabbi Pastor's style of rabbinic leadership became passé. The result of the change in the role of the rabbinate was an informal rabbi, who was approximately the same age his or her congregants, could relate to them on their level, and exuded joy and warmth.

The Rabbinical Family

Another innovation that came to Shalom in the late 1970s with the hiring of Ron Shapiro was the concept of the "Rabbinical Family" as a leadership unit in the congregation. While Rabbi Pastor's wife, Sylvia, cared deeply about her husband and children, she never much cared to be in the role of "the rabbi's wife." She attended some of the congregational events, but she never had any sort of leadership role among any portion of the congregation. This changed considerably when Rabbi Shapiro and his wife, Judy, started in 1978. Even at the very beginning of her tenure as the rabbinic spouse at Congregation Shalom, she immediately immersed herself in congregational work. Judy took on a leadership role in the Sisterhood. She worked on coordinating and programming for the family retreats and was very often present at congregational services and events. Though Judy Shapiro is a strong and independent woman, her acceptance of the role of "rebbetzin," or rabbi's wife, was in opposition to the trend of the 1970s and early 1980s. As a result of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and its national support in the 1970s, some women felt that they could no longer fulfill the traditional roles.

In her book about the changing role of the rebbetzin, historian Shuly Rubin Schwartz wrote, "By the 1970s, the postwar supportive spouse found herself under attack from all quarters. Rebbetzins, because they functioned as the unpaid half of a two-person career, understood themselves to be especially easy targets. The derivative nature of a rebbetzin's status offended all that feminists stood for. Moreover, rebbetzins' volunteer duties sapped talents, energy, and creativity that feminists felt ought to have found an independent outlet elsewhere."¹²⁶ While some rabbis' wives were opposed to the role, Judy embraced it, feeling that she was truly part of the rabbinic team.

The End of the Pastor Years

By February of 1980, Rabbi Pastor announced to the board of the synagogue that he would be retiring on September 1 of that year. He felt that Ron Shapiro was a worthy successor and that the congregation was in good hands. In a bulletin article from February of 1980, the President wrote, "Rabbi Pastor stated that he will be 70 on October 5, 1980. He does not want to sever his relationship with Congregation Shalom as long as he lives, and will remain partly active in his retirement. He will not interfere with his successor or the prerogatives of his successor. There will be only one rabbi, but Rabbi Pastor will help with High Holidays, with the vacations of his successor, and will maintain an office for counseling (if it doesn't interfere with his successor doing such

¹²⁶ Schwartz, Shuly Rubin. "Please [Don't] Call Me Rebbetzin!" *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*. New York University Press. NY, NY and London, England. 2006

counseling)... It was moved by Mel Gilbert that commencing September 1, 1980, Ronald M. Shapiro shall become the Senior Rabbi of the Congregation Shalom."¹²⁷

While many congregants were sad to see their founding rabbi retire, there was also a sense of excitement for Rabbi Shapiro to help shape the congregation in new ways. Following retirement, Rabbi Pastor continued to do many funerals, weddings, and other lifecycle events for people he knew. "Rabbi Pastor still maintained his same office. That never changed. It was important to him, and he deserved that respect. He and I had an understanding that if someone were to come to him and ask him to do a lifecycle event that he would feel free to do so without asking my blessing or permission. I felt that he should not have to lower himself in a sense, to have to come to a younger colleague, when he had founded this congregation and created a lovely community... I felt that deserved more respect."¹²⁸ In a bulletin article from October of 1980, the month in which the congregation honored Rabbi Pastor, Shapiro wrote, "His ongoing mission to teach the ideals of the Jewish religion establishes Rabbi Pastor as a master among his people. His warm and empathetic manner has dignified him as a warm and helpful counselor. Congregation Shalom has grown in stature each year since its inception. Our Temple can proudly stand as a leader among liberal congregations. This standing is a tribute to Rabbi Pastor's leadership and capabilities. Personally, it has been an honor to work with, and learn from, Rabbi Pastor. His example of leadership, his gentle concern, his great hope

¹²⁷ Abrahamson, Sherman, President of the Congregation. Shalom Shofar, February, 1980. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹²⁸ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ron Shapiro. October 8, 2007

for the perpetuation of the Jewish people will serve as a challenge and a source of strength for each of us in the years ahead.”¹²⁹

Throughout the rest of Rabbi Pastor’s life he remained close to many members of Congregation Shalom. With the official title of “Founding Rabbi,” he gave occasional sermons, continued to help with High Holy Days, and to officiate at life-cycle events for those congregants closest to him. As Rabbi Pastor continued to age, he spent much of his time in warmer climates during the winter months. When in Milwaukee he made a point of stopping in his office daily, checking the mail, and saying hello to everyone in the building.

Near the end of his life, Harry Pastor became quite ill, having developed a brain tumor. He died on March 19, 1988. In the eulogy for Rabbi Pastor, President Aaron Starobin said, “Harry loved his Congregation. It was his family and he loved them as he did his own family of Cylvia, Andrea, David, Lisa, and Shana. When someone in his family or his Shalom family hurt, Harry hurt too. When they rejoiced, he rejoiced with them and for them, never trying to captivate the spotlight because his philosophy was to help, counsel, assist, and share—but never to dominate.”¹³⁰ Rabbi Shapiro said of his predecessor, “There are few people in this world as principled, kind, and sensitive to other people as Harry Pastor.”

Dramatic Growth at Congregation Shalom

¹²⁹ Shapiro, Rabbi Ron. Shalom Shofar, October, 1980. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹³⁰ Starobin, Aaron. Eulogy for Rabbi Harry B. Pastor. March 21, 1988. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

Throughout 1980 and into 1981, the members and staff at Congregation Shalom felt a definite change in the congregation generally. Young people and their families were becoming more involved in synagogue life at Shalom, and the building, full of activities throughout the week reflected that. The nucleus of young families that attended the family retreats and the various activities now being offered by Congregation Shalom started expanding into a larger pool. By the end of 1980 the congregation had grown from 550 families to 589 families. During the 1980–81 year, the congregation attracted 65 new families. With regular membership losses the net increase for the year was 48 families. Shalom stood at 637 member units in June of 1981.

The dramatic increase in families created new issues for the congregation to resolve. Could Rabbi Shapiro with some help from Rabbi Pastor take care of the spiritual needs of the congregation? Was the religious school equipped to handle the increase in registration? Would the congregation feel different with 700 families than it did at 550 families?

The board of the congregation, led by the first female president Jackie Gilbert, decided to continue to push forward with membership drives in the following years. As the membership at Shalom continued to grow, so too did the programming. There were programs like, “Sunday Night at the Movies,” which featured a Jewish movie with a discussion and commentary by Rabbi Shapiro. Adult Education continued during the week and one class was formally moved to Sunday mornings. This time change for Adult Education indicates how the congregation attempted to cater to its younger adults who had children in the religious school. The regular Sunday morning program was called, “Sunday Adult Education And/Or Jogging.” Some participants would meet early before

the class began, go for a jog together, and return to Temple to learn afterward. The *havurah* program continued, though its numbers were unimpressive. Regardless of the turnout, *havurot* continued to be formed for families, young families, young couples, singles, and seniors.

As steady growth of the congregation commenced with the 1980s, the leadership of Congregation Shalom had to quickly adapt its structure to keep up.

Tradition—Worship Services in the Early 1980s

As Rabbi Shapiro took the reigns as Senior Rabbi in 1980, he and the Temple Services Committee began to make small changes to worship services at Shalom. Members of the congregation had always felt that their services were in line with the mainstream of Reform Judaism. They bought the New Union Prayerbook, *Gates of Prayer* very soon after its publication and started using it along with the *Union Prayerbook*. In 1980, High Holy Day services were conducted using *Gates of Repentance*, on which Rabbi Shapiro taught a number of classes in the months leading up to the High Holy Days. Along with the more traditional prayerbook and machzor that the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) published and Rabbi Shapiro's more informal style, a return to some traditional ritual practices began as well. This return to tradition was part of a national trend.

Historian Jonathan Sarna notes, "The American synagogue, as a result, became less performance-oriented in the late twentieth century. Where once congregants expected to sit back passively to watch a service choreographed by the rabbi and the cantor, perhaps with the assistance of the choir and the organist, now more of them

expected to participate in the service actively: praying aloud, singing, and even dancing in the aisles... Among Reform Jews, these changes were accompanied by a visible return to once-discarded Jewish customs and practices—an extension of the neo-Reform trend of the 1950s. Growing numbers of men and women chose to don head coverings and prayer shawls in their temples, reversing the late nineteenth century move to spurn these practices as ‘Oriental,’ and providing women, for the first time, the opportunity to wear the same religious garb as men.”¹³¹

During the tenure of Rabbi Pastor, Ron Shapiro never wore a kippah on the bima. He felt that honoring Rabbi Pastor’s tradition was of the utmost importance. As he took over as Senior Rabbi though, Rabbi Shapiro began wearing a kippah on the bima. He also began wearing a tallit during morning and bar/bat mitzvah services as well. “In 1980 I did start wearing a kippah and we initiated along with the Temple Services Committee, encouraging people to wear tallesim. That’s when we put a tallis rack out in the back of the sanctuary. And I remember there was some controversy about that—in what direction were we going; are we becoming a very Conservative congregation?” Eventually, kippot and tallitot became a regular fixture in the sanctuary of Shalom, though there are many members who do not don them for worship services.

Another change earlier in 1980 was an attempt at a weekly Saturday morning worship service. Prior to this change, the only service on a Shabbat morning would be a bar or bat mitzvah service. In a bulletin article from January, it says, “Did you know that there is a worship service at Shalom every Saturday morning? It’s complete with prayer, singing, Kaddish, Torah study, and a Kiddush. At 10:30am in the Shalom library, the

¹³¹ Sarna, Jonathan D. “Renewal” *American Judaism*. Yale University Press. New Haven, CT and London, England. 2004. p.321

Rabbis conduct a worship-study service for any who care to attend... For a truly meaningful Shabbat worship experience, won't you join us for Saturday morning at Shalom?" The Shabbat morning drew a very small group of people to the synagogue for informal discussion and learning.

Along with the weekly Shabbat morning service, the more traditional practice of observing the second day of holidays began as well. This additional service was the result of a group of more traditional congregants asking Rabbi Shapiro to implement the reform.

Finally, as the 1980s continued and the congregation continued to grow, a daily afternoon minyan was added on Monday through Thursday at 5:45pm. This daily minyan gave people a time to say Kaddish for a loved one or to have a daily prayer experience. Its consistency throughout the 1980s was questionable at best. From the mid 1990s forward, the service continued to be successful drawing in a mix of regular prayer-goers and people saying Kaddish for loved ones.

These changes to services were subtle, but gave congregants of Shalom new ways to express their Judaism. It also brought new members to the community. In the 1980s a number of people who considered themselves Conservative Jews joined the congregation because they felt a spiritual connection to Rabbi Shapiro and felt that Shalom was traditional enough for their level of observance. This return to tradition shaped the way Congregation Shalom developed as it grew rapidly in the 1980s.

Israel

Having been in Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War, and experiencing the jubilation of the Jewish people surrounding that victory, Ron Shapiro had a deep connection to the Holy Land. Like his predecessor, Rabbi Shapiro often gave political and spiritual sermons about Israel and connection to Israel. In 1983 he wrote an article in the *Shalom Shofar* about supporting Israel even when the international community is condemning and vilifying it. "We have an investment in that land of Israel. That investment consists of the hopes and aspirations of law-givers and prophets, psalmists and scholars, who have provided an enhanced notion of morality to the peoples of the earth. Certainly we must be concerned when Jewish armies muster arms, not to mention engage fellow humans in battle, and yet we realize the reality of history—a strong Israel is the only means to ensure its survival and its quest to go forth as a 'light unto the nations.' We pray for the welfare of Israel, both its physical welfare as well as its spiritual welfare."¹³²

While *Shalom* offered many programs and speakers to learn about Israel, Rabbi Shapiro and his wife Judy decided that a congregational trip to Israel would provide congregants with an invaluable connection to the Land. With departure set for June 28, 1981, a flyer went out in November to the congregation advertising the trip. "Congregation Shalom is proud to offer a deluxe tour to Israel escorted by Rabbi and Mrs. Ronald Shapiro. Accommodations in Deluxe-First Class Hotels as follows: Haifa, 2 nights, Dan Carmel; Kibbutz Ayelet Hashachar, 1 Night, Guest House; Tel Aviv, 3

¹³² Shapiro, Rabbi Ronald M. Message from the Rabbi, *Shalom Shofar*. November, 1983. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

Nights, Plaza; Sodom, Dead Sea, 1 Night, Morian Hotel; Jerusalem, 6 Nights, Jerusalem Plaza.”¹³³

This first congregational trip to Israel was a huge success—so much so that another trip was planned soon after. By the end of the 1980s, there was a congregational trip to Israel planned for every other year. “We have taken between 550 and 750 people to Israel over the years. Those people tend to gravitate back to the synagogue. They didn’t just filter away—they’re active, they stay active. There is something about going to Israel and having these Jewish experiences abroad where you connect with people from the congregation on these trips. It is really remarkable. That occupied a certain dynamic in the congregation even on Friday nights in terms of what I would speak about.”¹³⁴ Israel programming and education have remained important to Ron Shapiro’s rabbinate through to the present.

Assistant Rabbi Hired

In the early winter of 1982, it became clear to the synagogue board that Rabbi Shapiro needed an Assistant Rabbi to help run the rapidly growing congregation. By 1982 there were more than 690 family units in the congregation, many of which were young families with lots of life-cycle needs. After an extensive interview process, the congregation hired Rabbi Dena Feingold, who had recently been ordained from the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Following in the footsteps of Student Rabbi Sally Priesand who in 1970 was on the Shalom pulpit for the High Holy Days, Rabbi Feingold was the first woman rabbi to serve a pulpit in

¹³³ Congregation Shalom Shofar. November, 1980. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹³⁴ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ron Shapiro. November 8, 2007

Wisconsin. In an article in the Milwaukee Journal at the beginning of her tenure at Shalom, Rabbi Feingold said, "Once they meet me and see I can do and do well all the things that they expect a rabbi to do, there's very little problem accepting me as a rabbi and coming to appreciate me in that role."¹³⁵ After a very short amount of time at Shalom, Feingold felt that was exactly what had happened—the people were so warm and welcoming and were excited to have a woman rabbi. They felt like they were again on the cutting edge.

Drawing on his days as an Associate Rabbi, Ron Shapiro gave Rabbi Feingold enough responsibility so that she spread her wings. "I focused on youth and education. But we sort of shared everything. Ron and I both did hospital visits, but he did most of the weddings and funerals. If there was one that he couldn't do, I would do it. If he had too many conversion students, he would give them to me. I learned a lot from him just watching how he would handle a family at a bar mitzvah, getting the family involved in the participation of the service. I learned a lot about being with people from Ron. He was never too busy to stop and talk to someone in the hallway. He always made time for people who wanted to see him. He wasn't a planner or an organizer, and we would often do things spontaneously, which was hard for me, because I am such a planner and like to know exactly what I was doing at all times. But working with Ron Shapiro was one of the main reasons I came to Shalom. I could tell he cared about me as a person as opposed to looking at me as someone who could help him professionally. That's how he continues to

¹³⁵ Levin, Paul. "Woman Rabbi is Wisconsin First." Milwaukee Journal 1982.
Congregation Shalom Archives

treat his congregants today... He always put a priority on that personal relationship. He was a wonderful mentor.”¹³⁶

Rabbi Feingold quickly found her place at Shalom. At that point, there was no formally trained Jewish educator in the building, so Rabbi Feingold was doing much of that work along with the part-time Principal of the Religious School. She also taught adult education classes, preached, and advised the youth group.

At the annual meeting in 1985, Religious Vice-President Thomas M. Weiss said, “We are also fortunate to have Rabbi Feingold, our Assistant Rabbi, who also inspires us in her intellectual, social-action, and youth-oriented activities. Although Rabbi Feingold will leave our congregation this year, she has left a permanent mark with us.”¹³⁷

Professional Staff Grows

In the Spring of 1985, Rabbi Feingold decided to pursue a solo pulpit. As she prepared to leave, the congregation continued to evolve. With the congregation at over 785 family units in 1985, a strain could be felt in every aspect of the congregation. The building, which hadn’t undergone a significant renovation since 1968, was overcrowded for Religious School and Hebrew School. Shalom started offering three services for each of the High Holy Days in order to fit everyone in the sanctuary. The staff: a part-time administrator and two secretaries, was working overtime to make the congregation function. Rabbi Shapiro could feel a tangible difference in the congregation. “I really felt

¹³⁶ Personal interview with Rabbi Dena Feingold. November 19, 2007

¹³⁷ Weiss, Thomas. Vice President. June 8, 1985. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

the difference at 750 families. I will always remember that. It seemed at 750 families to feel like something else, maybe because of all the programming we added.”¹³⁸

Rabbi Shapiro and the Board decided to do some restructuring. They decided to hire a Rabbi/Educator so they would have a professional educator writing curriculum and running the Religious and Hebrew Schools. There was also a push to hire a Cantor to replace the Cantorial Soloists.

Near the end of 1984 a Cantorial Search Committee was formed to find a Cantor to serve the congregation. President Gary Mendelblatt wrote a letter to the congregation. He wrote, “As many of you had hoped our Board of Directors has approved a search for a full time graduate Cantor. YES, I SAID CANTOR! The Board feels that as the second largest congregation in this city we have a need to upgrade a meaningful part of our service—the music. A full-time person cannot only sing at services and B’nai mitzvahs, but also work with adult and children’s choirs and teach in the adult education programs as well as the religious school.”¹³⁹

In the following months, the committee decided to hire Cantor Larry Charson to fill the position. A founding member of the congregation who was on the search committee worried that Charson’s personality might clash with some of the congregants, but he was hired anyway and started in the summer of 1985. Cantor Charson had a “magnificent voice” according to some congregants. Charson sang at services and taught in the religious school. He often gave concerts and wrote some original music. However, his tenure at Shalom was brief. His style was formal at a time when the congregation was

¹³⁸ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro. October 9, 2007

¹³⁹ Mendelblatt, Gary. “Important Message from the President” Shalom Shofar. November, 1984. *Congregation Shalom Archives*.

becoming less formal on the bima. He was talented in teaching adults, but the bar/bat mitzvah program was more of a challenge. Two years after he started at Shalom, he was ready to leave.

At virtually the same time, the congregation hired Rabbi Stanley Schickler, a recently ordained rabbi from the Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Schickler was the first to fill a new role in the congregation of Rabbi/Educator. Schickler had some pulpit and pastoral responsibilities, but his main focus was on education and revitalizing the Religious and Hebrew Schools. In an introductory message he wrote, "My goals are to help put together a school, number one, where kids will feel comfortable and learn, and where teachers will feel comfortable and learn. I hope to make them feel comfortable in coming to the synagogue, so that it's not a foreboding place." Upon his hiring, Rabbi Schickler immediately began working on curricula and teacher training. He created a new program called "Open Hebrew" which was a Hebrew class for students who needed more one on one time in learning Hebrew. Rabbi Schickler recalled, "The part-time educators who were there before did a good job and I don't fault them at all. But as a full-time educator, my job was to really start developing the school. I spent much of my time writing curricula and really digging a foundation for the school. By the time I left we had a foundation and first floor built, and the educators who came after me built further and further."¹⁴⁰

Rabbi Schickler was known in the congregation for having a keen sense of humor and an easy manner about him. He worked well with children and helped to reshape the school. While there were a number of excellent teachers on the teaching staff, the school

¹⁴⁰ Personal Interview with Rabbi Stanley Schickler. February 7, 2008

lacked creativity. Near the end of Rabbi Schickler's tenure at Shalom, it was suggested that the Rabbi/Educator job should be split, and to hire a professional Educator. This idea took shape a few years later.

Social Action

Near the beginning of the 1980s, there was a revival of the Social Action Committee that been dormant since the early 1970s. The Social Action Committee's mission was slightly different in 1983 than it was in the turbulent 1960s. Rather than political action, the Social Action Committee of the 1980s was more concerned with local and global social issues. One such issue was hunger and poverty in Milwaukee. Ellen Abrams-Blankenship, who was instrumental in reactivating the defunct group, wrote a letter to the congregation called, *A Call for Help*. She wrote, "Hunger is a chronic problem in Milwaukee, as elsewhere, including within the Jewish community. Please donate non-perishable items as often as possible. For a list of the most needed items see the bulletin board at Temple... If you can help out in any or all of these worthy endeavors, it will go a long way in taking away the chill of an otherwise lonely day for many of our city's poor." During the 1980s, Shalom would send volunteers weekly to a local food pantry to help serve and to cook meals for the needy. The St. Ben's food donation program is still an active program in the congregation today.

Another important issue throughout the 1980s was Soviet Jewry. Rabbi Shapiro was passionate about work with Soviet Jews throughout the 1980s. "The activity that I did with Soviet Jewry was important for me and extensive. It started off by going to a number of national meetings, especially through the National Council on Soviet Jews. I

would write about it here and try to send material to the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle. At one of those meetings I listened to Senator [Charles] Grassley, a Christian from the state Iowa.” Ron Shapiro paraphrased Senator Grassley saying, “‘I went to the Soviet Union and there learned what it meant to be an American.’ He said, ‘They were fighting so tenaciously to assert their religious freedom and their desire to assemble as a religious community. Being with them made me think about the earliest of American colonists who fought for their freedom. Since then,’ he said, ‘I have become a very staunch supporter of Soviet Jews and their right to go free. I’ll never forget that trip.’ That planted a seed with me. I thought I’d love to go there some day. So I went to Chicago often and was involved with the Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry group and did programming here at Temple, particularly in the Religious School. That was a period of time when we would set up conference calls for classes, especially Confirmation, where we would call a family in the Soviet Union and speak with them, so that we would maintain a contact with them.”¹⁴¹

Like many other congregations in the 1980s, Shalom started a twinning program where a bar mitzvah family would “adopt” a twin whose picture would sit on the bima during the bar or bat mitzvah service. Education about Soviet Jewry continued in most of the grades of the Religious School in some way or another.

The Social Action committee and then the larger congregation became involved as well. The congregation “adopted” Refusenik, Vladimir Tsukerman, and attempted to work on his behalf for his freedom. In early December of 1980 a special letter went out to the congregation saying, “The bonds of tyranny and depression are rapidly being drawn

¹⁴¹ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro. November 20, 2007

around our adopted Refusenik, Valdimir Tsukerman. Your attendance and willingness to sign a letter at our special Oneg Shabbat this Friday, December 12th at 8:15pm, could well make the difference between slavery and freedom for this courageous Jew.”¹⁴²

In 1983, with only his wife and the Temple President knowing, Rabbi Shapiro made a secret trip to the Soviet Union. He and a businessman from Chicago named Mitchell Morris made a clandestine visit to 25 Jewish families throughout the Soviet Union. Rabbi Shapiro brought care packages of Jewish artifacts, prayer books, Passover food, Kosher wine, and more to families in need. Upon a customs check while entering the country, Shapiro was able to convince the guard that the items were for his personal use. Each day of the trip, as the rest of their “tour group” would get on busses to see local attractions, Rabbi Shapiro and Mr. Morris would track down their list of families given to them by the Chicago Council on Soviet Jewry.

While meeting with the families, Rabbi Shapiro did a number of baby namings, affixed mezuzot to door-posts, conducted a bar mitzvah, and let each family know that American Jewry cared about them and was supporting them. He listened to the families and often did some sort of Jewish teaching. According to Rabbi Shapiro, it was the most incredible week of his life. “I’ll never in my life forget about those people,” he told the Milwaukee Journal. “These people that I used to read about now live before my eyes as flesh and blood human beings who desire so desperately to be free human beings.”¹⁴³

Upon his return, members of Shalom were both proud of their rabbi and excited to continue making progress with the situation of Soviet Jews. This and other world Jewry

¹⁴² Shalom Social Action Committee, Letter to Congregation. December, 1980.
Congregation Shalom Archives

¹⁴³ Murphy, Mary Beth. “Rabbi Secretly tells Soviet Jews of West’s Concern.”
Milwaukee Journal; Congregation Shalom Archives

issues, along with issues of poverty and hunger in Milwaukee, constituted the bulk of the Social Action Committee's work during the 1980s.

Cantorial Soloist Hired—A New Era Begins

In 1987, following the two-year term of Cantor Charson, a committee at Congregation Shalom was formed to find a new Cantor for the congregation. Interviews happened in Spring of 1987, with the committee auditioning a number of candidates. In the end, it was not a Cantor, rather a Cantorial Soloist, Karen Berman who most impressed the committee. Karen was a young mother at the time, teaching Hebrew at Shalom during the week and singing on the bima of Beth Hillel Temple in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on many Friday nights. After receiving a call from Stanley Schickler urging her to apply for the job of "Cantor," Karen hesitantly decided to apply. At the suggestion of Rabbi Shapiro, members from the committee interviewed Karen, were impressed with her voice, but seemed to not take her seriously, as they were looking for a Cantor. Before leaving the interview, Berman informed the committee that along with singing, she was an experienced teacher, a bar/bat mitzvah coordinator, and was knowledgeable in general Judaica. Philip Himmelfarb, President of the Congregation at the time remarked, "Karen was the best in terms of voice and personality—she was just all around a great candidate... Hiring Karen was one of the best decisions I ever helped make."¹⁴⁴

Cantorial Soloist Berman had an easy-going manner about her, played guitar, and immediately distinguished herself and endeared herself to the congregation. Starting in May 1987, Karen Berman led music for Friday night services, bar and bat mitzvah

¹⁴⁴ Personal Interview with Philip Himmelfarb, President in 1987. December 2007.

services, festival services and the High Holy Days. It was soon apparent to Rabbi Shapiro and the board of the congregation that Karen was a success both on and off the bima.

“Soon we saw Karen really working out well. She has a strong work ethic and is a really great teacher for kids and for adults. Years went by and she assumed that position of teacher. It was natural for her to assume the position also of Bar Mitzvah Coordinator. And as the bar mitzvahs grew, and they really grew to classes of about sixty or so, she did a great job coordinating and working with the teachers.”¹⁴⁵

“I worked quite hard to learn many new pieces of music during that first summer at Shalom. I probably learned fifteen new pieces of music for the High Holy Days.”¹⁴⁶

With Cantorial Soloist Karen Berman, the nature of worship services changed yet again. With her lilting voice and her guitar playing, Karen invited more participation from the congregation. While congregants would often listen to the melodies from the bima, they felt that they could sing along as well. The congregation, while still being more traditional than the center of the movement, still had some Classical Reform elements to it. They expected an operatic voice to sing the prayers to them, especially on the High Holy Days.

For the first two years of High Holy Days that Karen Berman was at Shalom, she was joined on the pulpit by Eliot Palay, a Wagnerian Opera singer who was originally from Milwaukee and a Shalom native. Palay would sing many of the big solos on the High Holy Days, while Karen Berman led more of the standard liturgy. By 1989, there was consensus that Karen Berman was able to lead the music for the High Holy Day

¹⁴⁵ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro. October 9, 2007

¹⁴⁶ Personal Interview with Cantor Karen Berman. January 11, 2008

worship on her own. That summer she again learned many new pieces as she prepared to lead Shalom in worship for the High Holy Days.

As Cantorial Soloist, Karen Berman was doing much of the work that a fully invested Cantor would do in a congregation like Shalom. She was teaching classes, leading music for services and lifecycle events, coordinating bar and bat mitzvah preparation, and meeting individually with bar mitzvah families. In the late 1980s the congregation began referring to Karen as "Cantor Berman." Then, six years after she began at Shalom, Cantor Berman was invested as an associate member and later in 1998, as a full member of the American Conference of Cantors.

Conclusion

As the 1980s drew to a close, it became clear to the congregants that Ron Shapiro and Karen Berman were the clergy team that would take the congregation into its next phase of existence. By 1989 the congregation had over 890 family units, about 330 more families than were in the congregation ten years earlier. The 1980s saw a rebirth of Shalom, and growth never before matched in the congregation's history. One congregant said, "We joined because of Ron, and we'll stay because of Ron. He's just an amazing person." At the end of the 1980s it was clear that Ron Shapiro's vision for the congregation as a place focused on the individual, a place filled with warmth and laughter, a place where the rabbis are full of compassion, was one that fit with the congregation of Shalom.

As the 1990s began, the leadership at Congregation Shalom started working on a new plan to retain the essence of Shalom—the essence of warmth and closeness with a congregational family far bigger than anyone could have dreamed.

Chapter 5

The Essence of Shalom

Throughout the first 30 years of Congregation Shalom, the congregation prided itself on being the warm, friendly, and intimate congregation in Milwaukee. However, the membership boom of the 1980s forced Shalom to quickly adopt a new model for running the synagogue. Historically, Shalom's personal touch—its warmth and intimacy—were what attracted many of its members. But by 1990, with a membership of over 900 families, Congregation Shalom faced a new challenge. Rabbi Shapiro, the staff, and the lay leadership of the congregation had to negotiate between running Shalom like the informal, friendly place it has always been, and the large business-like operation it needed to become. In this chapter, we will examine how Rabbi Shapiro and the staff of Shalom developed a new model for running the synagogue in response to the changing realities of its increasingly larger membership. We will examine how the physical structure of the building changed, which staff positions were created and who was hired for those positions and what kind of innovative programming occurred. We will chronicle the expansion of the once intimate, informal synagogue community and determine whether their efforts to retain their essence were successful.

Groundbreaking for the Third Time

In the summer of 1984, Adam Himmelfarb and Jackie Gilbert, co-chairs of the Long Range Planning Committee of Shalom issued the results of a two-year study project about the Temple's programming and facilities. Among their recommendations was a

complete renovation and expansion of the synagogue's facilities. Throughout the 1980s, while other recommendations of the Committee's report were accepted and implemented, the physical expansion of the grounds was too expensive and seemed out of reach. However, by the end of the 1980s, the building constructed in 1954 and designed for 500 families, continued to become more of a liability than an asset to the Congregation. With almost \$800,000 of deferred maintenance to the original building becoming more of an issue daily, the Long Range Planning Committee gathered with the Board of Trustees and the Executive Board and together launched a building campaign. They adopted the slogan "Building today for all our generations."¹⁴⁷

At the very end of 1989, a booklet was compiled and sent to every congregant making the case for a new physical structure for Shalom. In the front of the booklet, following the Statement of Principles drafted in 1951, Rabbi Shapiro wrote, "...For these reasons we want to continue to create and erect a sanctuary and structure in order to express to the world and to God our conviction that the Jewish way of life is honored, respected and one that we shall pass on to the next generation. Our hope to build expresses our quest to invest into the future; it suggests our commitment to toil with our hands and our hearts for the sake of our people and tradition; it shouts aloud our pride on our house of worship and the school in which our children may learn..."¹⁴⁸ Rabbi Shapiro and many people on the Temple board shared a vision of creating a structure for Shalom that would be worthy to pass on to the next generation. In his letter to the congregation, then President Harold W. Rosenthal wrote, "As we view our Synagogue, classrooms and

¹⁴⁷ Blumenthal, Wendy and Warren, Riches, Gayle and Bob, Co-Chairs of the Building Campaign. Letter to congregation. August 1990. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹⁴⁸ Shapiro, Rabbi Ronald M. Letter to Congregation, 10/16/89. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

other facilities representing the current achievements of our Congregation, we must also envision the thread of connecting our achievements with the goals and needs of future generations of Congregation Shalom members.”¹⁴⁹ After a year and a half of fundraising, planning, and revisioning the physical space of Congregation Shalom, a ground-breaking ceremony took place on Sunday, June 9, 1991. The event commemorated the 40th anniversary of the congregation.

Planning for the new facility was a step in maintaining the warmth and energy of the congregation for the future. The plans were designed by architect Thomas Torke of Wirth and Pujara, Ltd., and Eugene Potente Jr. of Potente Studios Inc. of Kenosha Wisconsin, a firm that specializes in liturgical design and renovation. Potente Studios was known to some of the congregants as the firm which remodeled the sanctuary in 1978. Resident artist and congregants Suzi Derzon helped with the design process and designed some of the artwork in the new building as well.

Along with Suzi Derzon, Eugene Potente Jr, and Tom Torke, a committee called The Sacred Space Committee was formed by Rabbi Shapiro and a group of congregants committed to making the synagogue a holy and deeply meaningful space. The committee met for a year before the construction began. Committee members studied texts, read books and articles about sacred space, and visited other religious institutions around Milwaukee and Chicago. The result was a series of recommendations to the builders and architects that personalized the space. They wanted a large and airy space with warm colors, lots of natural light and a large bima. According to Rabbi Shapiro, “Anytime a

¹⁴⁹ Rosenthal, Harold W. Letter to Congregation, 10/16/89. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

member of that committee walks in our sanctuary they are filled with great pride knowing that they helped create the space.”¹⁵⁰

The plans for the new construction called for an airy, enlarged sanctuary shaped in a semi-circle. The sanctuary was to seat 400 and would open up into a new more elegant social hall in order to seat 1500 people for the High Holy Day services.

Construction first began on the new sanctuary, which was to be built on the west lawn adjacent to the existing structure. The sanctuary, named by the Samson family, became the crowned jewel of the synagogue. After construction began, Rabbi Shapiro decided that there should be some sort of stained glass or faceted glass window on the pulpit, which was not in the original plan for the space. He thought it would be awe-inspiring and meaningful to have on the bima. Suzi Derzon met with Rabbi Shapiro and Eugene Potente Jr. and translated Shapiro’s idea into a practical design. An article appeared in the *Kenosha News* about the project. “Derzon developed the overall concept of the window, which includes these elements, symbolically important to the Jewish religion: a large wooden ‘ark’ where the sacred scrolls are stored, a ‘menorah,’ or seven-branched candlestick, a ‘tree of life,’ 1500 multi-colored pieces of crafted glass—ranging from two inches square to 8-by-10 inches long—that symbolize the leaves on the tree and the colors of nature, an abstract bronze sculpture, Derzon’s creation—that symbolizes the ‘eternal flame’ or the presence of the deity, tablets representing the Ten Commandments. The fifteen-foot-tall ark is at the bottom-center of the window, and the menorah and tree radiate from it.”¹⁵¹ Following the design of the window, a vertical skylight and artificial

¹⁵⁰ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald Shapiro. December 2007.

¹⁵¹ Robbins, William E. “Temple lets sun shine in” *Kenosha News*. October 21, 1992.

lighting was installed as the eastern wall of the sanctuary was not the exterior of the building. This enables the glass wall to be well-lit at any time of the day.¹⁵²

In an attempt to create a space that was more intimate and personal, the original sanctuary was transformed into a small chapel, with only a few rows of pews remaining. The original bima was left in place as were all of the yartzeit plaques. Eight years later the room was completely transformed. The pews and the elevated bima were removed and replaced with moveable seating. Elements of the original sanctuary were left in place to connect congregants with the past. The walls of the room were curved to make the space feel more intimate, and chairs are often set up in a circle or semi-circle. The small chapel, named "The Kesselman Chapel," though not awe-inspiring like the main sanctuary, encouraged spirituality through intimacy. This helped Shalom accomplish its mission of maintaining a close connection among its rabbis and congregants.

The plans also called for expanded classrooms space, a bridal room, an expanded library, gift shop and more office space. While the original building was built at a time where economy and cost-effectiveness were of the utmost importance, the new building was symbolic of the congregation's status in Milwaukee. The old sanctuary, because of its size and layout, almost forced intimacy on its congregants. The new sanctuary, with its high ceilings, large bima, skylights, its striking faceted glass wall and Judaic artwork, was quite awe inspiring. Large open spaces, an elegant social hall, bright halls and space for the professional staff to grow demonstrated how the congregation viewed itself.

¹⁵² See Appendix D

The new challenge the congregation faced, both within services and the rest of the congregation was to balance warmth and intimacy with the beauty, awe and grandeur of the new sacred space.

On the weekend of September 11–13, 1992, the congregation celebrated the dedication of its new building. For the first time since the middle of the 1960s, congregants at Shalom felt proud that they had a beautiful, modern building as their spiritual home. The building facilitated Shalom's self-identification as a leader among the Reform congregations in Milwaukee and the region.

Congregation in Transition

Before Shalom's transformation, many congregants felt it was like a family-run synagogue. While it was at times quite inefficient and laid-back, it had a higher rate of volunteerism, because that was necessary. With the creation of the new building, the congregation began to move from a "mom and pop" type of operation to a more organized business model. Though it was painful to change, all of the staff, including Rabbi Shapiro, realized that the old way of running the Temple simply didn't work with a congregation nearing 1000 families. More professional staff needed to be hired. Fewer daily jobs were to be handled by congregants, and a computer system was desperately needed in the office. According to Rabbi Shapiro, "I could see that the congregation was different. I always thought that I had this important responsibility to try to keep the congregation as intimate as possible, despite the fact that it was big, and people perceived it as being big. People perceived it as being bigger than what it really was, actually. They thought it was a big place and people could get lost there. I felt that was an impetus

enough for me to try to do whatever I could to make people feel as if they were in a more intimate and friendly environment. I'm not sure that people felt that way, even as we tried hard. When I call people for anniversaries and new members, and try to keep in touch with people for months after funerals, I still think that there is the perception that it is a huge place and no one will know me there. That became a very big responsibility. So I really tried to emphasize the pastoral work because I thought that was what people really needed. And yet it was ironic because the larger the congregation grew the more pastoral work that was needed, the more my time was spread so thin. It was a cycle sort of, the bigger it got, the more of a pastoral response was needed. The question is whether or not the reaching out to the individual so much throughout the day was really enough to reach out to all the individuals, to the congregation as a whole. That was the really tough question."¹⁵³ That tough question is one that the congregation continues to struggle with to this day.

While Rabbi Shapiro, Cantor Berman, and the staff of Shalom realized that a new business model was necessary, it was really a man named Marc Cohen who made the new model a reality. For years a congregant served as an "Administrator" of the congregation. Vivian Eichenbaum did that job through the middle of the 1980s, followed by Jerry Plotkin.

In early 1993, two members of the Board of Trustees were put in charge and they envisioned the different model for running the synagogue. They spent that summer cleaning up the records and redesigning the system of bookkeeping for the synagogue. Then, later that year Marc Cohen, who had worked in management at Manpower in

¹⁵³ Personal Interview with Rabbi Ronald Shapiro. November 20, 2007

Milwaukee prior to that point applied for the job of Administrator. He came in for the interview having had no experience working for a synagogue in the past. "The board said, 'why should we give you an interview?' And I said, 'Because I think running a synagogue is very much like running a theater company, which I have done. You've got the actors and the directors, the rabbis and the cantors, the egos who put the show on, you've the audience, which is the congregation, who wants to enjoy a good show, to feel good, and you need an ego-less stage manager to make it all happen. I can make things happen from behind the scenes and don't need to be standing out there to be successful.'"¹⁵⁴ Following his interview, Marc was hired and began to run the office more efficiently, installing computers, learning as he went about the building and maintenance, and getting to know the congregants of Shalom on a deep level. Marc describes running Shalom as running a business with a heart. Fifteen years later, now Executive Director of Shalom connects with congregants on many levels. "If you don't take this as a life calling you're not doing yourself or the work justice... This job is about more than paying the bills, making sure the bathrooms are clean and the staff shows up and managing the calendar. I can't tell you how many families I talk to regularly about death and loss. It can be so challenging. Sometimes I go home exhausted not because I'm worried about the books or the calendar but because I've sat with four people that day who had four different issues to discuss... There is recognition, I think, that we (administrators) are part of that holy team that is there for congregants."¹⁵⁵ Marc quickly became indispensable part of the congregational team, known for his willingness to think creatively and solve every problem that arose.

¹⁵⁴ Personal Interview with Marc Cohen. November 20, 2007

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

Changing Liturgy at Shalom

By the end of 1993, the long-term team of Rabbi Shapiro, Cantor Berman, and Administrator Marc Cohen was established and the congregation enjoyed the stability of having a beloved and well-established Senior Rabbi, a Cantor who grew and matured with the congregation, and an administrator who knew the ins and outs of Shalom.

By the middle of the 1990s, it became clear that the style of worship on the Shalom pulpit needed to change. Though the congregation was more traditional than the mainstream of Reform Judaism, there was still a good deal of English in the services, and Cantor Berman used music that the congregation knew and liked. However, as the clergy team began to chant portions of the liturgy in Hebrew rather than reading them in English, they were pleasantly surprised at the receptive response from the congregation.

Having been at the congregation for five years and now as an Associate Cantor, Karen Berman felt that she could start really pushing the congregation to learn new music to complement its old favorites. "By the early part of the 1990s, the congregational choir began to shrink. Older congregants started coming a bit less frequently to services and family services were the most well attended. It was then, in the summer of 1994, that the service style really started becoming less formal. We started doing an outdoor service that was overwhelmingly popular. We sang with a guitar and our voices, and everyone participated in almost all of the music. I really believe in the prayers I sing, and I think the congregation feels that way too. So they sing along."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Personal Interview with Cantor Karen Berman, 1/14/08

President Jim Ross wrote about the services in a letter to the congregation. "It was decided that on the first Friday during the summer months, the service would be held out-of-doors at 6:00. The earlier service, lasting only forty-five minutes, would allow families to worship in an informal setting and to return home for a family Shabbat dinner. These services proved to be quite successful. Each successive first Friday the congregation grew larger; all those in attendance enjoyed the creative worship."¹⁵⁷

This trend was not unique to Congregation Shalom. All over the country in the middle of the 1990s congregants were starting to demand less formality, more traditional liturgy, and less hierarchy. "There has been a real shift from performance to participation in worship. The concept of participation has changed to where the physical act of singing—being involved in body and breath and song—has become very important."¹⁵⁸

As the 1990s continued, more changes were made to the worship service to stay current within the Reform movement. First, though it was the custom throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s for one of the rabbis to give a sermon every Friday night, by 2001, Rabbi Shapiro was often giving informal discussions of the Torah portion related to world events rather than a formal sermon. Special themed Shabbat services became anticipated events on the congregational calendar. A Jazz Shabbat service, which started in the late 1990s, helped to transform how the congregation prayed. This is also congruent to the trends in the Reform movement of the time.

In late December of 1999 President of the UAHC (now the Union for Reform Judaism) Eric Yoffie noted the challenge of transforming the synagogue. "[A]ll of us—

¹⁵⁷ Ross, Jim, President of the Congregation. Shalom Shofar 9/25/93-10/12/93

¹⁵⁸ Kaplan, Dana Evan. *American Reform Judaism*. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, NJ. 2003 p.92

rabbis, cantors, lay leaders—seem ready to admit that far too often our services are tedious, predictable, and dull. Far too often, our members pray without fervor or concentration and feel religiously unsatisfied in our congregations.” Yoffie pointed out that, “Reform Jews are rediscovering the power and the purpose of prayer. We sense that our Judaism has been a bit too cold and a bit too domesticated. We yearn to sing to God; to let our souls fly free.”¹⁵⁹

It was also during this period that the timing of services became a serious question. This too was becoming a national trend. The well-attended summer services at 6:00pm left some people wondering about a permanent time change. As a result, some services were moved to 7:30pm rather than at 8:00pm. Then, in 2004, a Kabbalat Shabbat service was added to the calendar twice a month at 6:15pm. This more relaxed service carried the informality of the summer service into the rest of the year. Following this change, there were two services offered on some Friday nights, one at 6:15pm. and a more traditional service with a sermon at 7:30pm. In order to avoid friction between the older members of the congregation who wanted their services at their “traditional” time, Rabbi Shapiro was careful to call this an addition to the schedule, rather than a change. “I am happy to announce this addition in the worship schedule because Congregation Shalom seeks to respond not only to the liturgical needs of its congregants, but is also aware of the changing dynamics of our community and how people vary in their quest to observe Shabbat.”¹⁶⁰ Having two separate but similar services in the same evening was problematic. It was difficult to maintain two services and still create a sense of

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Kaplan, Dana Evan. *American Reform Judaism*. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, NJ. 2003. p.92

¹⁶⁰ Shapiro, Rabbi Ronald M. Shalom Shofar, July 2004. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

community within the congregation. Eventually the second service was phased out and the timing of the service changes throughout the month.

As liturgical expression through music, liturgy and timing has changed throughout the movement in the 1990s and through to the present, Shalom continued to be in the mainstream of practice, with some slightly more traditional practices on one end; e.g. celebrating the second day of holidays, and some more classical Reform practices on the other; e.g. reciting some prayers in English as well as in Hebrew.

The congregation continued to grow, and professionalism became an important value to its leadership, Shalom became a more rabbi-centered congregation. Worship services were led almost exclusively by Rabbi Shapiro, Cantor Berman, and the Assistant Rabbi. While in some parts of the country lay-leaders were being trained to conduct worship services, at Shalom it was felt that this was a solely rabbinic job. While the congregation embraced informality, singing and spirituality during services, its members clearly still wanted to be led in worship by Rabbi Shapiro. To them, Ron Shapiro, with his warm and dynamic manner, represented the closeness and intimacy of the synagogue.

Social Action

Throughout the 1990s the Social Action Committee was again somewhat quiet, and dealt primarily with local issues in Milwaukee. Involvement in social action throughout the Reform movement in the later part of the 1990s was generally becoming less important.¹⁶¹ Some observers claimed that there was an inverse proportion of religious ritual to social action. The more a congregation busies itself with ritual, the less

¹⁶¹ Kaplan, Dana Evan. *American Reform Judaism*. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, NJ. 2003. p.105

time it has for social action. "The Reform system of ritual incorporated increasing numbers of traditional practices such as the use of yarmulkes, the observance of the second day of Rosh Hashanah, and even the wearing of tefilin... Simultaneously, the movement has drawn back from a commitment to social justice projects and embraced traditional ritual practice. The two trends are by no means contradictory, but over time there has been a clear tendency to favor one over the other."¹⁶²

However, at Shalom, another way that the leadership attempted to maintain the congregation's warmth, was to provide each congregant the opportunity to get involved in social action. Shalom's Social Action Committee and Rabbi Shapiro instituted a number of programs dealing with Hunger issues in Milwaukee. The most long-lasting and effective of these programs was with a local food pantry called St. Ben's. St. Benedict the Moor Community Meal program has served meals six nights a week near downtown Milwaukee. Members of Shalom help by cooking chickens in their homes and bringing them to temple. Other members of the committee then take the chickens to St. Ben's. Some congregants serve meals at St. Ben's as well. This establishes a strong connection between members of the congregation and the issues of hunger and poverty in Milwaukee. The program started off small, but after a sermon from Rabbi Shapiro on hunger in Milwaukee, the Social Action Committee was overwhelmed with the congregation's response, and actually had to ask people to better organize their chicken cooking because of the sheer volume of meals they were donating.

The Social Action Committee, and specifically Mel and Deenie Cohen, spent much of their energy organizing a "Mitzvah Day" for Congregation Shalom in 1998. The

¹⁶² Ibid.

goal of the program was to energize the congregation to help others in the community and for the suburban congregants to broaden their horizons and become more informed about issues facing Milwaukeeans. Response from the synagogue community was overwhelming, as more than 1500 people showed up for the first Mitzvah Day. During the first year, 55 different institutions benefited from the day. According to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "Mel Cohen, who worked with his wife, Deenie, to coordinate last year's project as well as this year's event, said some of the one-day volunteers enjoyed their work so much they decided to make longer-term commitments to agencies... Projects include cleaning at Penfield Children's Center and the Guest House for the homeless; visiting a pumpkin farm with children from Big Brothers & Big Sisters; painting and repair work at the Bay View Community Center and at the homes of older residents who live nearby; cooking a meal at the Ronald McDonald House; sorting food at the Hunger Task Force; and entertaining patients at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin with singing, storytelling and games."¹⁶³ Congregation Shalom finds much pride in this Mitzvah Day project. They now welcome people of every faith to join in on this annual event in Milwaukee.

Education

As Congregation Shalom transitioned from a "mom and pop" type of institution to a more professional organization, the Religious Schools saw a great deal of change and improvement. While during the 1980s Rabbi Stanley Schickler began to develop a curriculum for the school, his mission was furthered by his successors. First, Rabbi Greg

¹⁶³ Rohde, Marie "Fox Point synagogue seeking volunteers" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. April, 1999.

Wolfe, newly ordained from HUC-JIR in New York was at Shalom from 1990 to 1992. Wolfe, with his ease with people young and old, helped keep the Shalom schools a warm place, making a point of knowing each child's name. Rabbi Wolfe further developed a school-wide curriculum and instituted a number of teacher training programs. One of these was a mentoring program pairing young teachers (almost always congregants) with older, more experienced teachers. This program also connected younger congregants with older congregants. Following Rabbi Wolfe, Rabbi Isaac Serotta was hired and served from 1992 to 1998. Rabbi Serotta ran the school and worked to tweak and improve the curriculum.

While both Rabbi Wolfe and Rabbi Serotta did some pastoral work and were often on the bima, their main focus was on the youth of the congregation. As the congregation continued to grow and become more professional, Rabbi Shapiro and the leadership, at the suggestion of the previous Assistant Rabbi/Educators, decided to create a separate Director of Education position. For the first time in the congregation's history, there would be a staff member whose job was solely to develop and run the congregation's schools.

A search soon began for a Director of Education. As it became clear that they would not find a Director of Education for the 1998–1999 school year, lifetime members Carol and Jim Ross volunteered to be the Interim Directors of Education. The Ross' had been teaching for many years in the schools, most notably teaching in the eighth grade program for a number of years.

Following the Ross' year, Dr. Sherry Blumberg, RJE was hired. Prior to Shalom, Sherry served as an Associate Professor at HUC-JIR in New York from 1985–1999. In

her first article to the congregation, Dr. Blumberg offered a challenge. "I will strive to make both the schooling components of education and the informal moments of learning ones that will reach beyond facts to touch at the heart of our values and selves. This is a promise that I make to you. While striving for excellence, I will also strive for depth and meaning. However, I can only do so much. Much of the real work is yours. I can help the teachers in the school, the family programs, the adult learning opportunities to touch you, but only if you are willing to learn and grow. It is a partnership. I need you, and we need you."¹⁶⁴

Throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s the Religious Schools of Shalom fell into a dull rut. Historian Dana Evan Kaplan commented on this national trend. "With no consensus about what students should learn, schools tended to repeat much of the same material year after year, further alienating the students who saw the repetitive subject matter as yet another indication that Hebrew School was of little value."¹⁶⁵ Dr. Blumberg sought to re-imagine how the school functioned. "Our religious school is changing to a Religious Journey model of curriculum development. This metaphoric title describes a method of planning, teaching, and choosing materials that differs from the more standard subject oriented curriculum. We still ask questions about the purpose and goals of the education, the activities to be used, and how we will evaluate learning, and we add some very special questions. These include: How can we demonstrate to the student that religious life is a journey or path or even a quest? What is the religious path that our 'teacher' is on and how has he or she arrived at this point? How can the teacher help the

¹⁶⁴ Blumberg, Dr. Sherry. Shalom Shofar, July 1999. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹⁶⁵ Kaplan, Dana Evan. *American Reform Judaism*. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick, NJ. 2003

student find their own path or journey together with the student? What is the relationship of faith, belief and God to the requirements of the religious tradition and which ones are needed at the student's point of the journey?"¹⁶⁶ These questions provided guidance as Dr. Blumberg and the Education Committee began renewing and redefining the curricula of Congregation Shalom's schools. While some of the teachers were more eager than others to implement the new curriculum, "it was generally received very positively from most of the staff." Blumberg continued, "the teachers at Shalom were just wonderful."¹⁶⁷

The new curriculum was implemented slowly, for the youngest grades first. By the time Sherry Blumberg left Shalom in 2004, the curriculum was developed up through the fourth grade. Though the school was run professionally, Blumberg was careful to maintain and improve the feel of the Shalom schools, displaying children's artwork throughout the school building and offices. There were learning stations all over the building, enabling students to be intellectually stimulated in and out of the classroom. Creative school-wide programs included an "exodus from Egypt," where some students were the Israelites, and others were the Egyptians, while older students were "the Sea of Reeds." During Blumberg's time and during the time of her successor, the school was redesigned to give students a solid education and a love for being Jewish.

As the congregation continued to evolve, religious education moved out of the classroom for both adults and children. In 2003, to celebrate Rabbi Shapiro's 25th year with the congregation, Shalom hired *sofer* Neil Yerman to write a Torah scroll to be dedicated in Spring of that year. Each and every congregant had the opportunity to attend

¹⁶⁶ Blumberg, Dr. Sherry. Shalom Shofar, August 2003. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

¹⁶⁷ Personal Interview with Dr. Sherry Blumberg, February 5, 2008

lectures by Neil Yerman and to actually write a letter in the Torah scroll. The year-long program engaged congregants of all ages.

A New Generation

Following Rabbi Serotta, Rabbi Daniel Lerhman was hired to be the first full time Assistant Rabbi in 1998. Daniel was ordained at HUC-JIR weeks prior to his coming to the congregation. Rabbi Lehrman was described as a genuinely nice and warm man with lots of great ideas. Hiring a full time Assistant Rabbi enabled the clergy team to really serve the congregants. While Rabbi Shapiro still wanted to do and liked doing most of the pastoral care, Daniel worked on developing new ways to maintain intimacy with a congregation of well over 1000 member units. While at Shalom, he really worked to develop an alternative Saturday morning *minyan* service. While this service never drew the attendance that its leaders wanted, those who came enjoyed the lively discussion and informality of a Shabbat morning service. Rabbi Lehrman was both a warm and learned rabbi, but some felt he didn't have the energy and charisma to really engage the young adults and the young families in the congregation.

After two years, Rabbi Lehrman decided to leave Shalom and take a job in his native New York. At that time both Rabbi Shapiro and the board recognized that while the synagogue continued to grow, its membership was skewing slightly older than it had before. They dived into the process of finding a new Assistant Rabbi knowing they were looking for someone young and enthusiastic who could creatively engage young people and families in the congregation. While Rabbi Shapiro, called the "energizer rabbi who keeps on going," by an editorial in the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, continued to be a

source of warmth and vision for the congregation, it was thought that a young person could engage peers more effectively, as Rabbi Shapiro had done in the early 1980s. A good match was found in native Chicagoan Shari Heinrich (now Shamah), who was to be ordained just before her contract at Shalom began. "Right from the first interview they told me they wanted someone to engage young people in the congregation."¹⁶⁸ Shari knew Rabbi Shapiro from her years at the local Union for Reform Judaism camp, Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute, where Rabbi Shapiro served as faculty during the summer and was excited and challenged by building a new nucleus of young families for Shalom.

When Rabbi Shamah began at Shalom there was strong youth group programming, but there was virtually no programming for young families or for young adults in their twenties and thirties. This type of programming was one of her first assignments. The result was the creation of a group called "SYA" (pronounced see-ya) for Shalom Young Adults. After the High Holy Days, programming began. In an article to the congregation in September of 2000, Rabbi Shamah wrote, "Congregation Shalom is looking to reach out to those 20 to 30-something members of our community, single or married, to offer programs and events to help them feel tied to the Congregation. We recognize that for this population, synagogue can often be a lonely or unattached experience and we want to offer them a dynamic, welcoming haven."¹⁶⁹

The first event for the group was a Simchat Torah dinner following services at the Temple. More than 30 young adults joined Rabbi Shamah for dinner and conversation. The group continued to meet regularly, with mixed attendance results. In building

¹⁶⁸ Personal Interview with Rabbi Shari Shamah

¹⁶⁹ Shamah, Rabbi Shari. Congregation Shalom Shofar. September 2000. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

relationships with the younger members of the congregation, Rabbi Shamah talked to Rabbi Shapiro and the board about spending the occasional Shabbat evening at home and hosting congregants there. Participants enjoyed sharing Shabbat with Rabbi Shamah in her home. Rabbi Shamah was also responsible for overseeing the informal education program, which included the senior youth group, the junior youth group, and the creation of two youth groups for younger children as well.

During Rabbi Shamah's seven-year tenure at Shalom, she got married and had two children of her own. The congregation and leadership embraced Rabbi Shamah's new family and offered her a three-month maternity leave. Further demonstrating how important a rabbinic presence was at Shalom, Shari actually planned her pregnancies around Rabbi Shapiro's vacation schedule, so that one of them would be there at all times. Upon having both of her children, the congregation was supportive and understanding. While Ron Shapiro was genuinely thrilled for Shari, sometimes he would forget that she was the mother of a young baby. "Occasionally he would call me at 5:00 and ask me to do a 6:15 *shiva minyan*. I had to remind him that I had a four-month-old and needed to make sure my husband was going to be home before I agreed."¹⁷⁰ This demonstrated the difference in rabbinic styles between the younger rabbis and the older rabbis. Ron Shapiro's instinct, at that point in his life and career, was to be a rabbi, whereas Shari's first instinct was to be a mother.

As Shari's family grew, so too did the programming grow. Bagels, Babies and Books (also known as Bagels, Books and Babies) is a program for young mothers and their babies, which started in 2004. The program was implemented to create community

¹⁷⁰ Personal Interview with Rabbi Shari Shamah, February 4, 2008

for young parents within the larger Shalom community. Following the inception of the program, there was a monthly picture of the group of babies and a caption welcoming more participants in the Shofar. In March of 2005 underneath a picture of a group of babies on a couch the caption read, "The babies were so tired after eating all those bagels and hearing all of that talking from their parents that they needed a break on the soft couches in the youth lounge! There's always room for more babies on the couch. Next play date..."¹⁷¹ Billing the program as a play date, Rabbi Shamah was able to build a community of young mothers and fathers who could provide each other with advice, laughs, and much-needed moral support.

In 2004, Rabbi Roxanne J.S. Shaprio was hired to be the Director of Lifelong Learning, overseeing all of the Temple's educational programming, including the various types of adult education programming. Rabbi Roxanne, as she is called at Shalom, had been living in Milwaukee for a year and working as the Judaic Studies Director at the Milwaukee Jewish Day School. For the three previous years she led and coordinated Shalom's alternative High Holy Day services for families and youth. Shalom's hiring Roxanne as the full time Director of Lifelong Learning was controversial, as she was married to Ron Shapiro's son, Benjamin. Following her hiring, Ron Shapiro sent a letter to the congregation outlining the steps that were taken to interview and rank the candidates, showing transparency of the process to allay fears of nepotism.

As Roxanne began, she too implemented new programming for congregants of all ages. Along with brightening up the schools at Shalom with colorfully painted classrooms, she also redesigned the high school program and continued to reform the

¹⁷¹ Shamah, Rabbi Shari. Shalom Shofar, March 2005. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

Religious School curricula. More programming for very young families began, as the “kid”dush club was formed. This was a family friendly service like its predecessor “temple for toddlers,” but more musical and interactive.

When young family programming started taking off in the 2000s, the board of the Temple started noticing that younger families were joining the synagogue. Money was spent to make the building more “young family friendly” and booster seats, high chairs, and baby toys were purchased. A new nucleus of families began to be established.

In the Spring of 2007, Rabbi Joseph Prass became the newest member of the Congregation Shalom professional staff as Associate Rabbi. Rabbi Prass served as Assistant then Associate Rabbi in Houston Texas before moving his family to Milwaukee. Rabbi Prass’ time at Shalom is spent teaching, creating innovative programming for young families, leading services and doing some lifecycle events. “I am looking forward to working with all aspects of the congregation: from babies to teens, from young adults to life long members. One of the greatest joys I have found as a rabbi is the ability to interact in so many diverse ways with individuals. Be it in a hospital room or the halls of a synagogue, it is a privilege to try and teach and share a love of Judaism and also to help find the strength and comfort that also stems from tradition.”¹⁷²

Conclusion

During the 1990s through to the present day, Congregation Shalom had to recreate itself as a professional institution while attempting to maintain its warm personality—a trait that was part of the impetus for growth in the first place. In a mission

¹⁷² Prass, Rabbi Joseph. Shalom Shofar, August 2007. *Congregation Shalom Archives*

statement that was written in the late 1990s, the final line suggests what is most important to Shalom. "Congregation Shalom shall always be a sanctuary of warmth, comfort, and spirituality."¹⁷³

Throughout the last 18 years, as the congregation climbed to nearly 1200 families, many attempts have been made to retain the essence of Shalom, while providing an effective infrastructure for the large congregation. While many staff members, creative programs, and educational programs have helped retain the intimacy of the congregation, Ron Shapiro is certainly the glue that has held the congregation together throughout the years. He has worked tirelessly to make the congregation feel that the place is much smaller than it actually is. In so doing, Ron Shapiro, has become what most clearly defines Congregation Shalom.

Programming, lifecycle events, and innovative curricula are very important aspects of the Shalom identity as well, but Ron's ability to make even the largest spaces feel intimate and personal, to remember details about his congregants' lives, to make each person feel as if he or she is the most important member of the congregation is what has enabled Shalom to retain its sense of intimacy in spite of its growth. Rabbi Daniel Lehrman said in 1999, "He's a rabbi not of a congregation of people, but of the individual people who make up the congregation."¹⁷⁴ The congregation, through its staff, its programming, services, and even its building, strives to identify itself through the values of its leader: warmth, compassion, joy, tradition, learning, and connectedness.

¹⁷³ Congregation Shalom Mission Statement. See Appendix E for full statement.
www.cong-shalom.org

¹⁷⁴ Lehrman, Rabbi Daniel. Interview with Vivian Rothschild of the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*. April 23, 1999

As the rabbis of Ron Shapiro's generation are beginning to retire, the congregation must again struggle with the issue of changing identity. In each of the transitional periods, in 1951 with the creation of Shalom, in 1980 as Ron Shapiro became the senior rabbi, and in 1993 as the congregation transformed into a professional entity, the leadership has struggled to put the right people and programs in place to maintain the essence of Shalom. As Ron prepares to eventually retire, the congregation is again beginning to ask itself some important questions. During a Temple Board meeting in November of 2007, a question was raised: Who are we? What are we? What do we stand for? What makes up our identity?¹⁷⁵ "In the future, we are not looking to recreate Ron," said current President Nancy Barnett. "We can't do that. We are looking for someone who can create connections, someone who can build relationships. Congregation Shalom is all about relationships."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Personal Interview with Marc Cohen. November 20, 2007

¹⁷⁶ Personal Interview with Nancy Barnett, February 4, 2008

Summary and Conclusion

Following World War II, American Judaism changed substantially. As second-generation American Jews started moving to the suburbs and establishing new houses of worship there, a new culture was created. Within the walls of these new synagogues, the younger generation lobbied to break away from their parents' type of Jewish observance, which they saw as devoid in meaning. This was certainly the case at Congregation Shalom. The young families who founded and cultivated Shalom insisted on content above form. They wanted a place where their intellectual curiosity would be piqued, where they could derive meaningful messages from creative liturgies, where connections among congregants and between congregants and the rabbi would be warm, intimate, and genuine. With the creation of synagogues like Shalom, began an era in liberal American Judaism where personal connections trumped the pomp and circumstance of the established Reform Jewish observance. Rabbi Harry B. Pastor understood that. The congregants of Shalom loved Rabbi Pastor because he was a brilliant teacher and a warm and accepting person who made those around him feel welcomed.

Throughout the 1960s, many American Jews found their political and social action voices through their synagogues and rabbis. Rabbi Pastor was on the forefront of many of these social action issues, ahead of his time in issues of race relations, inner-city poverty, and combating radicalism. As demonstrated at Congregation Shalom, many suburban Jews felt disconnected from the real problems facing America's cities during the 1960s and 1970s. At Shalom and many other suburban synagogues around the

country, suburban Jews worked to educate themselves on these important issues. Some participated in protests, others in letter writing campaigns. Rabbi Pastor preached often during the 1960s about issues of race relations, politics, and fundamentalism. Through these sermons and classes organized through the combined Adult Education and Social Action Committees, congregants felt informed with a Jewish perspective on current events.

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s members of the baby boomer generation found themselves running some of the Reform movement's congregations. These younger leaders demanded that Judaism be even less formal than the preceding generation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s many young rabbis brought Judaism off of the bima and into the lives of their congregants. Rabbi Ron Shapiro is emblematic of the trend. He was roughly the same age as many of his congregants, he played basketball, tennis and football with them at the Jewish Community Center, he asked congregants to call him by his first name, he was informal and spontaneous while leading worship services, and he opened himself and his heart to each of his congregants. That sense of intimacy, that sense of warmth, coupled with the excitement of innovative family programming, led droves of people to join Congregation Shalom in the 1980s.

From the middle of the 1990s through to the present, Reform Jews throughout the country have experienced a spiritual awakening. While many Jews still value social action and a close connection to their rabbis, they are looking to be spiritually fulfilled through music as well. As the trend in congregational worship services has been to become even less formal, often with guitar and piano music and full vocal participation of the congregation during the entire service, Congregation Shalom has again changed

the format of many of its worship services. As the congregation has grown and professionalized, under the leadership of Rabbi Shapiro and Cantor Karen Berman, they have attempted to maintain an intimate, warm feeling during services. This is achieved in part, through spiritual music, with which the congregation can sing along.

Throughout the movement, the spiritual awakening has also manifested itself through a renewed desire of American Jews to learn Jewish texts. Many Reform Jews are becoming increasingly interested in critically studying our biblical text. Serious study and education have been and will continue to be an important of Congregation Shalom.

As Congregation Shalom prepares to transition to its third Senior Rabbi, its leadership, professional staff, and congregants will have to again ask: How do we retain to essence of Congregation Shalom? How do we retain its warmth, its intimacy, and its meaning as we move into the future? Thus far, the congregation has succeeded in responding to the changing needs of its congregants by meaningfully adapting itself with each new generation of leaders. At the first meeting of the congregation in 1951, Rabbi Harry Pastor said, "We have come to build, but we ourselves are being built thereby."¹⁷⁷ As Congregation Shalom builds for the future, its staff, leadership, and members must use the congregation's rich history to help define itself today and envision itself for tomorrow.

¹⁷⁷ Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle July 6, 1951

Appendix A

May, 1951

Introducing: THE NORTH SHORE CONGREGATION

The formation of the North Shore Congregation had its roots in the continued growth of the Jewish population, together with the general population, along the North Shore area in recent years.

It was not the result of a sudden decision on the part of a few people, but a long-felt need. Nor was it the result of a fundamental cleavage in an existing congregation. The actual history of our organizational efforts prove otherwise.

The first step taken by the active group which sparked the formation of the North Shore Congregation was to confer with the leaders of Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, asking their advice and seeking their reaction to the move. They were met with complete accord and with friendly guidance. These friendly relations continued, despite an erroneous newspaper story.

Throughout the formative stages, there has been a consistent determination to place all emphasis on building a congregation and not on championing a factional cause or an individual. There has also been a determination to make our congregation as democratic as possible and to leave all vital decisions to a majority vote of the actual membership.

As a Steering Committee, the active organizers of the congregation have formulated the following general statement of principles as a guide to prospective members and to the activity of all members in the future:

- (1) The purpose of our congregation shall be to study and teach the ethical and spiritual principles of Judaism, to integrate them with the best of modern thought, and to apply them in a world today.
- (2) Engaging in cooperative activities with others faiths throughout the community shall be a cornerstone of our program, with a view to building friendship and mutual respect among all religions and working together for the common objectives of all religious groups.
- (3) We shall extend the hand of friendship, cooperation and aid to all other segments of the Jewish population, both in this community and throughout the world.
- (4) The fullest possible participation by laymen in all religious as well as social activities shall be encouraged and cultivated, and the talents of all members given freedom of expression.

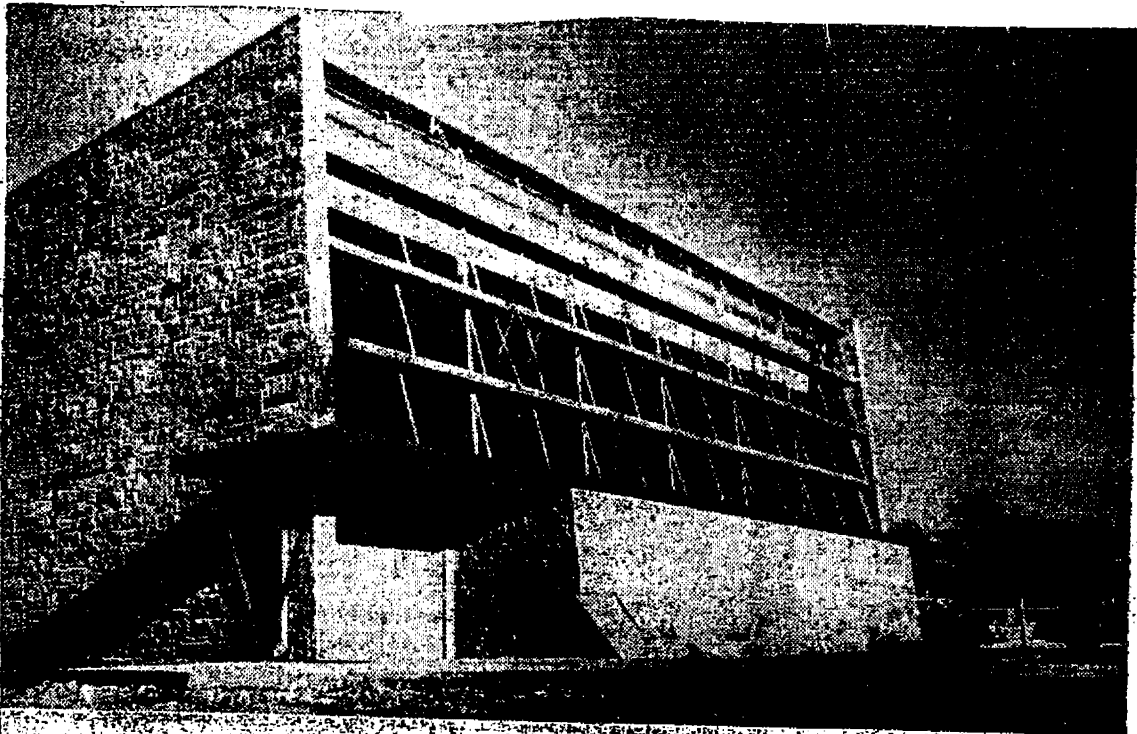
Appendix A

- (5) A major aim of the congregation shall be to preserve the friendliness and warmth of the compact, well-knit group and to develop activities that will meet the desires of all.
- (6) The affairs of the congregation shall be conducted on the broadest possible democratic basis, guided by representative leadership.
- (7) The spiritual and intellectual freedom of the Rabbi shall be respected and assured.
- (8) The emphasis in religious services shall be on content rather than the form, on creativeness and originality, the stimulation of the mind and elevation of the spirit.

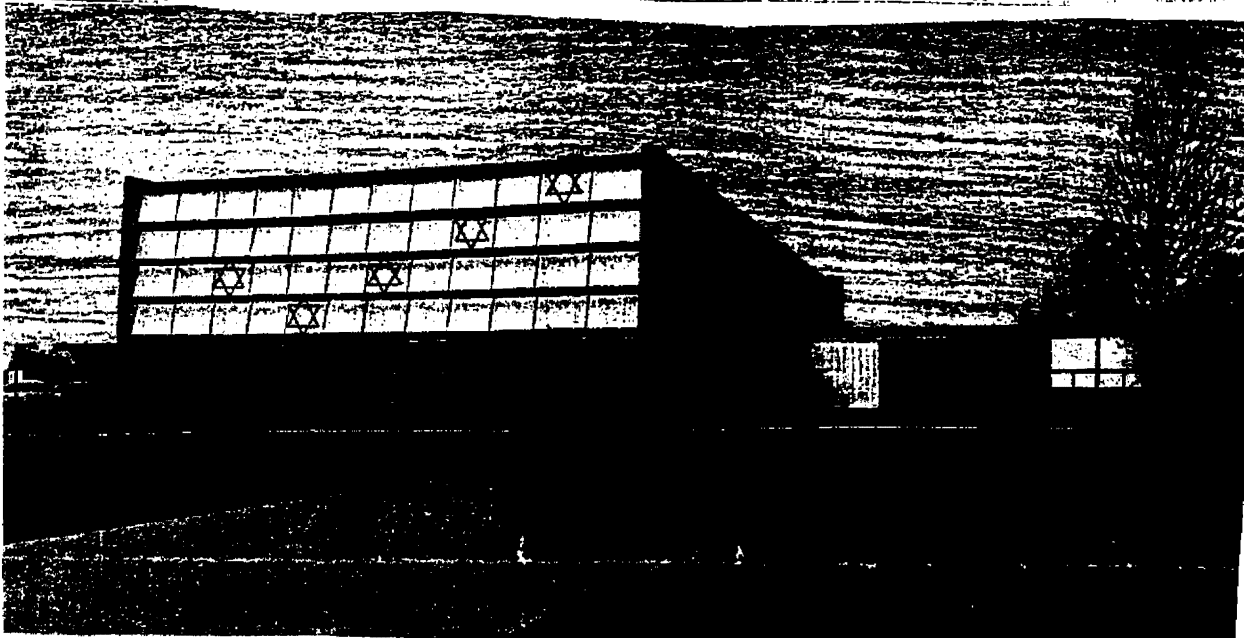
Appendix B

Congregation Shalom

HARRY B. PASTOR, *Rabbi*

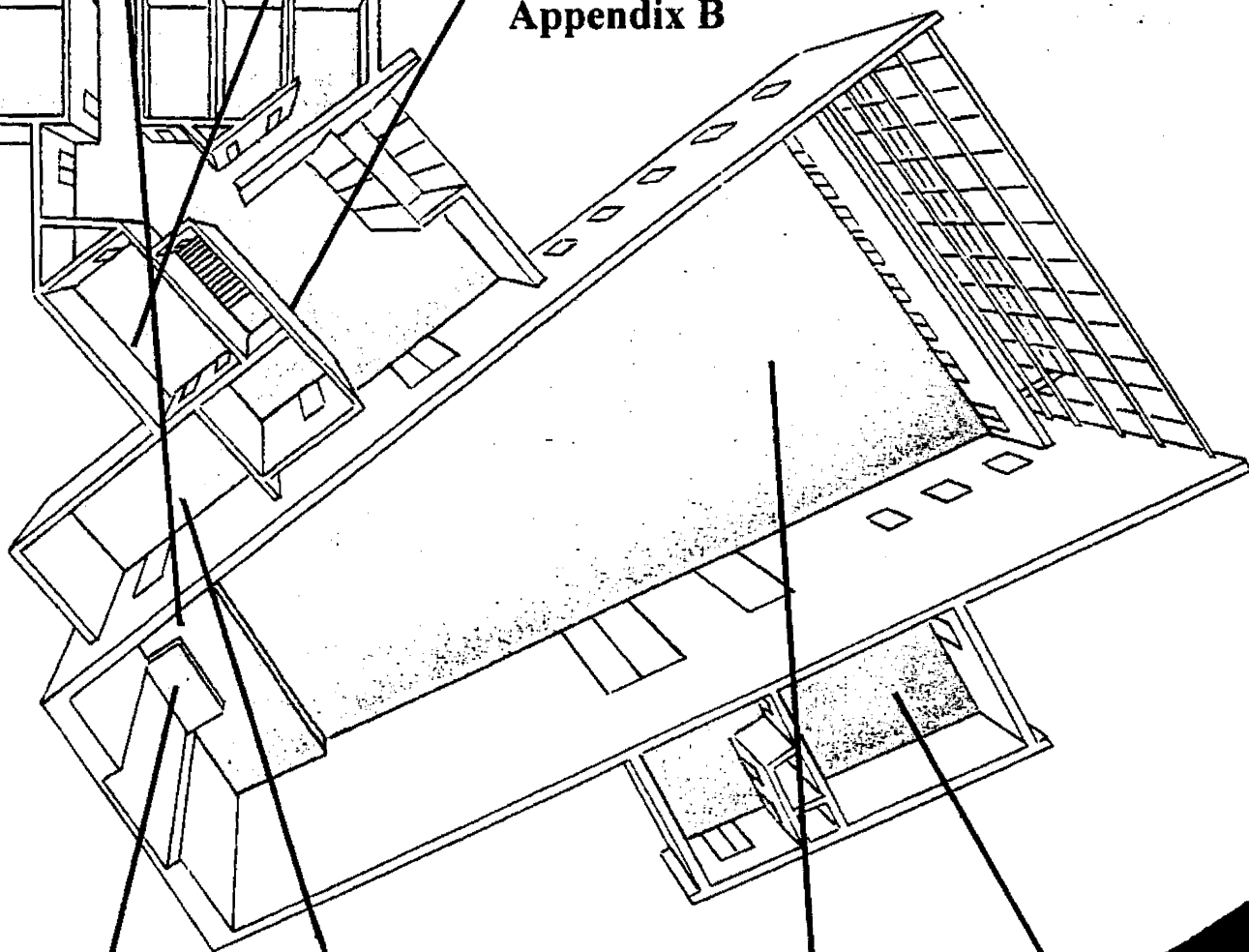


The new synagogue of Congregation Shalom is said to be a modern interpretation of an ancient design. Five stainless steel forms of the Star of David are mounted on the window mullions at the street end of the nave. The design was done by architects Robert E. Rasche and Donald L. Grieb.



en has written his name in sand and chiseled it in granite.
 always with the hope that his name would be recognized
 by those who follow after him.

Appendix B



ARK

\$10,000

LIBRARY

\$3,500

SOCIAL HALL

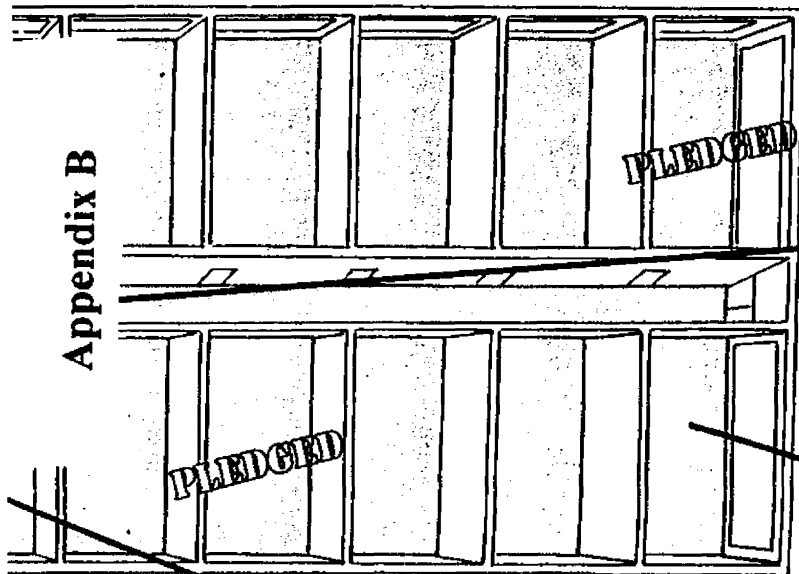
\$7,500

KITCHEN

\$10,000

pledged

Appendix B



HONOR DEDICATIONS

<input type="checkbox"/> Ark	\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Library	\$ 3,500
<input type="checkbox"/> Torah	1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Outside Menorah	5,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Perpetual Light	1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Mural	2,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Lectern	750	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Lectern	750	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Clergy Chair	250	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Clergy Chair	250	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Clergy Chair	250	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Clergy Chair	250	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Clergy Chair	250	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Organ	2,500	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Foyer Door	750	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Foyer Door	750	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Foyer Door	750	<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom	1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Foyer Door	750	<input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten Room	1,500
<input type="checkbox"/> Book of Life Showcase	1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten Room	1,500
<input type="checkbox"/> Temple Office	600	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Hall	7,500
<input type="checkbox"/> Rabbi's Study	1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Shofar Room	500
		<input type="checkbox"/> Kitchen	\$10,000

ORGAN

\$2,500

CLASSROOM

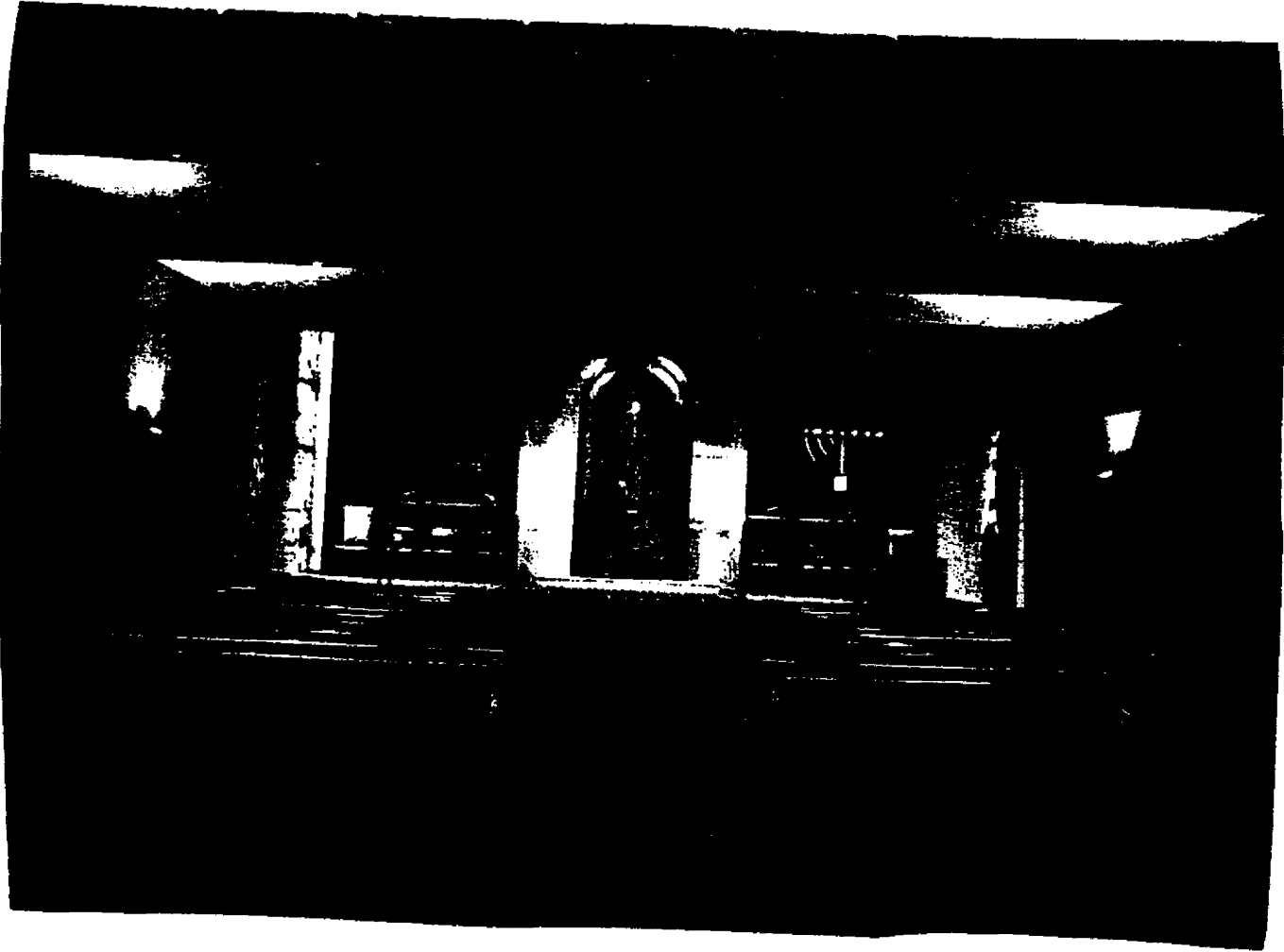
\$1,000

RABBI'S STUDY

\$1,000

MURAL

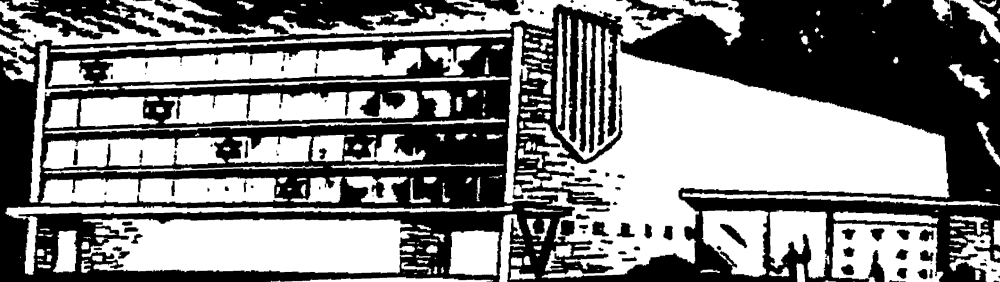
Appendix C



Appendix C



Congregation Shalom



Strength of the Past

Hope of the Future

*Be A Part of
Shalom's History*

Attend the
Art Auction
and
Ground Breaking Festivities

June 8 & 9, 1991

Appendix D

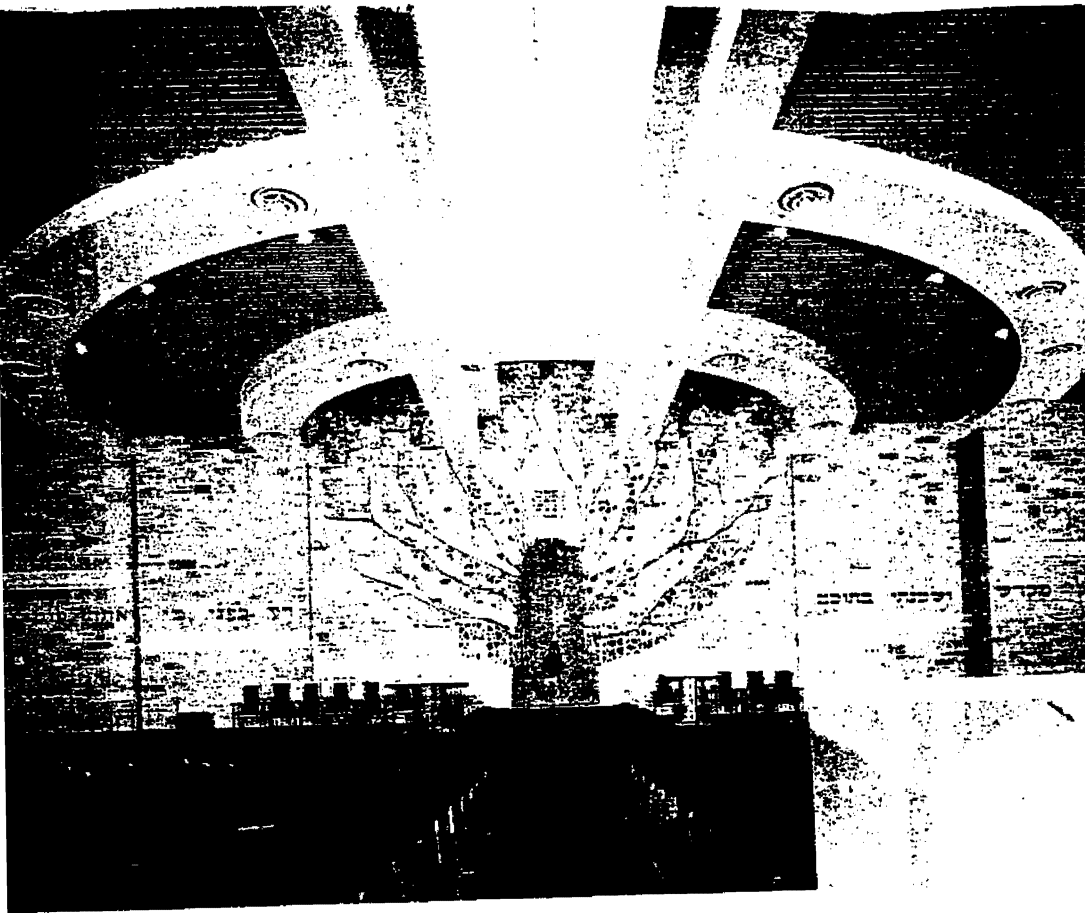
(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

The "Tree of Life"

The faceted glass window on the bima wall represents the Tree of Life, which is reflective of the prayer Etz Chayyim he l'maazeekim bah – It is a Tree of Life to those who cling steadfastly to it. At the top of the tree are the Ten Commandments, the basic principles of Jewish ethics.

The Ceiling

The ceiling of the Harry and Rose Samson Sanctuary is fashioned in the shape of a menorah. The centerpiece of the menorah is the skylight that allows us to gaze heavenward toward the firmament, created on the second day of creation. The theme of the menorah, a source of light and enlightenment, is also displayed within the faceted glass window intertwined with the Tree of Life.



Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

The Inscriptions on the Wall



Two statements carved in bronze letters flank the Ark. The inscription on the wall to the left is from the Talmud and reads "*Know before Whom you Stand.*" The inscription on the wall to the right is from the Book of Exodus: "*Make for me a sanctuary and I shall dwell among you.*"

The total number of letters that comprise the two inscriptions is thirty-six, a number that has long enjoyed spiritual significance because it is twice "*Chai*," which means "*Life*." Thirty-six also represents the legend of the 36 righteous people who live in the world at any given time, and by their integrity sustain the world.

Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

The Tallit on the Wall



A tallit, or prayer shawl, stretches across the entire bima wall. The fringes that cascade downward from the four knots represent all humanity residing at the four corners of God's earth. They are reflective of a prayer that not only will the wearer of the tallit be blessed by God's nearness, but all who dwell at the four corners of the earth will be blessed by the divine promise of spiritual warmth and peace.

The Wall



This shin is on the Harry and Rose Samson Sanctuary wall beside the weekly Yahrzeit panels at the back of the sanctuary. The lannon stone wall is reminiscent of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The windows that wrap around the western wall of the sanctuary, coupled with the wood ceiling and lannon stone wall, offer a natural setting that enables each worshipper to appreciate the splendor of God's creation and the beautiful world in which we live.

Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

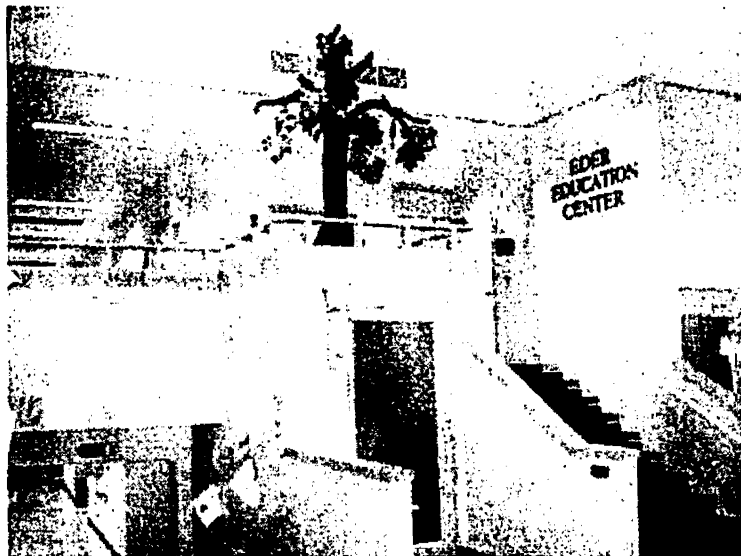
The Door Handles



The door handles welcome each person who enters the sanctuary with Shalom, or peace. The bronze handles that adorn the entrance doors on the outside of the sanctuary form the Hebrew letter "shin," the first letter of the word "Shalom," which is the Hebrew word for peace

Eder Family Education Wing

Dedicated in 1991-92, the Eder Family Education Wing houses the offices of the Director of Life-Long Learning and our Religious and Hebrew School. It contains 20 classrooms and the Richard Morris Youth Lounge. Donated by the Ralph and Louise Eder family in honor of their children and grandchildren, it is the center of Jewish education for all ages. The Eder Family Education Wing is housed in the Rabbi Harry B. Pastor School Building.



Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

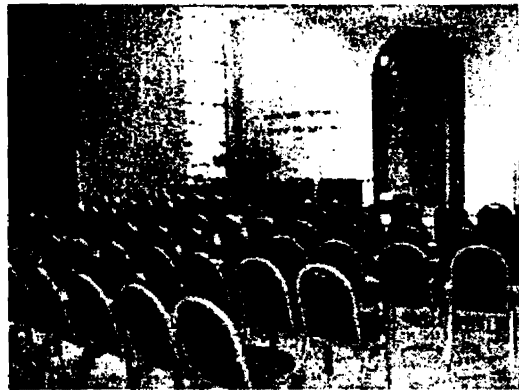
William and Fannie Kesselman Family Chapel

The William and Fannie Kesselman Family Chapel named in 1997, is now what was the front of Shalom's original sanctuary. It was updated and remodeled in 2000 and is now a small gathering place in which numerous life cycle services and daily minyan are held.

One of the highlights of the chapel is a faceted glass window depicting the famous Biblical story of Jacob's dream. The window was given in memory of Lt. John L. Abrams, U.S.N. by founding members Florence and Iz Abrahms.

At one time eight chairs sat on the bima, celebrating the major Jewish holidays and the Sabbath. Each chair's back is a tapestry symbolizing the holiday, designed by Shalom's Artist in Residence, Suzi Derzon and stitched by members of the congregation in 1978. Currently each of those tapestries are framed and hung in the David Klurfeld Reception Hall.

In addition, the insides of the doors to the Ark are tapestries also designed by Suzi Derzon and stitched by members of the congregation portraying the Lion of Judah.



Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

Nash Family Administrative Wing

The Nash Administrative Wing is the cornerstone of our building. It too was dedicated in 1991-92 as part of the major expansion project. It was donated by Harold and Tourraine Nash and David and Abigail Nash in honor of their families. Housed in this wing are the administrative offices, including Cantor Karen Berman's study, the Executive Director, Marc Cohen's office, and the Assistant Administrator Abby Habush Schroeder's office. It also contains a beautiful bride's room, robbing room, choir room and board room.

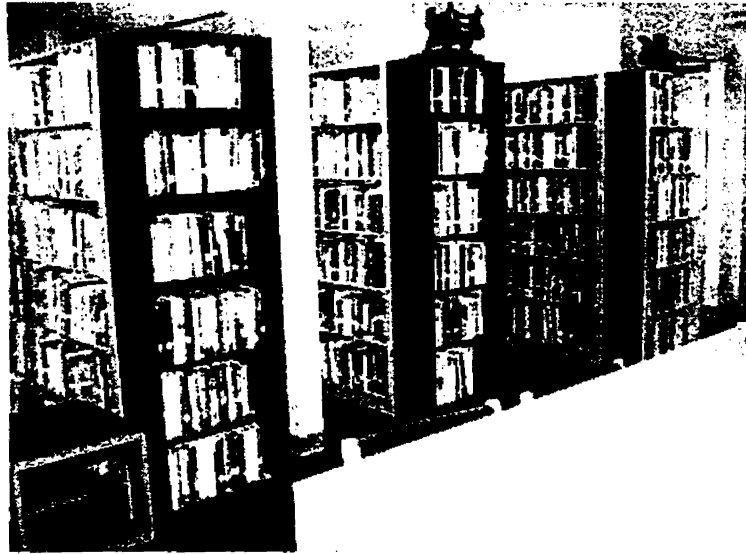


Sherman Pastor Memorial Library

Also in the Nash Administrative Wing is the Sherman Pastor Memorial Library. It is named in memory of our founding Rabbi, Harry B. Pastor's son, Sherman. Our library, run by librarian Elaine Friedman, houses a large collection of Judaica and variety of Jewish literature for all ages. The library also house the archives collection of Congregation Shalom, including the Leo Kissel Music Collection. Stop in and relax with some great Jewish reading!

Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)



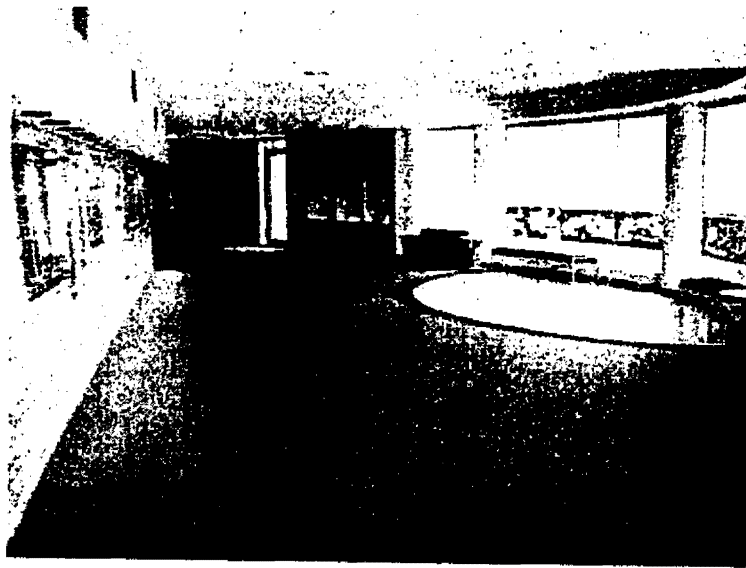
Morris and Naomi Pivar Foyer

Added in 1991-92 as part of a major construction and remodeling project, the Morris and Naomi Pivar Foyer was created from the front lawn of the original building. The original lannon stone wall was the corner stone of the building from 1954 and now an integral part of the new addition. Hanging on these walls, are our specially designed donor panels created and made by Suzi Derzon, that honor the generosity of our donors that help to ensure Shalom's future while honoring their families and family members. Some of the symbols on these panels represent the Trees of Life and Knowledge, the Seven Species, and the Gates of heaven.

Appendix D

(Reprinted from the Congregation Shalom Website www.cong-shalom.org)

On the east curved wall, six stained glass panels hang representing the six days of creation. This space is used for a variety of temple activities, school functions, and life cycle events. Our weekly Friday evening and Saturday morning Kiddush are held in Pivar as well.



Appendix E

Congregation Shalom

Mission Statement

Congregation Shalom is a Reform Jewish Congregation, representing a liberal interpretation of Judaism, building upon the bedrock of stability established by our founders in 1951. We are dedicated to the study and teaching of the ethical and spiritual ideals of Judaism and to integrating these ideals into the present day world.

We are dedicated to building a community which affirms God's existence and to working for the benefit and continuity of the Jewish people and human kind. We recognize this country's diversity and will endeavor to be as inclusive as possible so that each member of our community feels comfortable and is provided with an opportunity to embrace the rituals and beliefs of Reform Judaism.

We seek to provide a welcoming environment in which individuals and families are encouraged to engage in the study of Torah, prayer, acts of loving kindness, and righteous deeds. Together we worship God, celebrate Shabbat, sanctify Jewish holidays, and observe life-cycle events, in a manner that reflects the flavor and emotion of Jewish tradition and allows the freedom to be creative.

We recognize study as central to the formation of a strong Jewish identity and to the perpetuation of our Jewish heritage. We are thus committed to providing a rich educational program for children and adults through our Religious School, Hebrew School, library, and other educational programs.

We recognize that the Jewish people look to the rabbis and cantors for spiritual guidance; therefore, we uphold the creative, spiritual, and intellectual freedom of our rabbis and cantor.

We seek to address contemporary Jewish issues, support the State of Israel, and strive to strengthen the bonds of the worldwide Jewish community. We also acknowledge that we are part of a greater community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. We strive to improve life within that broader community and promote better understanding and tolerance among its members. Our endeavors in this regard reinforce our faith in the one God of all humanity who offers us the strength to uplift the plight of those less fortunate. We are committed to the ideal of tikkun olam.

Congregation Shalom shall always be a sanctuary of warmth, comfort, and spirituality.

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Marc Cohen
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Phillip Himmelfarb
Eleanor Robinson
Harold and Bernice Rosenthal
Rabbi Stanley Schickler
Rabbi Shari Shamah
Rabbi Ronald M. Shapiro
Rabbi Barry Francis Silberg
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