The Creativity and Resourcefulness of Remote Jewish Communities

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Chapter 1: Why Remote Jewish Communities?

I grew up in Anchorage, Alaska. Each semester in my elementary school there would be an award ceremony for those who had a perfect attendance in class. The reward was a certificate that officially claimed that this student made it every single class. I never received this certificate at the ceremony. Some semesters it was rightfully so, because of being sick or because of a family vacation, other semesters I would have earned it, except I did not attend school if Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur fell on a school day. I wish back then I had the wherewithal to say something. Something like that my religion prevented me from attending school and there is more than one religious narrative in this city, and it should not affect attendance awards. Instead I shrugged it off because it back then it never occurred to me that my city should accommodate my religious needs.

In high school my religious uniqueness became more apparent compared to the 4,000 non-Jews who attended my same school. As one of the only Jews I was responsible for representing my religion whether I wanted to or not. I was very lucky to have a group of non-Jewish friends who were supportive of my religion. However I found myself defending Judaism and myself a lot during this time, for example from those who wanted me to convert and from those who was ignorant of Judaism. It was that defense of Judaism that built the foundation for me to become a Rabbi. But it was also that defense of Judaism that made me realize that Jews in remote towns or cities have a fundamentally different experiences than Jews who live in larger communities.

The goal of this thesis is to inform the larger Jewish community of these smaller ones. Furthermore to show that no matter how isolated members of a remote Jewish

community feel, they are not alone. There are lots of remote Jewish communities out there discovering successful ways to have meaningful communities. Each community has its own unique flavor, with its own personality. What most of these communities have in common is a handful of dedicated lay leaders and Jewish professionals. Lay leaders are often the building blocks of these remote communities; they are a core of dedicated volunteers who keep the community moving forward through programming and networking. These individuals often organize Jewish holiday events like Chanukah and Passover. They plan and teach religious school for their children, and they are the Jewish representative for the remote places they live in. It is a thankless job and I have talked to many of them in working on this thesis. Before I continue I want to thank all of the lay leaders who spent time talking to me, and thank them for dedicating so much of their time organizing meaningful Jewish communities.

In 2001 the United Jewish Communities commissioned a study called the National Jewish Population Survey. This survey discovered that 19% or over 800,000 Jews live in remote towns and cities, which are places roughly 2 hours away from a larger Jewish community. I was only able to contact a few of them. I want to highlight the significance of that problem. There are lots of Jewish communities that are not connected to the larger Jewish world that have developed and organized amazing Jewish programs. In remote communities every Jew is important, and programming is often based around outreaching toward each individual Jews within the community. This is something that remote communities and larger communities have in common. In fact larger communities can learn from remote communities because often in remote places Judaism becomes a religion of

compromise and a religion of creativity. In this thesis I will show what these communities look like. I will show how organizations serve these kinds of communities and how sociologists study these kinds of communities. I will also share my results of surveying Jewish lay leaders who live in remote places and write about the kind of programs these lay leaders organize. But first, I would like to define the kind of community I'm referring to, when I write about remote Jewish communities.

Chapter 2: How to Define a Remote Jewish Community.

The "small town" is an essential part American identity and mythology. It is an often idealized place where life is slow and every day is the same. There are many references to Small Town, USA in pop culture. For example the singer John Mellancamp is famous for his song *I was born in a small town.* In his song he highlights the nostalgia and sense of community one finds in a small town, "No I cannot forget where it is that I come from/I cannot forget the people who love me/Yeah, I can be myself here in this small town." Small Towns are an important narrative of the American experience and as John Mellancamp points out, they contain a sense of community and belonging. The Country music genre often highlights the small town experience in its songs and features both the positive and negative aspects of small town life. For example the country singer Kacey Musgraves in her song *This Town* sings, "Too small to be lying/ Way too small to cheat/ Way too small for secrets/ 'Cause they're way too hard to keep." Small towns are often too intimate which for Kacey Musgraves can be a problem for privacy. Everybody knows what everyone else is doing.

Television often highlights both the idealistic and over-simplistic narrative of small towns. For example in the movie *The Last Picture Show* features how boredom in the town Anarene, Texas is the motivation behind the characters' many misdeeds. While the characters bonded with each other in the town, they also could not wait to leave for a more exciting life elsewhere. The Andy Griffith show included a segment about the fictional small town of Mayberry, which illustrated the slow and simple life of a small town. There are many other media sources that depict the small town life experience, for example: George Lucas's American Graffiti, Smallville – as series about superman in his formative teenage years, Friday Night Lights – a series about the football experience in small town USA, and Lake Wobegon – the fictional town invented by Garrison Keillor in his show Prairie Home Companion, to name a small few. All of these examples display both the intimate and nostalgic nature of small towns along with the slow pace and narrow-minded views of its members.

This thesis focuses on Small Town Jews. Places that are small and far; ranging from 20 to 200 families and are at least a two hour drive away from a larger Jewish community. While Small Town USA has deep cultural significance in American identity and lore, it is surprisingly hard to define. The National Jewish Population Survey of 2001 performed a study of geographic differences among American Jews. They split their findings into four categories by population density: New York, South Florida, Other Top Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) which includes USA's largest cities, and the Rest of United States. Of the Jews that live in the United States, 24% live in New York, 8% in South Florida, 47% in MSA's, and 19% in the Rest of U.S.. This thesis is focused on that 19% that make up the

"Rest of the United States," which is roughly 1 in 5 Jews. But this is not an official classification of remote Jews, in fact it is a very over-generalized view in which the study describes as, "The remainder of the United States and includes many smaller MSAs as well as rural areas with the lowest Jewish population density." This could include suburbs of small MSA's and larger cities, which is not the communities that thesis is focused on. Thus, somewhere within this 19% of Jews is the sweet spot of Jews who live in small towns.

Another term used for areas around small towns is rural. Often the term rural and small towns are interchangeable. For example 2016 presidential election was sometimes framed as populations voting based on their rural or urban setting[1]. One may be tempted to call Jews who live in small towns, rural Jews. However the term "rural" comes with its own problems. Rural in general parlance denotes the country or an area not very populated. However there is an official meaning for the term rural by the US Census Bureau and it does not describe Jews in remote places. Here is a statement by the Census Bureau, comparing urban with rural: "The Census Bureau defines 'urban' for the 1990 census as comprising all territory, population, and housing units in urbanized areas and in places of 2,500 or more persons outside urbanized areas. More specifically, 'urban' consists of territory, persons, and housing units in: 1. Places of 2,500 or more persons incorporated as cities, villages, boroughs, and towns, but excluding the rural portions of 'extended cities.' 2. Census designated places of 2,500 or more persons. 3. Other territory, incorporated or

[1] For example this New York Times articles splitting the United States between Rural and Urban: http://tinyurl.com/zfxsdb2

unincorporated, included in urbanized areas. Territory, population, and housing units not classified as urban constitute 'rural.'"

The Census Bureau states that urban is a population of 2,500 or more people, thus rural is below that. If a town or area has 2,500 people, very few of them would be Jews and if there were Jews it would probably not be enough to stitch together a community. Thus there are most likely no Jewish communities in rural areas, which means they must be in urban areas. However, this too is problematic. The US Census Bureau describes urban areas, as follows, "An Urban Area comprises one or more places ("central place") and the adjacent densely settled surrounding territory ("urban fringe") that together have a minimum of 50,000 persons." This definition does describe some of the communities that this thesis focuses on, however there are plenty of small towns between the population of 2,500 and 50,000 that support Jewish communities. For example the town of Astoria, Oregon consists of roughly 10,000 people and is the home of Congregation Beit Salmon, a community of 20 or so Jewish families. This means that not even the U.S. Census Bureau has a term to define small towns that are part of the 19% of the "Rest of the United States."

Luckily the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) swoops in and helps classify what the US Census Bureau does not. Instead of classifying individual population areas, the OMB classifies counties. Counties with population density of 50,000 and greater are metropolitan areas. Any county that contains populations between 2,500 and 50,000 is a non-metro area. However not all non-metro counties are the same. Counties that are economically tied to a "core" county are still considered a metropolitan area even if it falls

below 50,000 in population density. Counties that are between 2,500 and 50,000 people with their own labor markets are designated as a micropolitan areas. For example, Astoria Oregon is in Clatsop County. Since this county has over 10,000 people thanks to Astoria, has its own labor market, and is not reliant on a core county nearby it is considered a micropolitan area[2].

However there is now another problem. While it was helpful for the OMB to develop this classification, no one outside of government bureau workers and sociologist circles use this term. In fact Microsoft Office thinks the word is a typo. So, what word would best describe this community that people are more familiar with? One would think that small town Jews would fit the ticket. However, terms like small and large have official implications. For example the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is an important department of the Institute of Education Sciences, classifies population density in order to figure out school statistics. It classifies small towns as populations between 2,500 and 25,000 people, while large towns are between 25,000 and 50,000 people, a mid-size city are up 250,000 people and finally large cities are above 250,000. This thesis focuses on communities within each of these categories. For example Anchorage, Alaska has over 300,000 residents which is classified as a large city by the NCES and a metropolitan area by the BMO. It is the home to Congregation Beth Sholom, a community of Jews of just over 200 families. This is considered a small community by most Jewish standards and is a part of the

[2] Here is a link illustrating the different metropolitan and micropolitan counties: http://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/metroarea/us_wall/Dec_2009/cbsa_us_1209_large.gif

19% of the NJPS survey's "Rest of the United States." It defies the description of "small town" and yet falls well into the parameters of a small community.

This chapter is a very long winded way of saying that this thesis has decided to use the term "remote" to describe these kinds of Jewish communities. Remote is useful in a number of ways. There is no official designation of the term by the US statistic bureaus or other surveys and census organizations. It also describes the geographical location of these communities. While both Anchorage and Astoria are wildly different sizes, they both have successful Jewish communities that are far away from large Jewish populations. Remote also describes that the Jewish community in these locations are the only Jewish communities in the area. In this way remote does not describe small Jewish communities in suburban areas. Jews in suburban areas are close enough to other large Jewish populations to have choices on where they would like to attend. Jews in remote locations do not have much of a choice.

Now that the term remote has been addressed, let us address what constitutes small within Jewish community standards. This is some subject of debate, a debate that began over 50 years ago. In 1958 a sociologist named Marshal Sklare published a book called, *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*. This book set the bar by stating a small Jewish community is less than a 1,000 Jews. In the 1963 edition of the American Jewish Yearbook, Erich Rosenthal wrote an article called, *Studies of Jewish Intermarriage in the United States*. In it he states, "That a group of fewer than 1,000 individuals necessarily lack the *esprit de corps* essential for maintaining the communal institutions needed for

group survival and a proper organization of the marriage market." Essentially Rosenthal felt that Sklare's small Jewish communities were not big enough to survive as Jewish communities. A fact we know today, to be not true. Throughout the decades the number that means small has been a moving target for sociologists and historians studying Jewish communities. It has gotten as high as 25,000 Jews and as few as 100 Jews. Sociologists who study Jews and Jewish sociologists cannot agree on a number and the sociologist Matt Boxer wrote in his dissertation on small Jewish communities, "There has never been a consensus as to what constitutes a small Jewish community."

For the sake of this thesis, I have a couple of observations to make for understanding what small means. Communities often use types of measurements to signify their own numbers: individual Jews and family units. For example Congregation Beth Sholom out of Anchorage, Alaska would say they have over 200 family members. They are a member of the Reform Movement, has its own official classification for size of communities. For them any congregation like Congregation Beth Sholom and smaller is considered small. For most remote Jewish communities 200 families is the threshold for affording a Jewish professional to work with the community. This thesis focuses on Jewish communities as big as Congregation Beth Sholom and has no minimum. My only standard for small, is that there needs to be an established community with current members. In fact as the NCES shows that many small Jewish communities are not in small towns, but are in mid-sized and even large cities. Different cities contain different sized Jewish communities and this thesis is not interested in the size of the city, but in the remoteness and size of the Jewish community.

Chapter 3: What Makes a Remote Community Successful?

Part 1: A Community of Relationships

Among Jewish intellectual circles there are two schools of thought of how Judaism is moving forward in the United States. On side are the Traditionalists who are rather pessimistic. They believe that assimilation is just around the corner and they claim that statistics on intermarriage and limited Jewish participation support their theory. They believe that as Judaism moves further into modernity it will disrupt Jewish continuity. The other side is the Transformationists and they are more optimistic about Judaism's future. Transformationists look at the same data and they say that modernity offers lots of opportunity for Judaism and Judaism will change due to these opportunities, but these changes will not affect Jewish continuity. Remote Jewish communities are truly caught in the middle of these two schools of thought.

However, there are still plenty of Jews who lead meaningful lives as members of the communities in these remote places. In fact it may be in remote places where Judaism is thriving the most. In another chapter I survey lay leaders who live in remote places, and here is what one respondent said about the remote Jewish experience, "People make a commitment to come to services even though it's not easy or convenient. The experiment in small towns continues with what is relevant and what is personally important. And because of that the Judaism that emerges here is different from what we see in big cities." Judaism is special in these locations, not because it is easy, but because it is hard. Most Jews in remote communities cannot just show up to Jewish function, but have to play in integral role in planning and organizing them. It is almost impossible for these Jews to follow the

Halachot of Judaism, something Traditionalists would prefer. Instead remote Jews find unique and resourceful ways to organize Judaism around their lives which indeed does change it and transform it. The source of this transformation is the relationships Jews in remote places have with each other.

Relationships are the main subject of Rabbi Ron Wilson's book, Relational Judaism. In his books he writes about the Jewish concierge; a Jewish professional to whom a community looks to for support or education. Rabbi Wilson describes them as, "Someone I can meet face to face, someone with whom I can break bread, share a cup of coffee, shake a hand, lean on a shoulder, embrace in a warm hug." Rabbi Wilson is referring to Jewish professionals, but almost all of the lay leaders I have met in remote Jewish communities have these characteristics. They act as the foundation of the community by offering relationships to the other Jews who also want Jewish experiences.

Rabbi Wilson continues and writes, "The task of such 'concierge' for Judaism is to build a relationship between individuals and the Jewish experience… the approach needs to focus on how Jewish practice can be a path to meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing. Jewish life-cycle and holiday rituals, liturgy, and study are all means to a goal – to self-discovery, celebrating relationships, and fulfilling communal obligations." Rabbi Wilson is not focused on Halakhot or traditional Jewish practices as a means to create Jewish communities, but shows that Jewish ceremony and tradition is a pathway to successful Jewish relationships and communal experiences.

Relationships and communal experiences are also a subject of great interest for sociologists. Sociologists develop tools for understanding and measuring relationships. They have published a wide variety of useful information from their research that gives us a shared language when examining relationships and communal experiences. In this chapter I will discuss how these tools can help us understand remote Jewish communities and show how they can be successful.

Jews who move to remote places do not do so for the Jewish community. Whether it is a move for a career or a change of scenery, Judaism is hardly ever a motivating factor. There is actually a term for this dynamic called Central Place Theory. This theory was developed by the German Geographer Walter Christaller in the 1950's. He studied the economic relationships between cities and categorized goods into two levels based on proximity. Lower-order goods need to be replaced regularly and thus needs a nearby means of replenishment; for example grocery stores replenish the low-order good of food. High-order goods are often expensive and specialized and are replaced semi-regularly, like a vehicle or clothes. Christaller claims that those who wish to produce high-order goods need to be closer to larger population centers, but since they are not as necessary, people can afford to be farther away from them. Central Place Theory can be applied to religion as well. Jews who see Judaism as a low-order good will make more of an effort to live in jewishly dense populations, because they feel the need to replenish their Judaism more regularly. Those Jews who feel that Judaism is a high-order good do not mind living in remote places because they do not need to replenish their Judaism as much.

For example a respondent for this thesis, Miriam, moved From Portland, Oregon to Astoria, Oregon because her husband found work in Astoria as a teacher. Another respondent, Michelle, found work in Anchorage, Alaska and moved away from Chicago. Both respondents moved from large cities with large Jewish communities to remote places not for the Jewish community in those places, but for the work available there. At the time they viewed Judaism as a high-order good. Since their spouse or career took precedent over access to Jewish community.

Yet, for some Jews in remote places, Judaism is a low-order good, and they want to participate in some kind of Jewish experience regularly. Some Jews have always seen Judaism as a low-order good and moved to a remote place anyways, while for others having children is what motivates Jews to greater participation. Low-order goods can have two components: spiritual and economic. Those who have to choose between the two choose to make a living first, but switch their prioritizes back and forth depending on their situation.

Dr. Steven Huberman, a professor of social work, organized a survey called *Understanding Synagogue Affiliation*. In his research he discovered that "while 20% of Jews with no children are affiliated with a Jewish community, 64% of families with three or more children are synagogue members." He also learned that length of residence was a factor for Jewish affiliation. All of the respondents but one for this thesis have been residing in their current town or city for over ten years. Five of the respondents have children. For example respondents Ashley and Penelope both became Jewish lay leaders because they wanted their children to have a Jewish education. I have met many other Jews, outside this thesis,

who have become lay leaders for the exact same reason. Jewish parents often prioritizes their children's Jewish upbringing and for many remote places, that means parents have to organize something themselves.

While parent lay leaders are often the ones who prop up the community, a community is made up of more than just lay leaders. Lay leaders unlock the possibility for Jews to come together as a meaningful Jewish community. Often participation in these communities affects individual's own identity. Jewish identity is a popular research subject by many sociologists. One definition by the Sociologist Matt Boxer author of *The Effect of Jewish Community Size on Jewish Identity* is "Social identity theory defines a social identity as the part of an individual's self concept that is derived from the knowledge that he or she is a member of a social group or groups, combined with the value and emotional significance associated with that membership." In other words Jews who do not participate in Jewish functions are less likely to identify themselves as Jewish compared to those who do. Jews who do participate are likely to have a shared set of values and collective experiences that inform their identity. However, participating in Jewish functions can come at a price. People who are Jewish also have jobs, hobbies, families, and social lives. Groups compete with each other for time, ideology, and popularity. As a long time religious school teacher I often compete with soccer practice for my students' time. One of the respondents, Miriam, who is a single parent of two, has a full time job and is enrolled in graduate school, had this to say about her leadership role in the Jewish community of Astoria, Oregon, "I am harboring guilt that I haven't done as much as I liked. It's a responsibility, but it's also a gift." She, like many other lay leaders, struggle to balance all

the competing forces in her life. Just because she has figured out a priority that makes it all work, does not mean she feels good about it.

Furthermore, it is much easier to join a Jewish community than to organize one. The lay leaders and Jewish professionals who do organize Jewish functions help unlock opportunities for those who are more hesitant to participate, but if they do participate the benefits to their own identity and Judaism are profound. Matt Boxer continues, "Throughout the life course, identities are created, modified, and maintained, strengthened, or discarded through interactions with others. However, given the abundance of stimuli individuals experience in their social environments on a daily basis, it is a natural tendency to define and evaluate one's self in terms of group memberships. One tends to adopt the behaviors, attitudes, and values common within one's own groups." In other words people's identities are never static, but constantly forming and evolving. When people join a group they not only identify themselves as a member, but their values and behaviors align with that group as well. Over the course of my time as a student Rabbi I have talked to many lay leaders. Some of them, to my surprise, only became Jewishly active as a result to moving to a remote place. If there had not been a community already established they would have not identified themselves as Jewish or at least as strongly Jewish. Thus access to that Jewish community informed their own self-identity.

One of the most important components of community is relationships. Relationships can be considered a kind of currency. It is not as easy to measure as money, but relationships can be beneficial or harmful or anything in-between. Sociologists describe the

value of relationships, as social capital. Matt Boxer describes four components to social capital: “a sense of belonging to a social group, influence both within the group and outside it, the degree to which the group meets the individual’s perceived needs, and a shared emotional bond with other members of the group.” In other words social capital is comprised of the benefits and values an individual receive from belonging to a group. For example attending a Shabbat service increases the social capital of the individual who participated as long as they have a positive shared experience. This is where remote communities have an advantage and a disadvantage. In remote communities without a Jewish professional, worship services require the hard work of organizing and leading services by lay leaders. The advantage is that the processes that these lay leaders undergo to organize worship services for their community creates social capital. Social capital accrues over time spent together. The disadvantage is that Jewish communities in remote places, especially in places with no Jewish professionals, like Astoria, often have limited interactions with each other. Some communities meet once a month or have seasonal events. Others meet only a handful of times a year. This limitation of time spent together, makes social capital accrue much slower than in places where Jewish functions are available on weekly or even daily basis.

Boxer has another definition for social capital, “as a form of capital existing in relationships that allows an individual to use his or her social connections to gain access to a wide range of resources.” This is a more pragmatic definition and equally as helpful for remote communities. In communities with many Jewish professionals, communities utilize financial resources for professionals to organize Jewish programs, events, and holidays. In

remote communities with one or no Jewish professionals they rely heavily on the resources and connections of each other. Social capital is literally the currency necessary for Jewish community to happen in remote places. Since these communities do not necessarily have the financial resources to pay professionals, they need resources such as time and collective knowledge in order to plan, organize, and deliver Jewish programming. Social Capital is how these resources are traded and spent. Just two Jews talking to each other and sharing ideas is enough to spark a community event in a remote place.

A second type of capital is called Religious Capital, developed by the Sociologist Lawrence Iannaccone. Sociologist Bruce Philips introduces Inannaccone's religious capital in his article *The Religiously Inefficient Family Revisited*, "In this article [Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach] Iannaccone introduced the concept of religious capital, which he defined as 'familiarity with a religion's doctrines, rituals, traditions, and members.' If religious capital is considered as an economic 'input,' then the corresponding 'output' would include such behaviors as prayer and church attendance." Social capital refers to all social encounters for an individual, religious capital narrows it down to social encounters with a desired output of religious participation and experiences.

Traditionalists would disdain Jews moving to remote places, because many parts of traditional Judaism can only be practiced in metropolitan areas. With tools like Central Place Theory, Jewish identity formation, and Social and Religious Capital, it is possible to see how Judaism can thrive in these remote locations anyways, as transformationists predicted. Furthermore only a few lay leaders can unlock the possibility of an amazing Jewish

community in any remote location. As Rabbi Wolf pointed out, it's not the Halakha that brings Jewish together, but shared relationships and positive communal experiences. As soon as a Jews participate in just a handful of Jewish events their own identity begins to align with that of the rest of the Jews in the community, creating a rich and vibrant Jewish experience in a remote town or city.

Part 2: Types of Successful Congregations

Another prominent sociologist who thinks a lot about religious congregations is Dr. Penny Becker. In her book *Congregations in Conflict* she studies what makes congregations successful by researching why congregations split apart. Her book addresses a startling discovery that most congregations can be narrowed down to four different categories: the House of Worship Model, The Family Model, the Community Model, and the Leader Model. Becker believes that all congregations of all religions across North America fit into one of these four models. The following is a brief overview of each model.

Congregations who are part of the House of Worship model consider themselves primarily as a provider of religious goods and services, like Bar/Bat Mitzvahs or worship services. Their primary goals are to provide an intimate and uplifting worship experience and to train members, especially children, in the denomination's heritage, doctrine, and rituals. These congregations make limited demands on member loyalty and time where religious involvement remains relatively separate from other areas of members' lives. All decisions are made by clergy, paid staff, or committees. A good example of this dynamic would be a specialty grocery store, where you go pick up specific goods and leave as soon as you have them.

Congregations that are part of the Family model consider themselves a place of worship and religious education. They provide close-knit and supportive relationships for members. Members of these congregations know and care about each other's' lives. They can be matriarchal or patriarchal; informal, personal connections where length of membership are more important bases of authority than are formal structures or positions. These congregations may be led by a small group of longtime friends and their extended family network. Furthermore many of these congregations tend to have a "we do what we do, because it was always done this way" attitude. Any person or view that challenges the status quo becomes labeled as a troublemaker.

Congregations that are part of the Community model consider themselves a place of close ties and shared values. They place value on worship and religious education and provide members with a feeling of belonging and family-like attachment. These congregations find it necessary that the policies and programs of the congregation express the values and commitments of the members regarding social issues. One of their most important communal enterprises is figuring out how to interpret and apply shared values. These congregations are always trying to live their values and institutionalizing them in local congregational life. With more emphasis on formal and open decision making routines that include all members. If the House of Worship model is like a grocery store and the Family model is like a matriarchy or patriarchy, then the Community model is like a democracy.

Congregations that are part of the Leader model value worship, education, and expressing members' values. But they differ from Community congregation in three ways.

First, the values they express spring more directly from official tenets of their tradition or movement and less form members' own interpretation or life experiences. Second, many of these congregations engage in social justice beyond their own walls by being part of national political and social platforms. Third, intimacy is less valued than public good. Many of these congregations have a clergy member or leader who is outspoken and very active in the larger community. The whole community supports a single issue and often their clergy are the spokesperson for that issue.

While these four models were developed for all types of congregation of all types of religions, not just remote Jewish communities, many remote communities fit within these four different models. However not one congregation always fits perfectly within one model. Some congregations are in transition while others borrow pieces from two or more models. One of the greatest sources of conflict within these congregations is a group of people who want to be one model while another group within that same congregation wants to be a different model. This can be a painful process where many come to feel alienated from a congregation that they love. Furthermore most people do not see their congregation as being a specific model. They assume that the congregational model they grew up in, is the way that all congregations work. So when they join a new congregation they may not be able to appreciate it, because it does not fit the only model they know. This problem is especially salient in remote Jewish communities where there are not many choices for the community members. Often these communities become a shared space for Jews who adhere to different Jewish worship practices and ideologies. Since most Jews who move to remote places see Judaism as a high-order good they attend to adopt a non-

Halakhic or non-traditional Jewish practices like Reform Judaism.[3] However for Jews who live in remote places and prefer traditional worship services, this can be a deep source of tension for the community members. This means that for many remote places, Jewish communities are not just a sacred space to practice Judaism, but a sacred space to practice different ideologies and models of Judaism under the same roof. Articulating the type of model a congregation wants to be part of, may go a long way to prevent possible conflicts in the future. This is a unique problem for remote Jewish community. Whatever their model looks like, it is the only model in town. Jews who live in remote towns or cities do not have an array of models to choose from. Most Jews do not think of congregations as being part of one of four models. They adhere to the model they know, often the one they grew up with, and assume that all congregations work within this model. It can be a shock when a person moves to a new remote town or city and the only congregation in the place they move to, is nothing like the congregation they are used to. This compounded with the normal stress of moving to a new place can create some really unhappy congregants.

Becker's work provides us with an amazing assortment of tools and definitions to help communities articulate their feelings towards how a congregation is organized. When I presented these four models to the boards of both the Astoria and Anchorage Jewish community, they felt that they were mostly the Community model. They both have an open forum for decision making which includes open board meetings and semi-annual meetings. They try to make decisions based on shared values and principles which the Anchorage

[3] The NJPS point this out that the 800,000 of Jews who live in the "rest of the United States" 38% are Reform and 37% refer to themselves as just Jewish. From Jewish Geographic differences of American Jews

community has articulated through a mission statement. Both groups recognized the problem of their community containing members who desired a different model from their Jewish congregation. The Astoria community, had a couple of long time members of the community who did represent a matriarch like model. The Anchorage community felt that the four categories were limiting and wished there were more categories to choose from. The Anchorage community also recognized another interesting problem. One of Becker's quotes from her book is, "The opposite of conflict is not harmony, but apathy. Conflicting views or interests mean that people care, a lot." They felt that their congregation suffered from apathy by their members. Perhaps a conflict within their community would be a good thing because it would be indicative of people caring.

Becker also focuses on another tool in her book, the difference between institutionalism and idioculture. Institutionalism is a standard model in which a large group of people perceive and share their environment. For example a prayer service at almost all Jewish worship services contains at least the Sh'ma, the Amidah, the Aleinu, and the Mourner's Kaddish in that order. A prayer book is called a siddur which literally means "Order" in Hebrew. This is the institution Jews across the world use to have a shared and positive worship experience. This institution offers legitimacy to congregations who use it.

Idioculture is the minhag or customs of the individual communities. A definition of idioculture is as follows, "A system of knowledge, beliefs, behavior, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer, and serve as the basis for further action." In other words idioculture can be like an inside joke, which is funny for

those who experienced its meaning, but no funny for those who were not there. Many communities' idioculture works within the basic grammar of Institutionalism. For example playing a musical instrument during worship services does not disrupt the order of the prayers, and adds a meaning to the worship experience. Not all congregations use an instrument, and different congregation use different instruments, which contribute to the congregation's idioculture.

However sometimes different groups of people adhere to different institutional beliefs. For example many Conservative and Orthodox Jews believe that the Mourner's Kaddish can only be recited if there is a minyan of 10 Jews. While liberal Jewish groups believe that it is important to recite the Mourner's Kaddish whenever it is needed and the amount of Jews available is irrelevant. This is not a conflict over idioculture, but a conflict over institutional beliefs.

A community's idioculture could alienate or confuse a guest or new members who do not know how the local culture operates. This is the other side of an inside joke. Those who did not experience it or understand it, feel left out. Idioculture is an incredible process for congregations to have meaningful experiences. Idioculture can be the foundation for the community to develop aligned Jewish values and identity. This the basic framework required for Remote Jewish communities to develop impactful and meaningful programs.

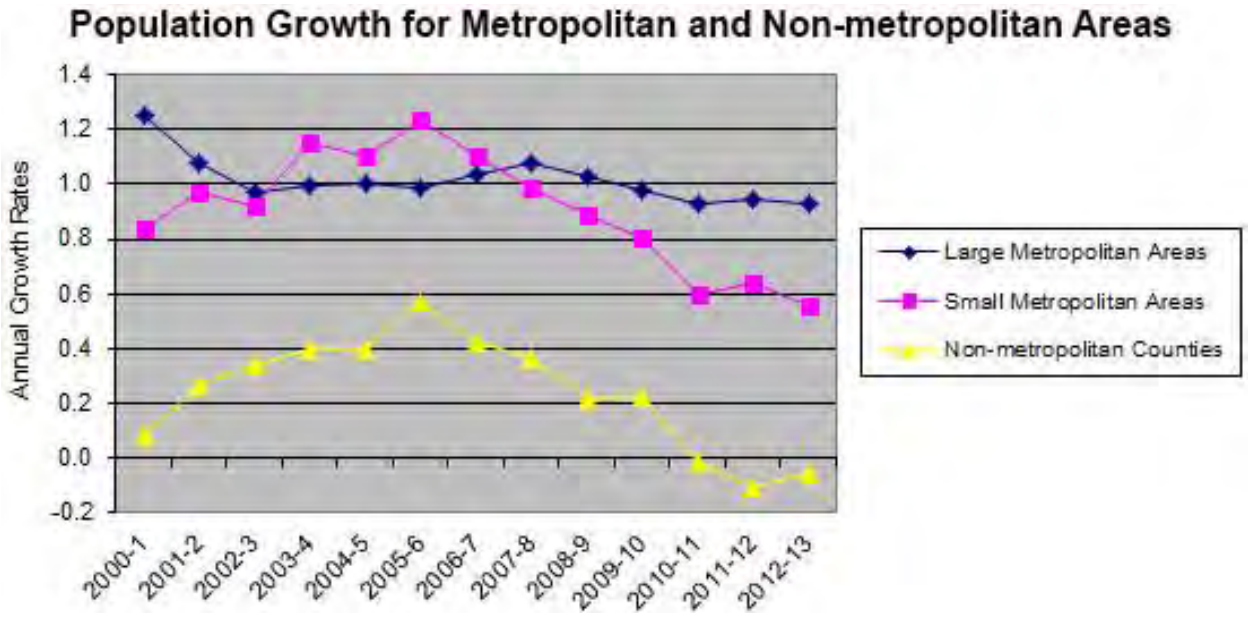
Research points to the fact that the general population, and Jews among them, are moving away from small towns and remote places[4]. However, there are still lots of Jews who live in these kinds of areas. While this statistic may make it seem that these areas are disregarded and even derelict, the truth is that remote places are incubators for Jewish creativity. Sociologists like Matt Boxer show us how relationships between Jews can spark meaningful Jewish communities. And Sociologists like Penny Becker show us how these communities can form into different types of successful congregations. A resourceful and beautiful form of Judaism is happening in remote places and it has a lot to teach us.

Chapter 4: Organizational Approach towards Serving Remote Jewish Communities

Jews seem to love to live in cities and there are lots of theories of why Jews live in metropolitan areas. Historically this trend began in the medieval era, where Jews moved to cities partly because they were not allowed to own land and partly because they were literate and urban areas supported jobs that required literacy like money changing. In the United States statistics from the National Jewish Population Survey show 71% of Jews live in large metropolitan areas[5]. Jews are mostly a city people. Sadly, statistics also show that people and Jews among them are moving away from small towns. For example the Brooking Institute shows that over the years populations of rural areas have been decreasing, "in the three years following 2010, roughly six in 10 rural counties experienced population losses

[4] This information comes from the US Census Bureau's publication Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010.
[5] This data comes from the NJPS's publication Geographic differences among American Jews

compared with less than half in the mid 2000s."[6] This graph from the US Census Bureau illustrates the decline of growth rates in non-metro areas:



However this thesis is focused on those 19% of Jews who do not live in large metropolitan areas. While Jews love to live in cities and the population of small towns is declining there is still 1 of 5 Jews who live in these remote places. By definition Jewish communities in remote locations are decentralized. Even if these communities have one or two Jewish professionals, they are still miles away from the influence of Jewish organizations such as Jewish Federations, Jewish camps, JCC's and so on. However there are organizations that have developed unique ways to serve these communities. The most salient organization is the Institute for Southern Jewish Life(ISJL); an organization that specializes in servicing small Jewish communities in the South. Other groups are the Jewish Federation of North America's Network Communities, the URJ's small congregations

[6] This information comes for the Brooking institute online article, A Population Slowdown for Small Town America at https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/a-population-slowdown-for-small-town-america/

department, and Agudas Chasidei Chabad. All of these organizations employ different approaches towards supporting small Jewish communities in remote places, in which I will explore shortly.

While many of these organizations are relatively old, they were not the first to help support remote American Jewish communities. That distinction goes to the Industrial Removal Office (IRO) of 1899.The IRO's mission went well beyond supporting small Jewish communities, they were in the business of creating them. "The goal of the IRO was thus to relieve the density of the Jewish population of New York and other great cities of the East by resettling Jewish immigrants, and especially the unemployed, in locations beyond the major cities of the Atlantic seaboard."[7] The IRO was started by the Rumanian Committee and the Jewish Agricultural Society. Its original impetus was to help Romanian Jews immigrate into the United States after a series of anti-Semitic decrees by the Romanian Government. It was also supported by the Baron de Hirsch Fund. This fund was started by the German Jew, Maurice de Hirsch, who made his fortune as a banker and as a railroad baron. Mr. Hirsch and the German Jews like him were very motivated to both create a place where their coreligionists could live and prosper and combat antisemitism. The IRO would solve both these problems by settling Jewish immigrants of Eastern and Western Europe in small towns west of the Mississippi.

The IRO also participated in the Galveston Movement which was started by Jacob Schiff, another wealthy German Jew. Schiff believed that it was important to settle Jews west of the Mississippi and wanted them to avoid metropolitan areas along the eastern

[7] From Jewish Life in Small-town America: A History pg 66 by Lee Shai Weissbach

seaboard. He helped to bring immigrants through Galveston, Texas rather than Ellis Island. During the immigration boom of the early 19th century the IRO used massive resources to move over 75,000 Jewish immigrants. The IRO developed an organized network of local Jewish town dwellers who would help facilitate immigrants into their local towns. Furthermore the IRO would send field agents to scout possible accommodating towns, which included locations that already had a handful Jews or places that needed a specific occupation that Jews could fulfill.

By its own standards the IRO was not terribly successful however. While it indeed moved Jews from immigration points of New York and Texas further west, most of the Jews who they settled, did not stay settled. Within days or weeks these settled Jews would move somewhere else. Furthermore the IRO steadily began losing money and resources after 1914 and shuttered completely in 1922 after Congress passed the Quota Act in 1921 which prevented many Jewish immigrants and refugees from entering the United States.

In terms of scale, the IRO probably had the grandest vision of centralizing Jewish life around small towns and the largest assets to accomplish it. However unlike the organizations we see today, the IRO was in the business of creating Jewish communities in small towns but not necessarily supporting them. The IRO was focused on managing the massive immigration boom of the early 20th century. However their mission was overly structured. They underestimated the importance of the capital and family resources available to Jews in cities. The IRO hoped Jews would thrive in small towns through their relocation process. However, Jews just used IRO's resources to get into the United States

and moved somewhere else. The IRO's inflexibility could not overcome the Quota Act and it unfortunately fell apart. However, the IRO was successful in moving many Jews into the United States and throughout the country. Modern organizations do not have IRO's massive resources, but they are also not interested in relocating Jews. Organizations like The Institute for Southern Jewish Life have noticed that Jewish relocation is a common trend and unfortunately Jews, much like most of the American population, are relocating away from small towns.

The Institute for Southern Jewish Life has become the most well-known organization that helps service Jews who live in remote Jewish communities in the South. With the exception of Florida, the South has a dwindling Jewish population. Their mission, from their websites states, "The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) promotes Judaism and our heritage through innovative programs and shared resources. The ISJL delivers rabbinic services, an education program, and cultural events to communities seeking new solutions, or where Jewish resources are limited. The ISJL also provides historic preservation and community engagement throughout the South."

The ISJL started in 1986 as a response to Jews migrating out of the South. As Jewish community centers and synagogue began to shutter their doors for good, there was a need for a place to deposit their sacred items and documents. So Macy Hart, the director of a Jewish camp in Mississippi, founded the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. In 2000 Macy reorganized the Museum into an organization that helps continue meaningful Jewish experiences and communities in 13 Southern States. The ISJL provides Rabbis,

educators, curricula, cultural programs, and many more tools and resources to Jewish communities that are too small to afford full time Jewish professionals and expensive Jewish resources.

The ISJL keeps a detailed website that has six separate departments including Community Engagement, Education, History, Museum, Cultural Programming, and Rabbinic Services. Their Community engagement service includes a rotation of programs which currently involve literacy programs and conflict resolution strategies. For their education department the ISJL has a robust education team who develop curriculum and help disseminate it to all the volunteer teachers in the Jewish communities that they service. The education team sends their educators to every small community in the South, much like the IRO's field agents, to show volunteer education directors and teachers how to use their curriculum. Their History department includes a Jewish encyclopedia of every state within their 13 state purview. This also includes a Jewish history of every small town. The ISJL used to have a physical museum, but are currently planning to develop a new museum space. Their museum department features many programs to explore the South's Jewish history. For their cultural programming the ISJL organize Jewish scholars, performers, and artists to visit any location within their organization's purview. For their Rabbinic services department the ISJL sends out an iterant Rabbi the same way they send out their educators. The Rabbi will perform life cycle events for the communities and offer to lead worship services a couple times a year. The ISJL see themselves as stewards to the Jewish experience in the South and endeavor to make these communities successful.

The ISJL is perhaps the largest organization to date with its singular focus of supporting small town Jews. So far it seems to have been successful. However population trends show that people are moving away from small towns and for the most part Jews are following these trends. The ISJL is in the middle of its own great experiment. If they can create successful and meaningful Jewish experiences in small towns, will the Jewish population continue and grow in these communities? The ISJL has no plans to expand their organization beyond the Southern States they service, so they are betting on these communities' survival and growth.

The Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA) is the Jewish Federation Umbrella organization and one of the top 10 charities in the continent. It has an operating budget of over 300 million dollars and distributes over 3 billion dollars. The JFNA provides services to its 153 local federations that include fundraising, training, and organizational and leadership assistance. While it services an impressive amount of Jews across North America, it unfortunately cannot help everyone. Many remote Jewish communities fall outside of the JFNA's boundaries. However the JFNA has set up its own program to help service these communities called the Network of Independent Communities.

The Network Independent Communities, called The Network for short, was started by Marty Stein, a lay leader out of Milwaukie, Wisconsin and Russel Robinson, an employee of JFNA. The JFNA has an organized fundraising apparatus in all major cities of North America. However, it occurred to Stein and Robinson that their fundraising efforts had holes in it. Jews in remote places were being overlooked and they had money to give. So together

they started travelling to small and remote places and asking for donations for JFNA. This effort coalesced into a whole department within the JFNA, that they called the Network.

Today the Network is run by Danny Nathanson, along with five regional directors and a robust advisory committee and it boasts of connecting over 300 communities. Under Danny's leadership the Network has evolved from just fundraising to focus on community building and leadership. The Network spends much of its time teaching remote Jewish communities how to fundraise for themselves. They help these communities fundraise towards Israel or another international programs sponsored by the Network. Afterwards these communities can use these same fundraising skills and tools to help fundraise within their local community. The Network is also a very well connected organization that sponsors speaking events at local communities.

The Network, true to its name, has discovered a unique way to connect and chart small and remote Jewish communities all across North America. Through its fundraising efforts the Network is motivated to find and reach every Jew, no matter how remote their community. They do not offer the amount of services that the ISJL offers, but their scope covers and uncovers all Jewish communities of North America.

The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), is by definition dedicated to all Jews who are members of the Reform movement. This means Jews who live in remote places, big cities, and everywhere in between. The URJ has lots of experience providing services to all of these communities, which includes 1200 congregations worldwide. By its own estimates this includes over 380 of what they call "small Jewish congregations" in the United States. Small

Jewish congregations have roughly 200 family units or less. Over the years the URJ has changed how its approached these small congregations.

In the 1980's and 1990's the URJ organized into a more corporate model and it cut up the organization into 12 different regions. It is through this structural change that small communities probably received the greatest support from the URJ. Within the regional structures URJ began developing separate programs catered to the needs of small communities. A small congregation department formed and developed How-To materials for Jewish communities. Furthermore there were small community breakout sessions and workshops during regional meetings and biennial as well as small community conferences. The representatives of the regions were physically able to visit all of the communities within their region throughout a one year period.

Unfortunately the regional model was also expensive and incredibly difficult to fund. Each region was designed to support staff members who visited every Jewish community within the region and would support these communities with programming, training, and organizational assistance. While this mode was wonderful for the communities it required too many people and resources for the URJ to support it. Due to financial troubles that included the 2008 fiscal collapse the URJ was forced to reorganize away from the regional model into a cheaper centralized organization with offices mostly in New York. The URJ dissolved or reorganized most of its departments and left a couple of employees to work with small communities. This was an unfortunate change for small communities affiliated with the Reform Movement. They no longer received the support and resources they

received during the regional system and the URJ no longer had a systemic means to support these communities.

However the URJ is attempting to build an effective tool to help these kinds of congregations called "The Tent." The Tent is a social media platform where congregations can share ideas and resources. The URJ acts as a steward of the website, with members of various departments working through it to connect to communities across the country. For example the Jewish Congregation of Astoria, Oregon needed prayer books. They inquired for new prayerbooks in the Tent and two weeks had their very own set, and they only had to pay for shipping. Communities also share ideas for programming, education, and holidays. Different sized communities can join similar groups and share their experiences of being Jewish in their town. The URJ wants to help out these communities as much as they can but they are just limited with their resources.

Another organization that works with small communities is the Chabad. The Chabad, an Orthodox Hasidic Jewish movement has been around since 1771. However it was not until 1951 that it grew into a worldwide Jewish movement through the efforts of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. "He established a network of more than 3,600 institutions that provide religious, social and humanitarian needs in over 1,000 cities, spanning more than 80 countries and all 50 American states."[8] As of today the Chabad has over 2,800 institutions in North America alone. Like the URJ the Chabad movement is responsible for all Jews within this movement, which includes institutions like schools, community centers, and even rehab centers.

[8] From Jewish Literacy by Rabbi William Telushkin pg 440

Yet the Chabad has an outreach approach towards remote communities and small towns worldwide. While they do not attempt to develop communities from within they normally send a Rabbi and his wife to a town with enough resources to serve a Jewish community at almost any location. It does not matter if the town has a large Jewish presence or not. These Jewish couples create a Chabad center for local Jews to worship and celebrate holidays. Furthermore the Chabad organization has a detailed and informative website full of Jewish content at Chabad.org. They organize the front page of the website around the Torah Portion of the week, with many articles reflecting on the weekly portion, its meaning and relevance today. They organize their website among four categories: Jewish Practice, Learning Values, Community and Family, and Inspiration and Entertainment. Each category has many subcategories which exhaustively cover every facet of Jewish life. Chabad.org is an encyclopedia, with articles, written by Rabbis, detailing every part of Jewish living. This combination of Rabbi couples outreach and deeply informative website has been an effective way to help service Jews almost everywhere in the world, not just remote towns in North America.

The Conservative Movement has over 500,000 affiliated Jews and many non-affiliated Jews. However, they do not have large focus towards remote Jewish communities. Perhaps this is due to limited resources or that many small Jewish communities are affiliated with the Reform Movement and/or the Chabad. Either way they do not have a large presence in the world of small town Jews. Furthermore the Conservative Movement is shrinking with the Pew 2013 reporting only 36% of Jews who are born Conservative are remaining so, with a majority transitioning over to the Reform Judaism.

There are two more organizations that should get an honorable mention in this chapter. The first is Rabbis Without Borders (RWB) which is affiliated with Clal. RWB has set up a program for small town Jews called the Rabbis Without Borders Service Corp. All 150 Rabbinic members of RWB have agreed to help communities that RWB calls, "small but proud." This includes many of these Rabbis traveling to small communities to help run services and other Jewish activities. RWB service corp. is still in the first year of its program, and it will be very interesting to see how it moves forward.

The second organization is The Center for Small Town Jewish Life (CSTJL). This organization is in its first year and is run by Rabbi Isaacs out of Waterville, Maine. Its premise, where Waterville and Colby College act as an incubator, is that there are a lot of Jewish possibilities for college towns. CSTJL's mission is to help connect college students and the town's Jewish community together for programming, worship services, and holidays. This includes colleges with and without Hillels. Hopefully moving forward CSTJL will find great success and help serve Jews in these areas.

Throughout this thesis I make the case that as a world community; Jews are not doing enough to help support remote Jewish communities. I am happy that these organizations prove me wrong. However, as far as I know, these organizations are the only ones whose mission includes remote Jewish communities. That is unfortunate; I wish this chapter could include a much longer list of organizations. Hopefully through the efforts of the organizations mentioned in this chapter and this thesis, that list will begin to grow.

Especially since these organizations can testify that remote Jewish places are incubators for impactful and resourceful Jewish programs.

There is also a dearth of literature concerned about remote Jewish communities. The Sociologist Matt Boxer has perhaps the only modern look at small town Jews published so far. Matt Boxer himself laments the limited amount of information dedicated to this subject. In terms of literature, their a couple of book that addresses the history of remote Jewish communities. For example Weissbach wrote *Jewish Life in Small Town America* in 2006 where he follows the history of the great immigration boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The historian Ewa Morawaska wrote *Insecure Prosperity: Small town Jews in Industrial America,* about the Jews in Johnstown Pennsylvania between 1890 and 1940. Finally the Historian Wiener wrote, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History*, about the Jews in the Appalachians in the 1900's. This is pretty much the extent of histories that focus small towns Jews and the latest these histories go is around the 1950's.

There are also some anecdotal accounts of life in small towns. For example the Historian H. V. Epstein wrote, Jews in *Small Towns: Lessons and Legacies* which provide individual Jewish accounts of the living in small towns. The periodical, *Sh'ma* includes articles about various Jews and Jewish professional who lived or worked in small towns. Then are some biographical books for example *The Jew Store* by Stella Suberman about her childhood experience in Concordia, Tennessee.

Finally there is a handful of Community Demographic studies. For example the book *Stranger in their Midst* by Peter Rose and Liv Olsen Perxoff who study small town Jews in

1950 and again in 1975 in upstate New York. The American Jewish Yearbook does a Jewish demographic study of the United States every year which includes a whole section of small Jewish communities, though not necessarily remote. Then there is also the NJPS which I mentioned earlier that did its survey in 2001.

By showing what literature is available, I would also highlight that there is much not available. Only Weissbach's scope covers all of the small towns in the United States, but only up to the 1950's. There are no other histories beyond that time period, nor modern surveys specifically tailored to remote Jewish communities. I hope this list grows as well. That more researchers and individuals find meaningful and interesting reasons to study remote Jewish communities and their contribution to the larger Jewish community in the United States.

Chapter 5: An Analysis of Lay leaders in Remote Jewish Communities

I spoke with seven respondents who are lay leaders within their remote Jewish communities and I asked them a series a questions about their experiences of participating with their Jewish communities. These lay leaders live in remote Jewish communities ranging from 900 Jewish members to 40 Jewish members. There are five respondents who are women and two who are men. Five of the respondents are above 50 and two are below 40. Six respondents have incomes above the median household income of 51,000. Six respondents have resided in their remote town or city for 10 or more years. In previous chapters I have established that most Jews do not live in remote places and that these same places are shrinking (US Census Bureau 2010). Yet, statistically 1 in 5 Jews continue to live

far from larger Jewish communities (NJPS 2001). I wanted to find out what brought them to these locations and how they organized and led meaningful Jewish communities with limited resources.

Respondent Information

Six of the seven respondents did not grow up in the community that they live in. All of respondents lived 3 to 4 Jewish communities throughout their lives before they landed in their perspective remote town or city. All of the respondents could compare their small town Jewish experiences with larger Jewish community experiences. Only one respondent, Mara, was young enough to move to Anchorage, Alaska with her parents. She moved out of Anchorage during her adult years, but has moved back to what she considers her hometown. The two reasons respondents moved to remote towns or cities was for their career or their spouse's career. Though one respondent moved for the good surfing.

With one exception all the respondents' parents where affiliated with a synagogue or a Jewish organization. However not all of their family members were practicing Jews. The type of affiliation was across the board, with respondents growing up in Conservative Jewish households, Reform Jewish households or Orthodox Jewish households. The one respondent who did not grow up Jewish, Miriam, did not have affiliated parents. However, she moved to her grandmother's house in Los Angeles during her teenage years. Her grandmother and her aunt were affiliated with the Reform Jewish Movement and her Jewish education and participation grew from their influence. When respondents moved away from the cities they were born in, they continued to be actively Jewish in each place they resided. All the respondents had a wide variety of Jewish experiences throughout their

lives. Two of the respondents were lay leaders in other locations where they lived. For example David was trained to lead services and had been leading services for over a decade at a previous community. Michelle volunteered to be a religious school educator in all of the previous locations she lived.

Experiences of Moving to a Remote Town or City

The respondents' answers varied when asked about their new experiences of moving to a remote Jewish community, Ashley found the experience scary. She did not like moving away from her Jewish friends and resources of the larger Jewish community in Portland. Miriam approach was more direct; she found the current Jewish lay leaders, when she moved to Astoria, Oregon and befriended them. She said this gave her an easier transition. Michelle's transition was harder. When she moved to Anchorage, Alaska she felt like she needed to explain Judaism to the many non-Jews around her. She had moved from a Jewish community in Chicago and was not used to being around so many non-Jews. Penelope's transition was also hard. She said, "It was difficult. We didn't know anybody and Alaska was a very different culture. But there was Jewish community and we joined community right away and that really helped." David's experience was similar. He said, "It was a terrible shock. I used to only have Jewish friends and I attended a reform congregation that was nothing like the congregation at Boise. The whole congregation was intermarried. Many in the congregation were Jewishly uneducated." For most of the respondents the transition to a remote town or city was a bumpy one. It seems that all of them reached out to the Jewish community early within their transition. This is an interesting discovery. While Central Place Theory would dictate that Jews in remote

communities perceive Judaism as a high-order good, the respondents looked towards Judaism as a way to help their transition into a new place. Moving to a new place is challenging for almost everyone and the respondents used the Jewish communities as tools to help integrate themselves.

Next I asked respondents to compare their Jewish experiences in their current remote town or city to previous locations. I received a rich variety of answers. Ashley said, “My Jewish experience here is really different. There is a Jewish void in small towns. Moving to a small town makes me feel unique, compared to a big town, where Jews are everywhere.” Miriam said, “Living in Astoria means making Jewish community on your own. It's a burden but it also makes it special. I had to seek it out, but I found it was accessible. Because of that I developed deep relationships and friendships with people in my community.” Penelope’s answer was very interesting and touched on a theme that I will discuss later in this chapter. She said, “Where I grew up I experienced anti-Semitism. But I've never felt anti-Semitism in my community here. Part of it was that I worked hard to explain Judaism to non-Jews. I'm actually more active here, because I have met a lot of people my age at the congregation.” Henry discussed the intentional nature of Jewish communities in remote places. He said, “The Jewish community here is both experimental but also has a long history. It's deliberate. The people who stay here want to be here, and do their work and religion deliberately.” In a similar vein Mara said, “Anchorage is so isolated that Judaism adapts. Judaism always adapts no matter where it is at. We have a very strong community that holds on to a Jewish Identity, but unlike Boston there are no Jewish neighborhood or stores.”

After their initial transitions, many of the respondents' comments were profound concerning the differences they experienced in remote places compared to previous Jewish experiences. All of them highlight the specialness of Judaism in these locations. Since Judaism is an uncommon or rare group within these remote places it gave the respondents a since of pride being part of something that is different from the usual narratives of remote towns or cities. This fits well with Jewish identity formation I mentioned in an earlier chapter. The respondents did not just identify themselves as Jews, but as small town Jews which comes with its own distinct character. For example Henry frames Judaism as an experiment or Mara calls Judaism adaptable. Both of these terms are not something one would find when describing most large Jewish communities. Inversely some respondents had negative experiences due to their Judaism. For example Mara speaks about her experience growing up in the remote city of Anchorage, she said, "I don't like being the anomaly. I went to one of the most diverse schools in the school district; and yet among the kids I was weird because I was Israeli and Jewish. Now, I work for that same school district and people are very focused on celebrating Christmas here, but when I tell them I celebrate Hanukah, I get that, 'oh, now we can't celebrate Christmas' it's pretty frustrating." Many Jews who live in remote cities and town often find themselves the token Jew in their place of work or in their neighborhood; Mara's experiences are not unique. Even though most of the respondents for this thesis had lots of positive things to say about their experiences with non-Jews, the truth is that many of these Jews are defacto representatives of Judaism. While they do not normally experience anti-Semitism in terms of hate, they are often

discriminated through an anti-Semitism of ignorance. However, as I will explain later, many Jews work hard to prevent this kind of anti-Semitism.

I next asked whether the respondents felt isolated Jewishly in their remote towns. What I discovered is the respondents feel isolated or do not feel isolated in different ways. Some of them do not feel isolated because they have Jewish friends. For example Miriam said, “As a Jew I don't feel isolated, because my community is here. For example two members helped me put up my Mezuzah up on my door.” Similarly Ashley said, “Yes, but I wouldn't use the word isolated, I feel remote. I know that support exists and other fellow Jews, which means I don't feel isolated.” Penelope concurred “I don't feel isolated, The Jewish people are very active in this community. so I don't feel isolated.” Other respondents did feel isolated due to the lack of Jews in their towns or cities. When asked if he felt isolated Henry said, “Yes, it’s isolated because there are a lot of diverse people, but too few Jews are here. Jews here worry about being cutoff. For example there really isn't a daily minyan here, except for one guy.” Mara responded to the same question and said, “I wish there was diversity of ages. I wish that, I can see more of a Jewish presence in Anchorage. I was babysitting another Jewish kid and telling her in Israel I could hear people in the neighborhood sing Pesach songs. And she said ‘that is never going to happen here.’ That's where I feel the isolation.”

Mara pointed out an interesting problem among Jews who live in remote places. There are not just fewer Jews in these places, but fewer demographics of ages as well. Mara, who is under 40, felt isolated because there were not enough Jews her age. Michelle

said something similar, “There are less opportunities. I wish there was more discussion groups. More specialized groups throughout the community. There is only one Rabbi.” Michelle pointed out that less Jews limits opportunities for Jews to come together. She would have liked to seen a greater variety of Jewish programming and events. However Penelope, who is above 50, experienced the opposite. She said, “I'm actually more active here, because I have met a lot of people my age at the congregation.”

How They Became Lay Leaders

The next question I asked respondents was how they became lay leaders within their communities. The respondents typically became lay leaders in one of two ways. The first was that they found a need for their particular set of skills or their time and the second was that they were “voluntold” to be lay leaders, in other words they were asked to be lay leaders. Ashley felt that her time was necessary in order for her Jewish community to continue. She said, “I wanted things to continue without having Rabbi or a Temple. If you want a Jewish community you have to be a part of creating it.” Similarly David, said, “I was trained to lead services, and I have been leading services my whole life. So I decided to help our congregation with service leading. I believe that services should always occur no matter what. So every time the Rabbi was out of town I led services.” Ashley may not have David’s service leading skills, but both are willing to volunteer much of their own time in order make sure Jewish experiences occurred in their towns.

Henry had a very colorful thing to say about his transition to a lay leader. “I made the rooky error of demonstrating competency. I was told to join the board.” Michelle had a similar experience, “It was one of those things I didn't decide. You teach Sunday school, you

volunteer for a few things and then they put you on the board. It wasn't anything deliberate." Both of these respondents are from congregations with more than 400 members, one Rabbi and a ten person board that meets monthly. Their experiences are most likely related to an already established lay leadership system of board membership that meets consistently. Respondents who live in communities that are too small to afford a Rabbi and have board that only meets a handful of times a year, are normally not asked to lead directly, but do so on their own volition. For example Miriam wrote, "The passing of one of the matriarchs made me next. Now people look to me for all things Jewish and I'm a really organized person. I am harboring guilt that I haven't done as much as I liked. It's a responsibility, but it's also a gift." No one told Miriam it was time for her to lead, but she took up the mantle because she felt the rest of the community was looking to her for leadership.

I next asked respondents when they became lay leaders if they had any goals in mind for the community. While the answers varied, two themes emerged: worship services and education opportunities for the younger members. For example David is very interested in worship services. He said, "My goal is to help people become more comfortable with the service. If I can give people more of a hint on how Services work they can feel more comfortable at this congregation and other congregations. My goal is to also create a more Halakhic worship service." Miriam had both goals in mind and said, "I had a goal to get a Shabbat group going that's dedicated to kids. I also wanted to do religious classes." Mara became a lay leader specifically on the platform of supporting young Jews, "I like that I focus only with the Youth. I work better with teens and kids. My goal for the youth group is

that it becomes a strong committee and for them to understand that there is a community around them that will be there for them. It's easy to get to that through Judaism because Judaism provides a lot of tools for that vision."

Almost all the lay leaders I spoke with had a clear vision of the direction they wanted to take the community and their priorities as a leader. Henry's response was especially eloquent in this matter, "I want to develop more access points for people to join the community here. Some people don't want to go to services, but want to discuss Israel. We have a softball team and cooking classes here as well." Essentially this is the goal of every lay leader. However each lay leader has their own understanding of what that looks likes, predominantly worship services and children education. This may be a great indicator of the values systems within the entire community. The lay leaders and thus the community themselves value worship services and children education above other Jewish programming and services.

Community Outreach

My final question to the lay leaders was how they outreach to other Jews in the community. The responses I received surprised me. Many of the respondents asked if I was referring to Jews or non-Jews because they outreach towards both groups. For example Penelope responded to my question like this: "Jewish people or non-Jewish people? I educate non-Jewish people frequently. I put holiday information on my Facebook page. I'm president of the interfaith council." I actually changed my question to indicate both after I realized that this was an important topic for respondents.

Miriam's answer was similar to Penelope, she said, "Do you mean Jewish people or non-Jewish people? I write emails, make phone calls, and I drop by people's work. I go right to the source! It's the same for non-Jewish people too." Beyond this emphasis on outreach towards non-Jews I imagine the respondents for this thesis outreach endeavors are similar to those in most Jewish communities. Ashley's response to this question is, "When we do organize an event I try to get attendance. I even use the newspaper. When I put the call out and it is the same 5 people who come. Communication is difficult, because there is not a network that exists. It is hard work to find people and getting to them to come. " Henry's reply suggested he had some outreach experience, "You have to meet people where they are at. Sometimes they are ready sometimes they are not. I try to help people get a good sense of who we are."

On the surface remote Jewish communities are no different than larger communities in terms of outreach strategy and organizing. They want as many members to show up as possible, and they advertise any means possible to reach members and non-members. However, the one large difference is how much time Jewish lay leaders spend outreaching to non-Jews within the city or town they reside. This is a unique dynamic for Jews who live in remote towns or cities. They do not live in a Jewish bubble within these communities, but are members of the greater community. Judaism is just one part of their identity and they share their time with many different groups of these communities. Furthermore, many of the respondents are well respected figures of the city or town they reside. For example Penelope and her husband, not only sits on Jewish committees, but on many different boards and committees throughout Anchorage. One of these committees is the interfaith

council, an organization that fosters inter-religious participation and dialogue. She has many non-Jewish friends who she encounters every day. This may be the reason she does not feel the anti-Semitism that she felt in previous locations, as she mentioned earlier in the chapter. She increases the Jewish literacy and decreases Jewish ignorance with everyone she interacts with, using the interfaith council and her Facebook accounts as tools. Three other of the respondents expressed they do similar work in their communities as well.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned that a common trope for small towns is that everyone is too familiar with each other. However, this familiarity is incredibly helpful when building a rapport with the greater community. Jews in these remote places know everyone in their towns or cities. This familiarity help engender cooperation and collaboration between the number of sub-communities within the city or town. However this can also be a source of tension, especially around the holidays. Since many Jews do not participate in Christmas this marks them as an outside group compared to the narrative of the rest of community. While this is a problem across all of the United States, dubbed the December Dilemma, it is especially acute in remote places. For example Penelope pulled her children from class for a few hours because there was a mandatory Christmas carol assembly for the school and she did not want her children to participate. This is also a problem with school districts in remote places where they are not sensitive towards the Jewish calendar. For example they will schedule sporting events on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. These points of tensions are also unique opportunities. Penelope in the very act of pulling her children from class engendered the school administration to think about inclusiveness policies for their school. Remote towns and cities are complicated and intricate network of connected

relationships. The “everyone knows each other” mentality is helpful for the Jewish community. Jews who represent Judaism towards non-Jews improve this network’s Jewish literacy and tolerance.

Chapter 6: Examples of Remote Community Programming

Congregations in remote towns and cities tend to base their programming around Shabbat worship services and Jewish holidays. This is because remote congregations have limited resources and people for a large variety of programming. This is also because Shabbat services and Jewish holidays such as Hanukah and Passover are easier to lay lead and draw the most interest than other types of programming. However some Jewish communities develop unique Jewish programs outside of the usual Shabbat and holiday programming. This chapter contains a number of programming examples that various remote communities have developed. This chapter is helpful in two ways. First it demonstrates what can be done with minimal resources in remote Jewish communities. Remote communities should not feel they have to reinvent the wheel every time they try something new. These programs are helpful ideas that I hope other remote communities see as possibilities that will work for their congregation. Perhaps this small list of examples could be a beginning for a program bank dedicated to remote Jewish communities.

Shabbaton – Anchorage, AK 1,000 Jews

The Anchorage Jewish Community, Congregation Beth Sholom (CBS), sets up a shabbaton in the form of a weekend festival retreat of Jewish learning at a ski lodge every other year. At this retreat they invite Jews from across the state to come learn and ski with them. Thus it becomes a resource for even smaller Jewish communities or individuals who

live as the only Jews around. They bring Jewish scholars, artists, and musicians from all over the United States and Israel up to Alaska to contribute to this festive and educational weekend. For example at the last Shabbaton they brought Rabbi Michael Mellen as their scholar in residence who is an executive coach and well known youth educator. They also brought in the musical duo "We are the Northern Lights" who perform all across the country including Jewish camps and Shabbat events. They set up different learning tracks for adults, the youth group, religious school students, and preschool teachers.

This program was started by CBS's executive director, Robin Dern, who wanted to bring the national Jewish conference experience like URJ's Biennial event to Alaska, with educational experiences and talented presenters. Robin knew that Alaska did not have the resources or the people to afford most of the presenters one would see in national conferences. However, Robin knew that not only was Alaska a unique place to invite presenters, but Alaska had a very active and engaged Jewish community. She uses these two factors to leverage talented, scholars, musicians, and artists to come for this Shabbat weekend. For example in the first organized Shabbaton she asked Rick Recht, a well known Jewish rock musician, to come and perform for the shabbaton weekend. About this process she said, "I know if you come here it's going to be a financial sacrifice, but here is what we have going on in the State of Alaska: If you come the impact you make will be greater than any impact you can make for a Shabbat in LA or New York. Concider this pro bono spiritualism. You are taking a loss to make an investment into this community"

Robin is making two arguments when inviting presenters to shabbaton. The first is that the congregation's commitment for this Shabbat is much higher than the commitment of a regular Shabbat in a larger Jewish community. It is higher due to the rarity of the shabbaton which occurs every other year and the scarcity of Jewish talent in Alaska. The second is that Robin sells Alaska as a unique place for Judaism and for Jewish events. This argument, of pro bono spiritualism, has convinced many presenters to come to Alaska over the past 16 years that shabbaton has been organized. In fact some of them come back every shabbaton or ask to be invited back in the future; these are presenters that are used to crowds of thousands while Shabbaton draws only 90 to 200 people. For example Israeli artist Avi Zukerman could make a lot more money working in other events during this weekend where he lives in New York. However every Shabbaton he comes to Alaska with new art projects for adults and children.

One of the challenges of this event is the amount of work it requires to organize. Not only does Robin spend a large amount of time preparing for shabbaton, but she is heavily reliant on lay leaders to help her. Since lay leaders are volunteering their time, they are not readily available and sometimes they are not reliable. She also does not have speaker's bureau to use as a resource for finding presenters. She has to find and invite presenters all by herself. Lay leaders are most helpful during the actual event. They welcome Shabbaton attenders, chaperone the youth group, and help Robin with logistics during the event. Unfortunately Shabbaton is not free and the Anchorage Jewish community does not have wealthy members to help underwrite the costs. Thus it costs each family hundreds of

dollars to attend. The cost takes a heavy toll on the whole community. This has engendered a community decision hold it every two years instead of every other year.

Robin also believes that all communities can organize something similar. Often communities are of the mind set that they do not have enough resources to organize big events. However, as Robin has shown, the real resource is an engaged community. For example one of the respondents said this about Shabbaton, “It does create a feeling of commitment and bond between participants. The presenters and discussions provide topics for social interactions. The musical performances and social interactions outside formal activities give attendees a chance to interact with each other and meet new people.”

Mitzvah Mall – Anchorage, Alaska 1,000 Jews

Mitzvah Mall is a once-a-year, afternoon event that occurs within the synagogue of Anchorage, Alaska’s Congregation Beth Sholom (CBS). Each year the congregation opens up their doors for non-profit agencies of all kinds to set up booths for people to come and learn and donate. It is like a mini mall, but except of store fronts, there are non-profit booths, thus Mitzvah Mall. Mitzvah Mall has one main volunteer who organizes everything; she contacts the non-profit agencies, organizes other volunteers, and advertises to the Anchorage community for the event. The event attracts 20 to 30 agencies to come and present themselves at Mitzvah Mall. The general public is invited to come support these agencies. CBS decided to time Mitzvah Mall so it is always held right before the holidays. When attenders offer donations, they are asked if they would like to make it out to a loved one or friend, then calligraphers write their names on thank you cards. Attendants can give these cards to family or friends as presents.

The non-profit agencies make the experience do more than just present materials. Animal shelters will bring pets. The birding non-profit organization always brings an exotic bird. The musical arts non-profit always provides free musical accompaniment to the event. Each year 100 to 150 attendants donate money. The event lasts three hours and raises on average $14,000. CBS does not take any percentage of that money, but asks each non-profit to pay a $55 booth fee.

In terms of challenges the main volunteer spends lots of time inviting and coordinating the non-profit agencies and managing the synagogue's facilities for the event. Her hardest effort is advertising, and in the future she would like to delegate advertising to another volunteer. The other respondents, who I interviewed in Anchorage, love this program. Everyone feels that Mitzvah Mall is how CBS gives back to the Anchorage community.

Shabbat at Home – Portland, Oregon by Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori

Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori are a married couple who run a small congregation out of their home called Gesher in Portland, Oregon. While Portland is certainly not a remote or small Jewish community, Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori's philosophy around Shabbat is definitely a remote Jewish idea. They work towards outreaching to Jews who are unaffiliated or secular and providing for them a meaningful Jewish experience. They do it with limited resources. This program is well suited for remote Jewish communities, because many of these Jews are unaffiliated and secular and the lay leaders do not have many resources to organize programming.

This Rabbi couple believe that the greatest expression of Judaism is a Shabbat meal at home. Here is what Rabbi Gary has to say about this understanding, “Jewish communities start at home. Lay leaders would do well to create a Shabbat dinner sampler, with a Shabbat dinner network. This should start in a Jewish home that understands what Shabbat really is. This means a meal that serves multiple courses. Have each person light a candle, with songs and music, Kosher wine, and a guided conversation and you begin to knit together a community.” Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori envision a Jewish world where everyone is celebrating Shabbat at a home that truly understands its meaning, which is fellowship and a shared positive experiences.

Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori believe this method to be a powerfully attractive to non-affiliated or secular Jews. Rabbi Gary continues, “Lay leadership may realize that their home is an important landscape of the Jewish community. Celebration of Shabbat dinner is not universally experienced, but a window into Jewish community building and planting positive Jewish memories. They have the means of reaching into the lives of secular Jews and flourish a relationship to grow which inspires an understanding that a Jewish home is a principle source of physical and spiritual wellbeing and connection to other Jews.” Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori’s idea of Shabbat is deceptively simple. While any lay leader can open their home to a Shabbat meal, their needs to be a particular formula for these meals. This formula requires the participation of all guests: Lighting candles, singing Shabbat songs, drinking kosher wine, sharing stories about each other, and learning a little Torah. If the host can offer these things then they have created what Rabbi Gary and Rabbi Lori call “an island of being in a world of doing.”

A great challenge to the Shabbat at Home method is that the host needs to be comfortable with different aspects of Shabbat ritual, literature, and songs. Not all people are comfortable leading songs, or leading text studies. While there are plenty of helpful resources out there, if a lay leader does not know how to sing then they may be too intimidated to create this immersive Shabbat experience. Another challenge is that these Shabbat meals can require a lot of work for those hosting. It is not something that a lay leader can organize every week. Furthermore it requires some advertisement and outreach on behalf of the host, which can also be time consuming and intimidating.

However if lay leaders can overcome these barriers, or find help from other lay leaders, then they can essentially create a meaningful Shabbat experience with limited organizing, especially after the first few. It does not require a synagogue or organizing volunteers and a large benefit is that its incredibly inclusive and fun Jewish experience. Rabbi Gary calls Shabbat, "an opportunity to be a whole person." Lay leaders who are available to open their homes to this Shabbat experience will be unlocking the potential for individuals in their community to feel like a whole person.

Chevrah Kaddisha – Boise, Idaho 1,500 Jews

Historically one of the first things Jews do when they move to a new place is to buy space for their own cemetery. However in the 21st century this is no longer the case. Often Jews in remote communities buy plots of land in the closest cemetery available, disregarding who runs it. Yet, over 15 years ago the remote Jewish community, Ahavath Beth Israel (CABI) in Boise, Idaho decided that they wanted to have more traditional Jewish burials. They were unhappy with the fact that if anyone died within the community, the

local Mormon funeral home would make the arrangements for the body. They began by asking their Rabbi, Daniel Fink, to set up an event that would show the responsibilities of a Chevrah Kaddisha for CABI. The event was well attended and out of it formed a Chevrah Kaddisha committee and men's and women's team, that would take care of bodies after a community member's death. Together they trained each other in the duties and responsibilities of the Chevrah Kaddisha and waited for a community member to pass away.

They worked closely with the Mormon funeral home, which was very accommodating to their needs, which includes a means to wash the body. The committee also created brochures asking congregants to plan out their burial wishes after they died. This helped engender interest with the Chevrah Kaddisha. When finally someone passed away within the community, they were more than prepared to carry out a traditional Jewish burial.

One of the challenges to starting a Chevrah Kaddisha in a remote community is that the local funeral home needs to be accommodating. Not all of them may understand the nuances of the Jewish rituals of taking care of a body. Another challenge is finding volunteers over long periods of time. The elders within the community often volunteer to be members of the Chevrah Kaddisha, while younger generation does not. This means the very members of the Chevrah Kaddisha, are in the most need of it.

Rabbi Daniel Fink pointed out the importance of a community Chevrah Kaddisha, "We did this not because we wanted Halakhic burials, we did it because people liked the idea of the community lovingly taking care of our own. That we don't farm out these jobs to

professionals, the communities does it for each other." Rabbi Fink mentioned that the community is not worried about the Halakah of Jewish burials, only that their community members are buried by Jews. Much to the Transformationists delight, these Jews are creating a tradition of Judaism by practicing Jewish ritual in their own way by using a traditional Chevrah Kaddisha, but not adhering to all the Halakah required for one.

Religious School – Astoria, Oregon 40 Jews

Astoria, Oregon has roughly 10,000 people and about 5 families with children of the religious school age. A few years ago the Astoria Jewish community decided they wanted to have more Jewish experiences. They renamed their community Congregation Beit Salmon and started developing new programs and events. One of those programs was a religious school for children 6 to 12 years old. One of the most unique decisions they made about this religious school was to allow non-Jewish children to attend. The organizer of the religious school had this to say about their choice, "It was a logical decision. We are in a small community and in small communities there are not enough Jews to create Hebrew schools. Sometimes there are not enough numbers to make it happen. It was a decision to make classes worthwhile for the community and for the teacher." These non-Jewish families help subsidize the religious school. In return the religious school focuses on Hebrew as the central part of the children's education.

Of roughly the 20 children who participate in religious school 12 are Jewish and 8 are not. What is even more surprising is that the non-Jews are evangelical Christians. The religious school organizer said that this benefits the school, because they have great foundational knowledge of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and are actually more

educated in the stories found in the Hebrew bible than the Jewish participants. The Christian parents really value their children learning Hebrew and they have a lot of shared value systems with the Jewish parents. And the children get to see where their values overlap. Furthermore the Christian parents and their children love learning about the Jewish holidays and other Jewish content that the religious school covers.

There are certainly some challenges that come along with this model of religious school. Not everyone the Jewish community is happy about inviting Christian families to participate in Jewish religious school. They think it is a weird choice and they are worried that the Christians have their own agenda or some ulterior motive. Another challenge that the organizer pointed out is, “the Jewish kids don’t have an integrated Jewish community, this can be rough when developing a Jewish identity. For example this religious school often refers to the Torah as the Bible and not as Torah or Tanakh as in most Jewish religious school, so that lessons can accommodate the non-Jews kids.” In other words there is nowhere for these children to go where they have a complete Jewish experience, because they are always surrounded by non-Jews. But as the organizer points out, “It’s a sacrifice to make this happen in a small Jewish community.”

The families of Congregation Beit Salmon made this decision for the continuity of the religious school. If it only two or three children showed up each week, then all the families and the teacher would begin wondering if the effort was worth it. However the addition of non-Jews guarantees a larger attendance each week, which motivates the teacher and the families to continue the program. The organizer pointed out that this was

an awkward arrangement at first, but over the past year some really beautiful things have occurred. Religious school has been an excellent source of outreach towards the non-Jews in the community. The Jewish members see this as an opportunity to be inclusive and universal with their Jewish experiences. The Christians families get to expose their children to Hebrew and another culture that is occurring in their same town, they get to see that their Christian religion and way of life is not the only narrative of where they live.

Annual Jewish Food Fair – Stockton, California 900 Jews

Stockton, which is a city of 300,000 people, is home to Temple Israel a congregation of roughly 230 families. Every year this congregation hosts a celebration for the whole Stockton community, called the Annual Jewish Food Fair. Much like Anchorage's Mitzvah Mall or Astoria's religious school, the community of Stockton's flagship program is designed for the entire community of Stockton and just themselves. It is held on the first Sunday of June, this celebration is one part Jewish food festival and one part fundraiser for the community. It is a big deal for the whole city. Thousands of people attend the event. Admittance is free, but for a 10 dollar ticket one can be served a classic Jewish brunch which includes bagels and lox and corn beef. Furthermore there are homemade Jewish foods available to buy from the deli which includes Jewish classics such as kugel, blintzes, and other baked goods. There is also live music, a beer garden, and a playground and face painting for kids.

This event started 40 years ago, when two lay leaders within the community were visiting friends in a different state and enjoyed an event called Blintz Brunch. They brought the idea of the Blintz Brunch to Stockton and over the years it slowly morphed. Blintz

Brunched turned into Bagel Breakfast, which turned into the Jewish Food Festival, and finally became the Annual Jewish Food Fair. Each name change represented the widening of the scope and size of the event, starting as Jews enjoying a meal together and evolving into a celebration for the whole city and a successful fundraiser.

The volunteer hours devoted to this event is intense. They start preparing in February through workshops; they call “fun”shops. At these funshops congregation members begin to prepare the home made food available at the Annual Jewish Food Fair. They then take their baked and cooked goods to a cold house, which donates space for the event, and they are frozen until the event in June. While the time investment is huge, the Rabbi of the congregation, Rabbi Jason Gwasdoff, explains that it is actually a benefit, “That time investment helps to build a community. This gives them an attachment to the temple and an investment to the success of the event.”

The challenges to run this program are also daunting. Since it is both a city wide celebration and a fundraiser for the temple the logistics are complicated. It requires a lot of people to work together, from people willing to run the funshops, to the committee that organizes actual day of the event. Because lay leaders get burned out or want to do something else with their time and the community has to find new volunteers. Making it profitable is also a challenge. While the volunteer time is free the ingredients for the funshops, set up, and the facilities all cost a lot of money. The congregation tries to find corporate sponsors to underwrite the costs, and those sponsorships are what make the fundraiser profitable.

This event raises 25,000 to 30,000 dollars each year, which by all measures of success makes this event very profitable. However, I would like to point out another way this event is successful. Throughout the day the Rabbi or one of the Jewish educators gives a tour of the sanctuary which includes an intro to Judaism talk every hour. While there is certainly lots of motivation to be outside, these tours are packed each hour. There is a lot of good will and relational moments passing between the Jewish community and the greater community of Stockton. Not only does this event engender many opportunities to accrue social capital within the Jewish community, but also increases social capital between Jews and non-Jews. One final interesting thing of notes, is that the one main volunteer who is responsible for the whole event is not Jewish, but a person deeply dedicated the Jewish community in Stockton and who loves the Jewish Annual Food Fair.

These programs are just a few examples of the ideas organized by Jewish communities that turn into impactful and meaningful experiences. Organizers of any event are often worried about the resources and popularity when planning their programs. Of course, lay leaders in remote places worry about these things as well. However, due to their circumstances they measure success a little differently. For example often success is defined by the growth of a program. This does not seem to be the case of the some of the programs in this chapter. For example Mitzvah Mall fluctuates between 100 to 120 attendees each year. For its organizer, stability is valued over growth. The facility is small and more people would make it more chaotic. She would prefer to keep it running just the way it is.

While these programs vary in terms of mission and scope they have a number of commonalities. First all of them require one dedicated individual that acts as the main volunteer or point person for the program each year. With exception to Anchorage's Shabbaton and Boise's Chevrah Kaddisha, these programs involved non-Jews or coordinate with the local community in some way. Finally all of these programs require a lot of volunteer labor, while one person usually acts as the main organizer, these programs could not happen without the continuous work of Jewish volunteers and lay leaders.

One would think limited resources would limit the potential of the programs. However, the opposite seems to be true for remote communities. Limited resources engender creative problem solving. For example, Congregation Beth Sholom does not have the money to pay the normal speaking fees of presenters. However, due to their invention of "pro bono spiritualism," they have been able to attract scholars and musicians well outside their price range. Or Temple Israel of Stockton make the cooking and baking process for their event a fun activity that they literally call funshops. Remote communities' understanding of success and creative problem solving as a result of limited resources is what they have to offer the rest of the Jewish world and to each other. Many of the lay leaders I talked to expressed interest in sharing their ideas with others and expressed frustration that there was no outlet do so. Their remoteness engenders great programs, but also makes it harder for them to communicate their success to others.

Conclusion – My personal View on Remote Jewish Communities

This thesis is written for lay leaders who are members of a Remote Jewish community. I identified who these lay leaders are by defining remote communities as small and isolated places in my second chapter. Through the help of sociologists Matt Boxer and Penny Becker, I showed lay leaders how concepts such as social capital and idioculture can be helpful in building a successful community. I listed the various organizations in the United States like the ISJL and the Network as a helpful reference for lay leaders who may find these organizations useful for their own work. I interviewed and surveyed lay leaders from different remote communities, to display their own thoughts and feelings about living in a remote place while participating with the Jewish community there. Finally I started what I hope to one day be a program bank for remote communities, as ideas for lay leaders, so they do not have to reinvent the wheel every time they want to create a new successful program.

Furthermore, the goal of this thesis is to generate more interest in remote Jewish communities and to offer a big picture view of what remote Jewish communities currently look like in North America. I also wanted to demonstrate the "source code" of community building and success through the work of sociologists who study communities. This is for the benefit of lay leaders and Jewish professionals who work in remote Jewish communities. If we can understand the fundamentals of relationships and community building through shared terms and concepts that has been measured by sociologists, then we can understand why communities are successful, no matter their size or their location. Most respondents I interviewed can compare their remote community with larger Jewish

communities they have experienced in the past; this makes measuring success complicated. However, comparing the success of large communities and small Jewish communities is like comparing apples with oranges. Using sociologists work to understand community building and relationships creates a rubric of measuring tools that help to understand the success of individual Jewish remote communities without comparing them to each other.

Another goal of this thesis is to act as a beacon of hope for lay leaders who are feeling worn out by the work of supporting their local Jewish community. After spending much time working on this thesis, helping remote communities as a student Rabbi, and growing up in one, there is one thing that keeps me up at night; lay leaders burning out. I have talked with many lay leaders who are the bedrock of their Jewish community, and I wonder what would happen when they decide they would rather do something else. The lay leaders I talked to are busy people. They often have families, careers, and other interests within the community. Many times they get stuck propping up the Jewish community, because no one else is willing to help. They feel pressured by their own sense of duty to keep the community going. These lay leaders who could be spending their time on something else, are instead participating in creating resourceful programs that weave together impactful and meaningful relationships that form successful communities. Their work is organically making their community more connected to each other. Every time they work with others in their community to make a Jewish event or program happen, they are accruing social and religious capital. They are creating their own idioculture and transforming Judaism to meet their needs. It would be shame if they decided that it was too much effort, or if the reward is not worth the work. I want to make their work easier, and

their effort more rewarding. I believe the answer is a network of accessible resources and program ideas developed by remote Jewish communities and designed for remote Jewish communities.

This whole thesis is just a small survey of what is possible in remote Jewish communities. There are so many impactful and resourceful programs organized in remote Jewish communities in the United States that are unknown simply because no one has asked about them. There are also many great lay leaders out there who are willing to share their work and their ideas with anyone who will listen. A final goal of this thesis is to point out that this is what we are missing. Success for the continuation and celebration of Judaism is being discovered by pioneers who decided to live in remote corners of the United States. They have organized meaningful programs that have helped bring their community close together through shared positive experiences. They need as much support as possible. They are not just preserving Judaism in their town or city, but are creating new programs and ideas that should be shared with the rest of the Jewish world. Remote Jewish communities have so much to teach us about Judaism.

Appendix – List of Questions to Respondents

Question 1: Where are you from?

Question 2: Was your family originally engaged in a Jewish community?

Question 3: Where else have you lived?

Question 3a: Were you actively Jewish in all the places?

Question 4: how did you get to (current remote place)?

Question 5: Tell me what it was like for you to move to (current remote place)?

Question 6: From a Jewish point of view, how is living in (current remote place) different or similar to where you grew up and other places you have lived?

Question 7: How is being Jewish in your (current remote place) different from other places you are familiar with?

Question 8: How did you first become involved with (Jewish community name)?

Question 9: How did you become a lay leader?

Question 10: Did you have any goals when you became a lay leader?

Question 10a: What are your current goals?

Question 10b: Are there any programs within the community that you helped organize?

Question 11: Do you feel isolated Jewishly and how is that impact felt?

Question 11a: Do you feel like you have enough tools to continue a meaningful Jewish community?

Question 11b: What resources do you use?

Question 12: Do you try to involve others who are not involved and how do you do that?

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