



CONGREGATION SHA'ARE SHALOM
Rabbi Research Committee Report

May 2007

Rabbi Research Committee

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Please note: Due to the length of section D of the appendix and the fact that most of the information contained in it is summarized in Part II of this report, this final section of the appendix is not attached to the printed copy of this report. This last section of the appendix (as well as the rest of this report) will be available for your review on the Congregation Sha’are Shalom website at www.sha-areshalom.org. To request a printed copy of this section, please contact our committee at rabbisearch@sha-areshalom.org or by leaving a message for us at 703-737-6500.

Introduction

Congregation Sha'are Shalom's Rabbi Research Committee (RRC) was formed in June of 2006 as a preliminary step in furtherance of our congregation's goal of hiring a rabbi to join us in the summer of 2008. The mission of the RRC was to research our congregation and then based on our findings, to develop a description of the ideal rabbi for our community. Through various research methods including surveys, focus groups and individual discussions, the RRC has gathered information from as many congregants as possible regarding their interests, thoughts and hopes regarding our future rabbi. This report reflects our findings and general recommendations.

There are three parts to this report. Part I contains a summary of our key findings and general recommendations. Part II contains a more detailed analysis of the information we gathered through our surveys, focus groups and discussions with individual congregants. Part III is the appendix, which contains information about our survey methods and response rates; focus group methods; and a memorandum to the Congregation Sha'are Shalom (CSS) board highlighting specific suggestions from congregants related to programming (as opposed to the rabbi search). There is one additional section of the appendix that includes raw data from our two surveys. Due to the length of this section and the fact that most of the information contained in it is summarized in Part II of this report, this final section of the appendix is not attached to this printed copy of the report. This last section of the appendix (as well as the rest of this report) will be available for your review on the CSS website at www.sha-areshalom.org. To request a printed copy of this section, please contact our committee at rabbisearch@sha-areshalom.org or by leaving a message for us at 703-737-6500.

This report would not have been possible without the input of our fellow congregants. We are extremely grateful to all of you who have participated in our research by responding to our surveys, attending our focus groups or by speaking individually with members of our committee. Thank you for sharing your personal stories, your thoughts, your hopes and your dreams about the future of our congregation and our first full-time rabbi. Your input is invaluable and it was truly a pleasure getting to know many of you through this important process. Thank you for your participation in our research efforts and for helping to shape the future of our congregation! A special note of thanks to the CSS board for their support of our research efforts and to fellow CSS member, Mike Cohen, a market research specialist, who volunteered his services to help us prepare for our focus groups.

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Part I: Summary of Key Findings and General Recommendations Related to Rabbi Search

Key Findings

1. Who are we as a congregation?

Demographics

- Total of 128 member units
- Over two-thirds of member units have children 18 and under
- Remaining one-third of member units are primarily a mixture of households with children over 18, empty nesters, retirees and singles
- Approximately 30% of member units consist of interfaith couples
- Just over three-quarters of member units have been affiliated with CSS for fewer than five years

(For a more detailed explanation of our congregation's demographics, see Part II, section A-1.)

Practices, Beliefs and Values

- A large majority of members believe it is important to attend High Holy Day services, observe certain home rituals (such as sitting *shiva*, lighting Shabbat candles and attending Passover seders), and attend services on Shabbat and festival holidays.
- A majority of members do not keep kosher at home but many believe that it is appropriate and important for *kashrut* policies to be observed at our synagogue.
- Almost all members support our current practice of having an egalitarian community where men and women have equal opportunities to participate in leadership roles and ritual practice.
- A majority of members support inclusion of non-Jewish spouses in all aspects of our congregational life to the greatest extent possible within Conservative Judaism (although we found that there is a lot of confusion among our members about exactly what this means and it is something that as a congregation, we should probably explore further).
- Congregants want conversion opportunities to be available for those who are interested, but do not believe that anyone should be actively encouraged to convert by a rabbi or fellow congregant.
- A majority of members support the rulings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS), the central *halakhic* authority of the Conservative movement, allowing the ordination of gay/lesbian rabbis and permitting rabbis to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies between two Jews.

(For a more detailed explanation of the practices, beliefs and values of our congregants, see Part II, section A-2.)

2. *What are the primary things our members want from our congregation?*

- Sense of community
- Place to attend services throughout the year and specifically on the High Holy Days
- Support from rabbi and fellow congregants during life cycle events (wedding, birth, conversion, bar/bat mitzvah, illness, mourning)
- Jewish education for their children
- Opportunities for adults to learn more about Judaism and how it can be related to their daily lives in a way that will help them with their own personal development
- Affiliation with Conservative movement
- Social, cultural and social action activities

(For a more detailed explanation of why members joined our congregation and the types of programming our congregants would like offered, see Part II, section B. For more information on preferences for worship services and how they relate to our future rabbi, see also Part II, section C.)

3. *What are the primary roles we want our rabbi to serve within our congregation?*

- Worship Leader
- Teacher
- Role Model
- Spiritual Guide
- Pastor
- Congregational Leader
- *Halakhic* (Jewish legal) Authority

(For a more detailed explanation of how members define these roles and of their specific hopes for our first full-time rabbi, see Part II, section C.)

4. *What attributes would enable a rabbi to perform these particular roles at CSS?*

- Outstanding personal integrity (described by congregants as someone who is honest and ethical with strong personal convictions)
- Compassionate, approachable and responsive to the needs of congregants of all ages, from children to seniors
- Someone who will take an interest in congregants' personal and spiritual development and be able to inspire them regardless of their backgrounds or current levels of religious observance
- Strong knowledge of Judaism with an excitement to share his/her knowledge in both formal and casual settings
- Respectful and appreciative of the diversity of our community, with particular sensitivity to the issues faced by interfaith families
- Supportive and respectful of our congregation's current customs and practices, including the active participation of lay members in our services

- Flexible and open-minded but also willing and able to make steadfast *halakhic* decisions when appropriate
- Strong leader with the ability to unite us and help us continue to grow as a sacred community (and as 83% of respondents mentioned, a sense of humor couldn't hurt!)

Additional attributes that would be helpful due to our location in Loudoun County:

- Willingness to drive to services on Shabbat and holy days
- Willingness to eat a vegetarian or dairy meal at a restaurant that is not designated as a kosher establishment (while this is obviously not something we would require, it would certainly make life more enjoyable for our rabbi by enabling him/her to have a social life outside of our synagogue)

(For a more detailed explanation of desired rabbinic attributes and how they relate to the roles of the rabbi mentioned above, see Part II, section C.)

General Recommendations Related to Rabbi Search

1. When a congregation has a rabbi, he or she is the *mara d'atra* ("teacher of the place") and as such, has the authority to make *halakhic* decisions (i.e., decisions on matters of Jewish Law). We are in the unusual position where we have the luxury to decide what we want our policies to be and then try to find a rabbi who has consistent views. The more we know about ourselves and what we want our policies to be, the better able we will be to find a rabbi who is a good match for us. We feel that our research is a good start for this, but our congregation could probably benefit from further exploration of a few more topics.

If there are any important subjects on which our congregation has not yet established a policy (such as whether same-sex commitment ceremonies between two Jews will be permitted in our sanctuary) or subjects upon which many congregants have expressed concern and would like to know more about our current policies and what options, if any, exist within the Conservative movement for change (such as issues relating to conversion and interfaith participation in services and activities), it would be advisable to explore these topics and set our policies before we begin our rabbi search.

Perhaps a forum moderated by Rabbi Ragozin or someone from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) would be a good way to educate our community on the current options within Conservative Judaism regarding these topics and to gather more input from our congregants once we are all aware of our current policies and what, if any, options exist. We would hope that after such discussions, the board would have all of the information they would need to proceed with any appropriate policy implementations or changes.

2. Once we have made definitive policies on all important topics and feel we really know who we are as a congregation and where we want to go, it would be advisable to search for a rabbi with the attributes described in Part II, section C of this report, as soon as fiscally possible.

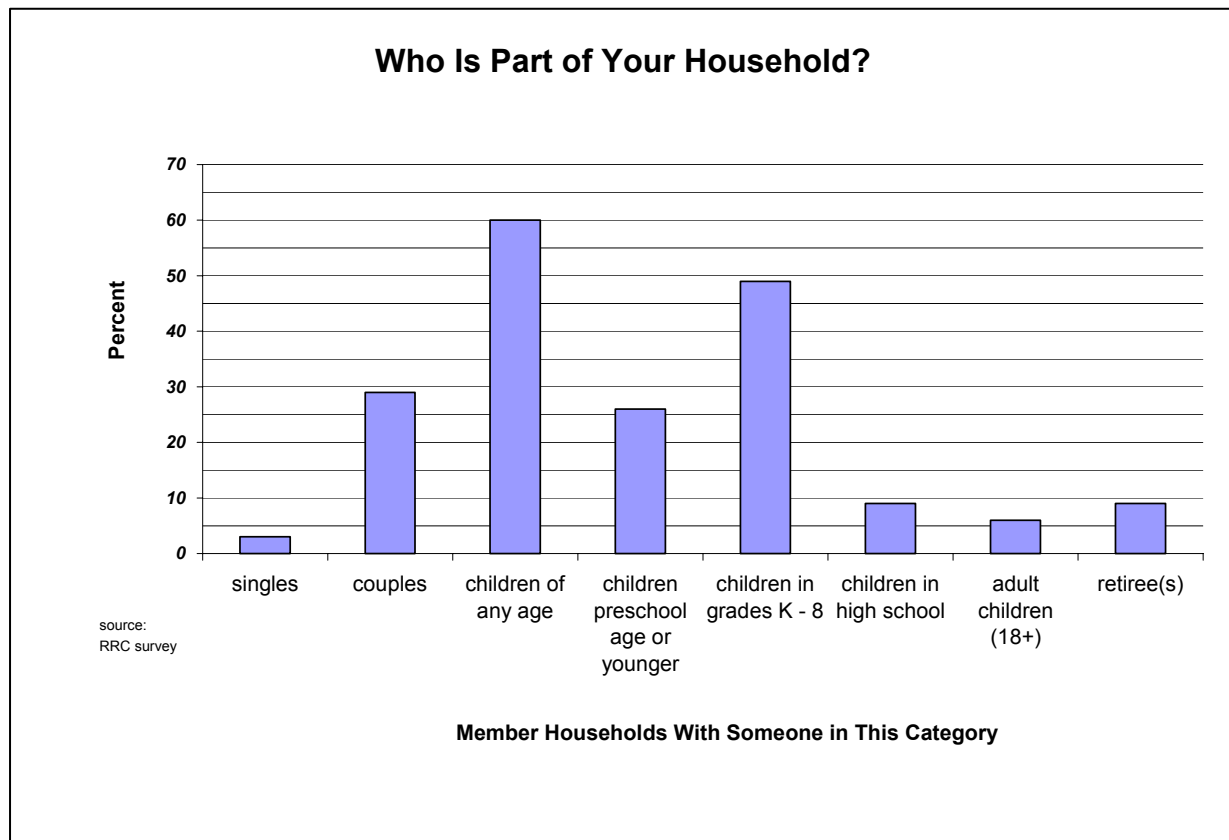
3. When it is time to provide rabbinical candidates information about our congregation, we suggest giving them a copy of this report so they will understand who we are and will be able to determine whether they feel they would be a good match for us.

Part II: Analysis of Information Gathered through Surveys, Focus Groups and Individual Discussions with Congregants

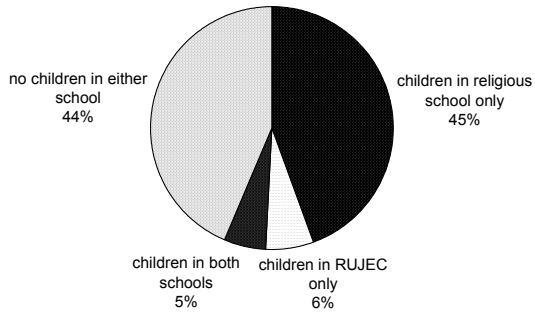
A. Who are we as a congregation?

1. Demographics

CSS is a growing, diverse congregation that currently has 128 member units or households. Of those member units, over two-thirds have children 18 and under. Just over one-fourth of the households include children under five. Half of the households have children enrolled in CSS's religious school. Of the 15 member families enrolled in the Rosie Uran Jewish Education Center (RUJEC), just over half of the families have children enrolled in the preschool only; just under half of the families have children enrolled in both the preschool and religious school. The remaining one-third of the member units is primarily a mixture of households with children over 18, empty nesters, retirees and singles. Approximately 30% of our member units consist of interfaith couples. As one might expect in one of the nation's fastest growing counties, the bulk of CSS's membership (just over three-quarters) has been affiliated with the congregation for fewer than five years. Approximately one-quarter of the member units have been members five years or more; half have been members for two to five years; and one-quarter have been members for fewer than two years.

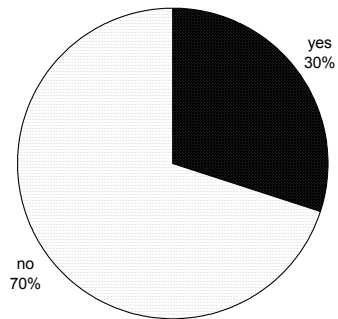


Do You Have Children Enrolled in CSS Schools?



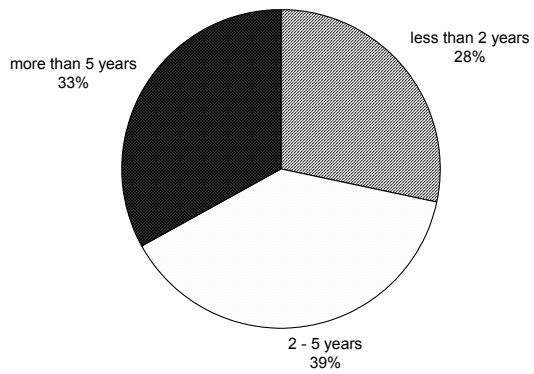
source: data from school records and membership committee

Are You An Interfaith Family?



source: RRC survey

How Long Have You Been a Member of CSS?



source: RRC survey

Note: The numbers and percentages found in the demographics section of this report come from several sources: the survey results, the membership committee and database, CSS’s religious school database and RUJEC.

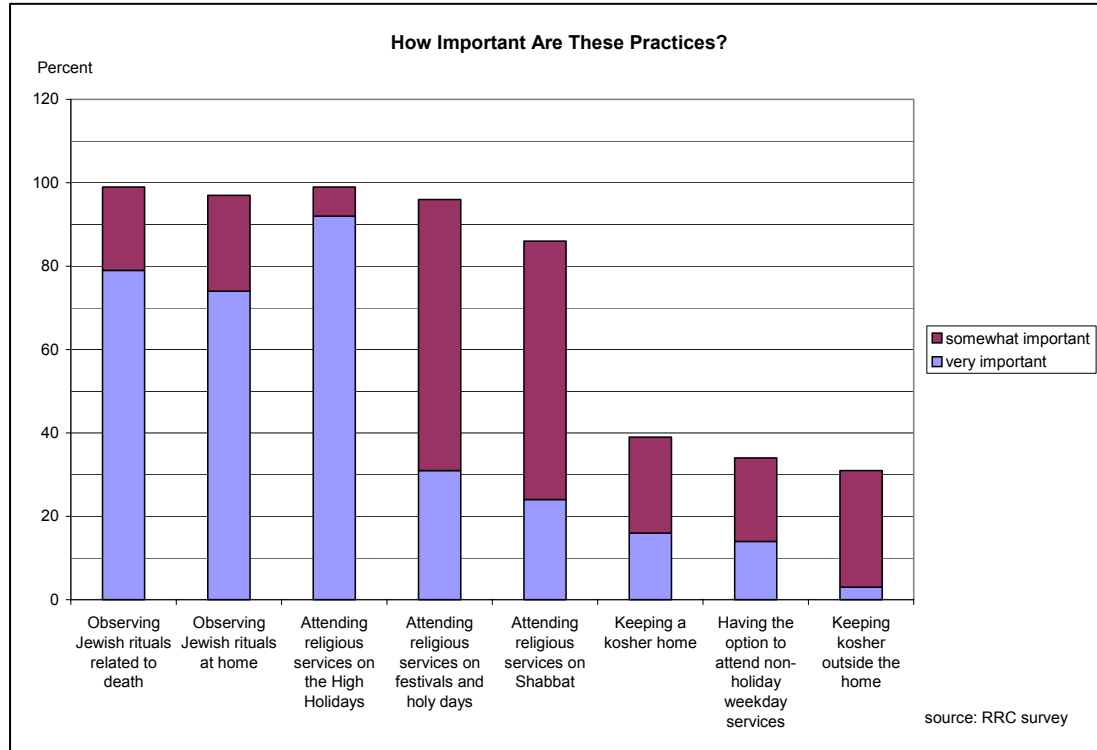
2. Practices, Beliefs and Values

Importance of certain religious practices to our members

Like many Conservative congregations, our members hold certain religious practices to be far more important than others. Over 90% of questionnaire respondents thought that attending High Holy Day services was very important to them personally and approximately three-quarters of the respondents felt that certain home rituals (sitting *shiva*, lighting Shabbat candles, attending Passover Seders) also were very important.

At the same time, approximately two-thirds of the respondents felt that keeping kosher (at home or outside the home) was not important, and approximately the same number was uninterested in having the option of weekday services. On the other hand nearly two-thirds of the respondents felt that it was somewhat important to attend services on Shabbat and festival holidays.

Among the clarifying comments were several that noted that although they do not personally keep kosher, they believe it is appropriate and important for *kashrut* policies to be observed at our synagogue. A few people also noted that religious practices were particularly important when there are children in the house.



Issues concerning the recent rulings on gay and lesbian rabbis and same-sex commitment ceremonies

It is very important to note that these rulings are as polarizing for CSS as they were to the CJLS that made them. In our supplemental survey on these rulings, we asked three questions, each of which had two parts. The first part of each question asked whether the respondent agreed or disagreed with the statement in the question and the second part asked how strongly the respondent felt about his/her response to the first part of the question. We asked the second question because we thought that the strength of congregants' opinions might be an important gauge of the importance of the issue to our community.

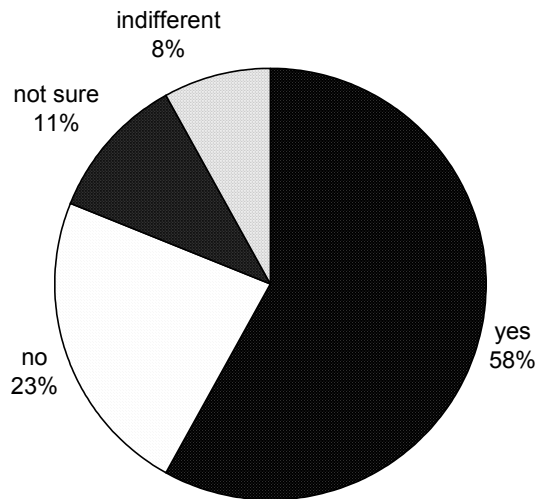
The first question of our supplemental survey asked congregants, "Should Congregation Sha'are Shalom welcome applications from openly gay or lesbian rabbis?" Of the 62 respondents, nearly 60% indicated that we should welcome such applications. Just under 25% of the respondents were opposed to accepting such applications and the remainder were either not sure or indifferent. While one respondent commented that if we had a gay/lesbian rabbi he/she would leave the congregation, another said that he/she would leave if we didn't consider such candidates. A few congregants looked at this issue from a practical rather than personal perspective, and noted that while they personally don't care whether a rabbi is homosexual, they are concerned about the reality that as a Jewish congregation in Loudoun County, we already face a lot of obstacles in gaining acceptance in our community. Other congregants suggested that we should not be concerned with these types of implications.

It is not surprising that regardless of their views, over three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they felt very strongly or somewhat strongly about the issue, as shown in Table 1. About two-thirds of those feeling "very" or "somewhat" strongly would welcome openly gay or lesbian rabbis. It is interesting to note that among those for whom it was not an important issue, all of those with an opinion supported hiring gay or lesbian rabbis.

Table 1: Importance of Accepting Applications from Gay/Lesbian Rabbis

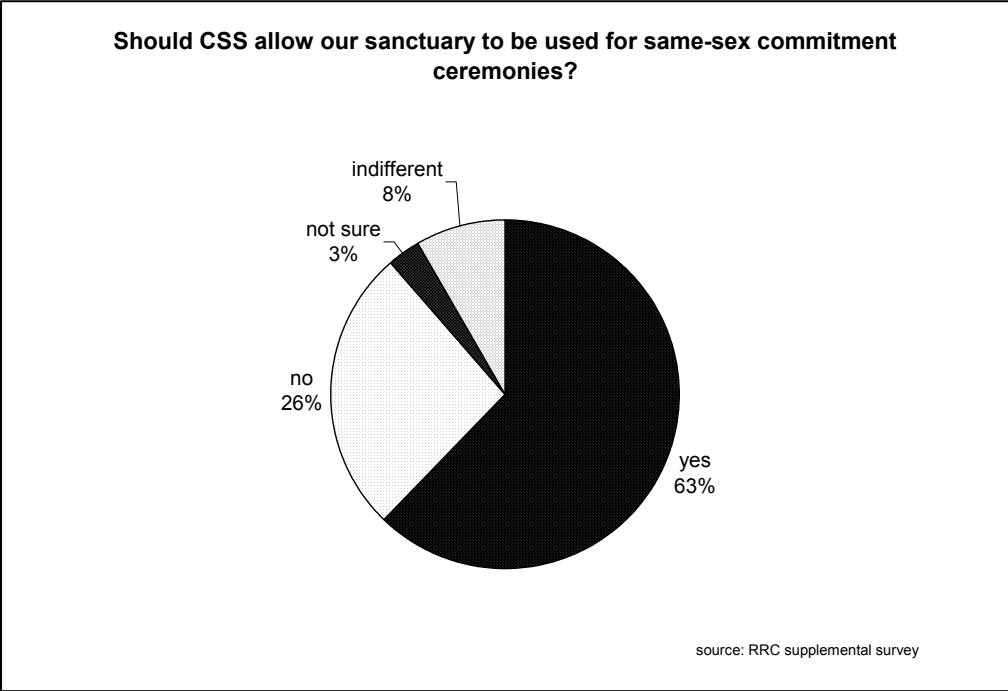
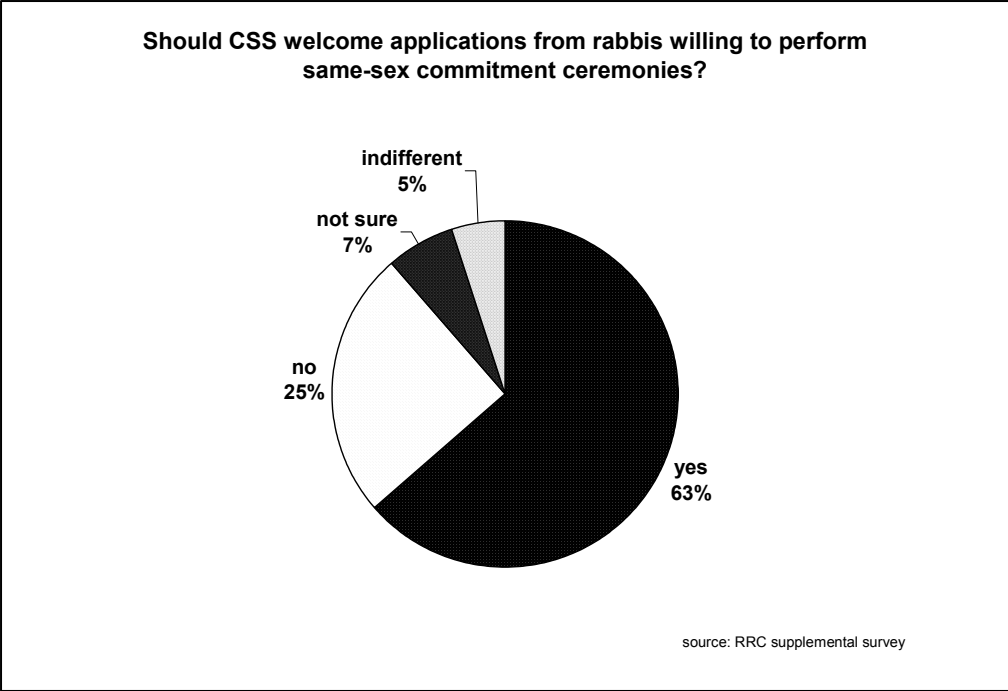
Welcome applications from G/L rabbis?					
Importance	Yes	No	Not Sure	Indifferent	Total
Very	15	8	2	0	25
Somewhat	11	6	5	1	23
Unimportant	10	0	4	0	14
Total	36	14	11	1	62

Should CSS welcome applications from openly gay or lesbian rabbis?



source: RRC supplemental survey

The CJLS also made it an option for rabbis to perform same-sex commitment (not marriage) ceremonies between two Jews. In our survey, we asked congregants, “Should Congregation Sha’are Shalom welcome applications from rabbis who are willing to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies?” Almost two-thirds of the respondents said that we should accept applications from rabbis willing to perform commitment ceremonies, while about one-quarter of respondents disagreed. The remaining respondents either were not sure or were indifferent. In the comment section of the survey, several respondents argued against same-sex commitment ceremonies, but three other respondents suggested that they would leave our congregation if our rabbi were not willing to conduct such ceremonies. Overall, the level of approval was higher in both the numbers and the comments for this question than the previous one. (Approximately the same numbers and opinions came out of the question on whether CSS’s sanctuary should be used for same-sex commitment ceremonies.)



On the question of whether we should accept applications from rabbis willing to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies and the related question of whether we should allow these ceremonies to be performed in our sanctuary, there was a difference in the intensity of the views, depending on whether or not the respondent favored these types of ceremonies (see Tables 2 and 3 below). Those who oppose the possibility of same-sex commitment ceremonies were substantially and proportionately more intense about their opinions than those who support these

ceremonies. The pattern was the same for the question about whether our sanctuary should be used for such ceremonies.

Of those who thought welcoming applications from rabbis who would perform commitment ceremonies was an “extremely” important issue, there were approximately equal numbers on each side of the issue. However, three-quarters of those who thought it was “very” important agreed with welcoming such applications, and all but one of those who thought it was “somewhat” important or “unimportant” agreed.

In written comments to this question, a few respondents contrasted the option of same-sex commitment ceremonies with the prohibition of rabbis’ conducting interfaith marriages and religious acknowledgement of non-Jewish children of interfaith marriages. There was a lot of frustration expressed in those comments, some directed at our congregation, some at the Conservative movement at large. Overall, there seems to be a lot of confusion about the new rulings, the reasoning behind them and how they relate to the Conservative movement’s current positions on interfaith marriages and conversion. While a few people felt strongly enough to put their thoughts about this in writing, based on comments made during our focus groups, we believe there are probably more than a few who share those thoughts. We suggest that CSS strongly consider creating a rabbi- or USCJ- led forum for exploring and clarifying issues related to the new rulings as well as the Conservative movement’s current positions on interfaith marriages and conversions.

Table 2: Importance of Rabbi Performing Same-Sex Commitment Ceremonies

Welcome applications from rabbis who will perform ceremonies?

Importance	Yes	No	Not Sure	Indifferent	Total
Extremely	8	9	0	0	17
Very	12	5	0	0	17
Somewhat	17	1	4	1	23
Unimportant	2	0	0	2	4
Total	39	15	4	3	61

Table 3: Importance of Using Sanctuary for Commitment Ceremonies

Should Congregation Sha’are Shalom allow sanctuary to be used for ceremonies?

Importance	Yes	No	Not Sure	Indifferent	Total
Very	13	12	0	0	25
Somewhat	20	4	2	0	26
Unimportant	5	0	0	5	10
Total	38	16	2	5	61

Issues concerning interfaith families, non-Jewish spouses, and the USCJ recommendation to encourage conversions

In our survey, 70% of respondents indicated that they would like non-Jewish spouses to be included in our services and all aspects of our congregational life to the greatest extent possible within Conservative Judaism. Through individual and group discussions it became clear that there is great uncertainty among our members regarding what “the greatest extent possible within Conservative Judaism” actually means. Our congregation currently accepts non-Jewish spouses as members of our community and encourages their participation in the community to the extent possible, limited only by some ritual restrictions and some leadership roles. As stated above, our congregation would benefit from further education and discussions about this issue. From the many comments made in response to the survey and during our discussions, it seems that most interfaith families feel welcome in our congregation and are satisfied with our level of support for them. The number of comments about the importance of welcoming interfaith families, in both the open-ended comments and in the focus groups, was substantial and without opposition. Congregants generally feel that if changes are to be made, those changes should be towards even more openness and acceptance. This is of particular interest because, to some extent, it goes against national Conservative “policy.” The Conservative recommendation is explicitly not just outreach, but that “[w]e also must encourage non-Jewish spouses to convert, and when it is necessary, to convert their children as well.” (See http://www.uscj.org/Ehud_A_New_Approach_6974.html.) Our congregants reject that approach quite strongly. A few congregants expressed interest in conversion classes, but generally our congregants do not want a rabbi or our community to actively encourage anyone to convert.

Issues concerning our identification with the Conservative movement

Approximately 80% of our survey respondents indicated that when they were looking to join a congregation, the congregation’s “affiliation with Conservative Judaism” was either one of the primary reasons for joining (49%) or a benefit of joining (33%). It is clear from our congregants’ responses to questions concerning gays, lesbians, and interfaith families that, in general, CSS lines up on the liberal side of the Conservative movement. While this may be associated with our newness as a community or our location (somewhat isolated from the broader Jewish community), it may also represent a trend among a broader range of communities, a trend that leads the national Conservative leadership rather than follows it. Although we do not have the data to place us unambiguously on the Conservative movement’s ideological spectrum, it is fair to suggest that we will be more attractive to a candidate who is on the more liberal end of the spectrum, and vice versa.

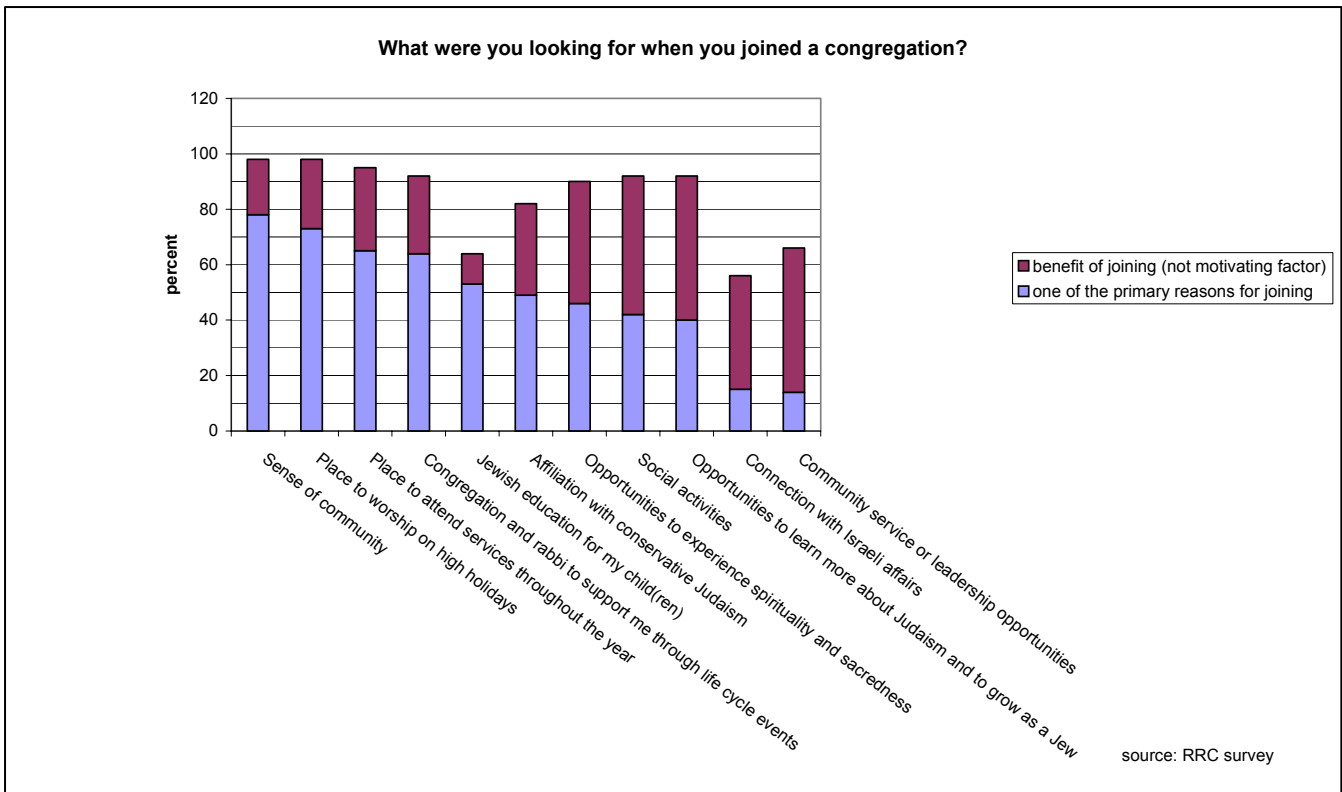
B. How do our congregants view the role of a synagogue in their lives (generally and with regard to CSS in particular)?

Through our research, our committee investigated the role of a synagogue in the lives of our members. We sought to learn why our members wanted to join a congregation in general and why they chose to affiliate with CSS in particular. On a related topic, we wanted to learn as much as possible about the sort of programming our members would like the congregation to offer. We also sought congregants’ opinions on what they believed to be the greatest strengths of CSS, as well as areas in which our congregation could be improved. Our analysis of these topics

relies most heavily on the data collected by our congregational survey. The focus group meetings and conversations our committee members have had with our fellow members over the past few months also gave us additional information on which our conclusions are based.

Reasons congregants wanted to join a congregation

In our initial survey, our committee asked congregants, “What were you looking for when you joined a congregation?” Respondents were asked to rate eleven factors that were expected to have had some influence on our members’ decisions, as “one of the primary reasons for joining” (P), “a benefit of joining (although) not the motivating factor” (B), or “not relevant to decision” (NR). The following chart summarizes the responses to this survey question:



The chart illustrates the following points:

- At least 95% of respondents cited sense of community, place to attend services throughout the year, opportunities to learn more about Judaism, and place to worship on the High Holidays, as either (P) or (B).
- The majority of respondents cited all of the factors as being either (P) or (B).
- “Sense of Community” was cited most often as (P). This was made clear by focus group attendees too.
- Neither “Connection with Israeli Affairs” nor “Community Service or Leadership Opportunities” was considered a primary reason for most members to join a congregation. If we explore further, and examine responses by age, we see that these factors are rated (P) or

(B) by most respondents who are either “empty nesters” or “retirees” but by relatively few respondents with children in the home.

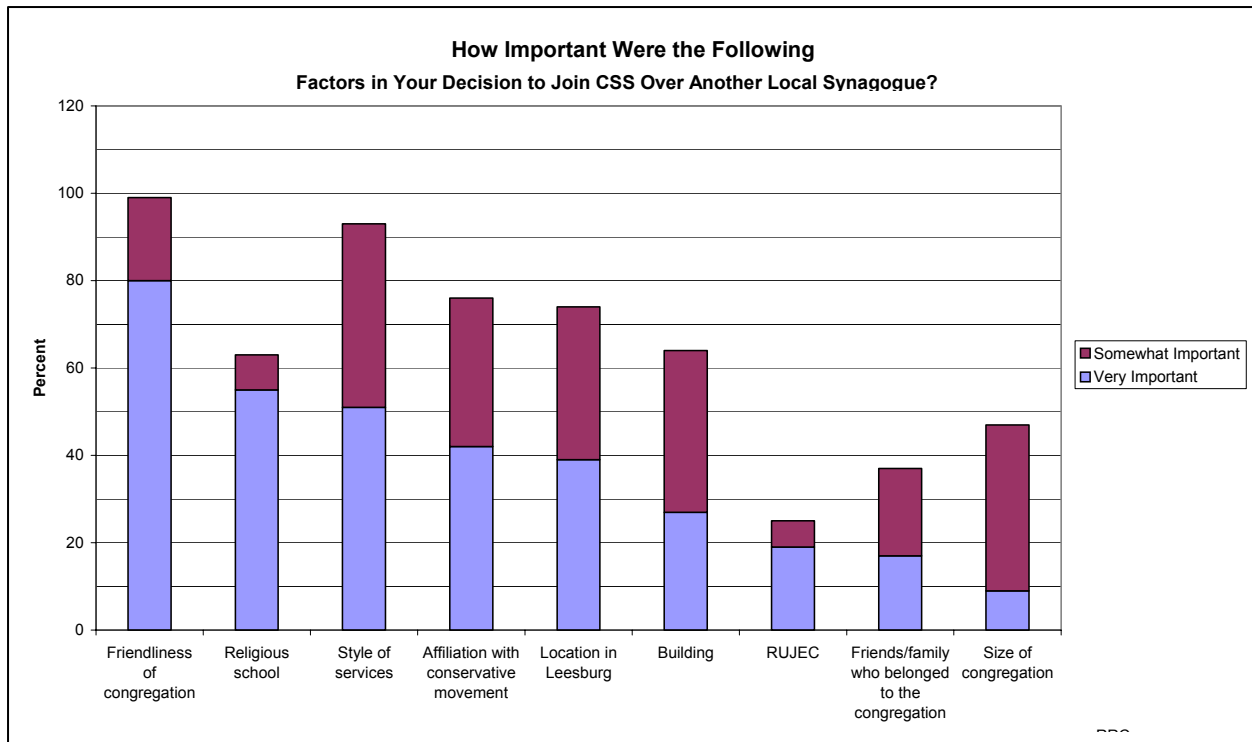
- This question tells us nothing about individuals’ strength of preference or relative rankings of the listed roles, just the proportion of respondents citing each factor as being either (P), (B) or (NR).

Results must be viewed with caution. For example, although “Jewish Education for my children” was cited by just 64% of respondents as being either (P) or (B), far less than almost any other area, it was actually cited as either (P) or (B) by all those respondents with children of religious school age and younger. Combining this additional information with information gathered through conversations with our fellow congregants, it is clear that if CSS did not provide educational opportunities for our youth, a great many of our families would not be members.

In the written comment section of this question, 14 respondents provided additional information. Three respondents cited the preschool, which was not asked about separately in this question, but was asked about under “Jewish education ...” more generally. Of the 11 other responses, seven related to community, which was covered by a specific response to this question. The need of these people to amplify their responses is likely due to the strength of the preference of these seven individual respondents (9% of total respondents). For those respondents, it was clear that community was the most important factor in their decisions to join CSS.

Reasons congregants joined CSS rather than another congregation

In our survey we also asked, “How important were the following factors in your decision to join Congregation Sha’are Shalom rather than another local synagogue?”

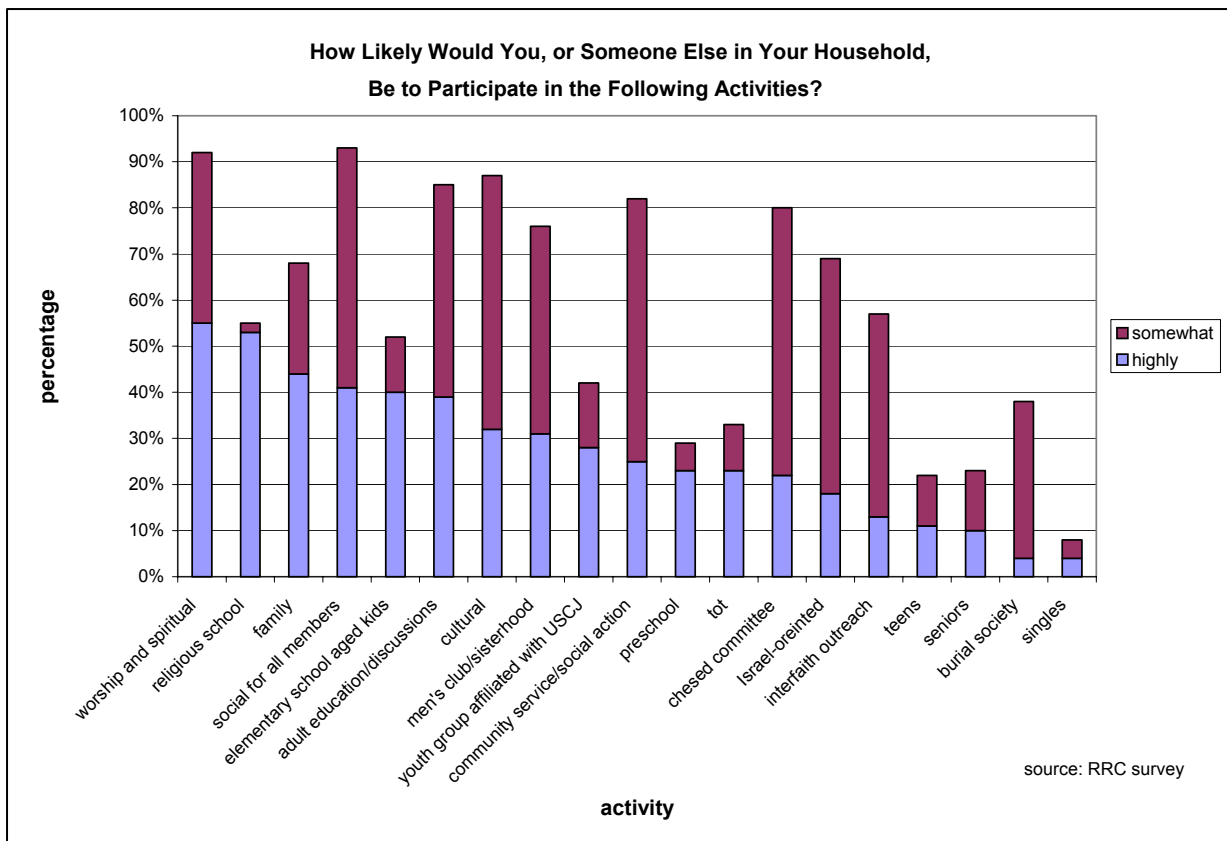


The chart illustrates the following points:

- Friendliness is by far the most frequently cited attribute.
- In addition to friendliness, at least three-quarters of survey respondents reported that style of services, affiliation with the Conservative movement, and location in Leesburg, were important reasons for choosing CSS.
- More than half of the respondents told us that neither the size of the congregation, RUJEC, nor (having) friends/family who belonged to the congregation, were important to their decision.
- RUJEC and the religious school are critically important assets of our congregation. The relatively low percentage of congregants citing our schools as important factors in their decisions (25% naming RUJEC and 63% the religious school) reflects the fact that many congregants have no children with ages appropriate for either program, and do not anticipate taking advantage of the schools in the future. Again, if strength of importance had been measured, we likely would have found that these are critically important programs for many of our congregants.

Likely participation of congregants in specified activities

In our survey we asked congregants, “In which of the following would you (or members of your family who are not completing their own copies of the survey) be likely to participate?” Response options were “highly likely to participate” (H), “somewhat likely to participate” (S), or “not likely to participate” (N).



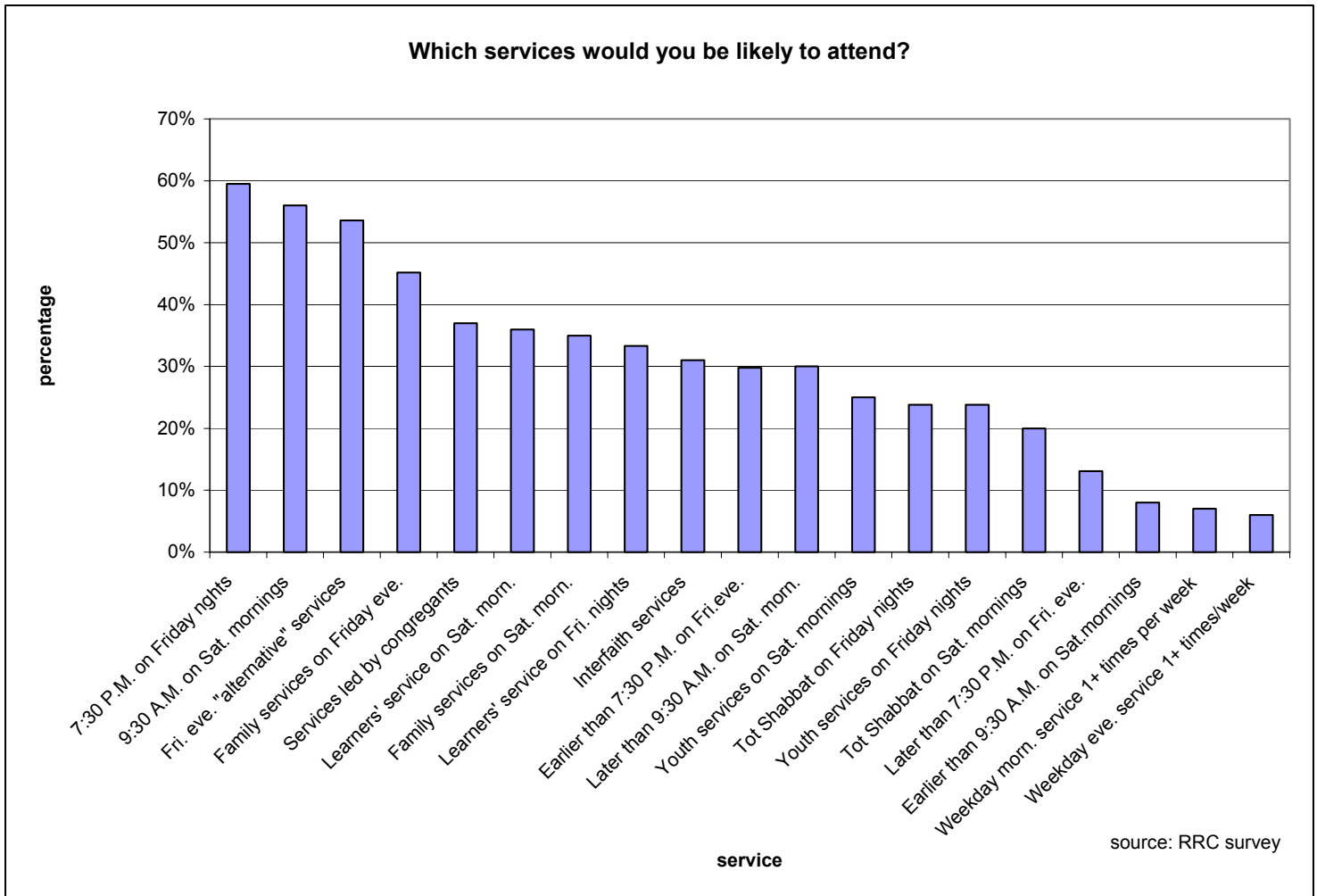
The chart summarizes the results of this survey question:

- “Worship and Spiritual Activities” and “Youth Education” were the only items the majority of respondents cited as (H).
- “Worship and spiritual activities” and “Social activities for all members” were cited most often as being either (H) or (S).
- More than three-quarters of respondents cited these other activities as being either (H) or (S): community service/social action opportunities, *chesed* committee, cultural activities and adult education.
- Other activities cited by at least one-quarter of the respondents are “activities for children in elementary school,” “youth groups affiliated with USCJ,” “community service opportunities,” “social activities for all members,” “Family programs/activities,” “Men’s Club/Sisterhood,” “Cultural Activities,” and “Adult Education.”
- Due to the demographics of the congregation, singles, teen, tot and senior activities were cited by the vast majority of respondents as (N).
- It is interesting to note the interest in participation in those activities not dictated by membership demographics: Israeli-oriented activities (69%), worship/spiritual (92%), community service (82%), social activities for all (93%), *chesed* committee (80%), burial society (38%), and cultural activities (87%). All respondents could have expressed interest in Men’s Club/Sisterhood and Adult Education; however, these activities were cited as being either (H) or (S) by 76% and 85%, respectively.

Congregants’ preferences regarding worship services

Our research included several questions related to religious services. Overall, respondents seem content with religious services as currently conducted, rather than favoring possible scenarios in which potential changes were described. However, from the survey and focus groups, we learned that many congregants would like more family services and occasional alternative services and many others would like services to be more meaningful to them personally. Several congregants said that they wished services would relate more to their daily lives. (For more information about congregants’ feelings on worship services and what they want from a rabbi with regard to services, please see Part II, section C.)

The first survey question we asked regarding services was, “Which of the following religious services would you be likely to attend? Please select all that apply.” The chart below summarizes the responses to the question.



- The most popular response was “7:30 P.M. on Friday nights” and the second most popular was “9:30 A.M. on Saturday mornings.” These are the times when CSS currently holds our weekly Shabbat services.
- “Alternative services (with more singing, dancing ...)” was the only other category selected by the majority of those answering the question.
- Between one-quarter and one-half of respondents selected “Earlier than 7:30 P.M. on Friday nights,” “Later than 9:30 A.M. on Saturday mornings,” “Youth services on Saturday mornings,” “Family services on Friday nights,” and “Family Services on Saturday mornings.”

The second question we asked regarding service preferences was, “Please indicate your opinions regarding the levels of Hebrew and English currently used during services at CSS.” Respondents seem satisfied with the way things are being done currently at CSS. More than 60% stated that current use of all of the options is “just right.” The options included were, Level of Hebrew used during Friday evening service, Level of English used during Friday evening service, Level of Hebrew used during Saturday morning service, Level of English used during Saturday morning service.

We asked one other question related to religious services: “Would you prefer any of the following during services?”

- The statement agreed with most often was “After we have a full-time rabbi, I would like to have members serve as lay cantors.” This statement was selected by 74% of respondents. (It is interesting to note that only 48% agreed with an analogous statement pertaining to “lay leaders” rather than “lay cantors.”)
- The other statements agreed to by the majority of respondents were “I prefer that the non-Jewish spouses be included in our services, and in all aspects of our congregational life (to the greatest extent possible within Conservative Judaism)” and “I would like a sermon, by either a rabbi or a knowledgeable, articulate congregant.”
- For the statement “I would like a sermon, but only if delivered by a rabbi,” responses were divided fairly equally among “agree” and “neither agree nor disagree” and “disagree.” This may be due to the fact that many congregants have not experienced congregant sermons at CSS.
- The only other statement with which more than one-third of respondents disagreed was “I would prefer that musical instruments be permitted on Shabbat and holy days.” Since 35% of respondents disagreed with the statement, and 42% agreed with it, it is an area of true notable disagreement for our congregants.

Congregants’ thoughts on CSS’s greatest strengths

Our first survey contained an open response question in which congregants were asked what they believed to be the greatest strengths of CSS. Out of the 62 responses to this question, over half described the greatest strength of our congregation as its friendly, inclusive, and enthusiastic members. Many respondents also noted that CSS has a warm, inclusive atmosphere to people of varied religious backgrounds. In other comments, current members and leadership were given credit for creating a sense of community with educational opportunities for people of all ages, particularly at the religious school and pre-school levels, and also for creating social and religious activities. CSS’s use of Conservative Judaism practices was also noted as an important strength. The building, both in its location and its physical qualities, was another commonly mentioned strength of CSS.

Congregants’ thoughts on things that could be improved at CSS

In our first survey, congregants were also asked in which areas they believe CSS could use improvement. While there were 62 responses to the question about CSS’s greatest strengths, there were only 48 responses to this question. A third of the respondents mentioned that we need a full-time rabbi. Most of those people indicated a belief that a rabbi will help unify the congregation. Long-term planning was also a major concern as it relates to high-priced dues, care of the building and expanding leadership. Other responses suggested the great need for clarification of Conservative Jewish practices at CSS, particularly how they relate to interfaith issues. There were a few comments relating to the congregation’s stance on children during services, with the commentators wishing for a more kid-friendly atmosphere. There were fewer comments about the expansion of religious school to allow for more integration of the students in religious practices, as well as expanded opportunities post bar/bat mitzvah. People are generally

very impressed with the adult education opportunities at CSS. There were a few requests for further adult education opportunities during a wider variety of times. (In various parts of the survey, congregants suggested possible topics for future adult education classes. These suggestions can be found in the memorandum to the board found in section C of the appendix.) Other respondents suggested the need to get more members involved in the congregation and the congregation itself more involved in the outside community.

C. What roles do our congregants believe should be priorities for our first full-time rabbi and what attributes would he/she need to perform these roles at CSS?

In our first survey, we asked members what roles they think should be priorities for our first full-time rabbi. We also asked what attributes they thought would be necessary to perform those roles. In response to our survey, congregants rated the following roles as those they felt should be the highest priorities for our rabbi:

1. Worship Leader (95%)
2. Teacher (92%)
3. Role Model (85%)
4. Spiritual Guide (77%)
5. Pastor (75%)
6. Congregational Leader (60%)
7. *Halakhic* Authority (54%)

During our focus groups, we asked attendees to define what the roles listed above mean to them. The following is a summary of our congregant's responses, along with their opinions on the attributes necessary to perform these roles in the manner they described.

Worship Leader

With regard to the role of "Worship Leader," members are looking for a rabbi who is extremely knowledgeable and able to give thought provoking, engaging sermons that help bring Judaism into their daily lives. They want a rabbi who can speak from the heart and relate the weekly *parsha* to current issues they face in their lives. They want a rabbi whose sermons will "grab them in" and "make them want to learn more."

With regard to the style of the worship service, congregants feel we need a rabbi who is able, willing and comfortable leading all kinds of services. Many of our members enjoy the familiarity of the traditional Conservative service with its traditional songs and melodies. Many of these congregants have a great respect for the repetition of ancient traditions and derive comfort from participating in rituals they experienced as a child with their own parents and grandparents. While many of our members would prefer that our rabbi conduct most services in a traditional Conservative style, we seem to have just as many members who want our rabbi to lead more interactive, alternative services with more music, singing and congregant participation. Many of our members admitted that they lack the experience or knowledge to fully appreciate a traditional service, but they are eager to learn and want a rabbi who will make services more accessible and meaningful to them. While members acknowledge that all services should not be family style or children's services, many parents expressed the desire that services be more family friendly and

engaging to their children. As one parent said, if the children (young and teens) are drawn in and want to come back, it is more likely the parents will come back, too.

One thing that most members seem to agree upon is that they want a rabbi who will continue to encourage and respect the participation of lay members in our services. Congregants feel that this is a very important part of our congregation's tradition that has helped to build our community and give our children something towards which they can aspire. Congregants feel blessed to have knowledgeable, talented and dedicated lay leaders in our community and want a rabbi who will work well with them to continue this important aspect of our congregation's services.

Teacher

With regard to the role of "Teacher", congregants want someone who is willing to jump right in and teach. They want someone who is excited about teaching and anxious to share his/her knowledge and love of Judaism. Congregants feel that it is important for our rabbi to have an "intellectual openness" so that he/she will be able to relate to, respect and teach people with varying levels of knowledge and experience. While most members feel it is essential that the rabbi play a role in educating our children, they feel that we have a competent, professional staff of educators within our religious school whose primary task is to educate our children. Most congregants don't envision our rabbi as an active teacher in our children's classrooms, but more as a role model for them (more on that in the next section). While they don't see the rabbi as a constant presence in their children's classrooms, many congregants feel it is essential that the rabbi take an interest in getting to know them by occasionally visiting their classes, participating in pre-school Shabbat services, participating in special events and interacting with them in casual settings in a manner that will make them feel that they are special, loved and an important part of our community.

When defining the rabbi's role as "Teacher," many congregants mentioned that while we have a very active adult education program with dedicated lay educators, they would like our rabbi to expand on this existing program so there will be even more educational opportunities for them. Congregants would like a rabbi who is willing and able to teach them both inside and outside the sanctuary through classes, discussions and individual study sessions. They want a rabbi who will engage them in thought provoking exchanges and teach them through casual interactions, not just through formal lessons. One congregant mentioned that anytime you engage a great rabbi, it has the potential to be an important teaching/learning moment. While many people want to learn more about Judaism and how the Torah applies to the way we live today, many would also like our rabbi to be a resource for learning about current events outside of our congregation like those relating to Israel, Darfur and changes within the Conservative movement at large.

Role Model

When members were asked to explain what they meant when they said that one of the rabbi's top priorities should be serving as a good "Role Model," their responses fell into two general categories. First, they want the rabbi to be someone of great personal integrity. They want an upstanding individual who is honest, ethical and leads a good, moral life with strong convictions. It is also very important to many congregants that the Rabbi serve as a role model to show that it is possible to be live as a devout Conservative Jew in Loudoun County. While our survey

revealed that many of our congregants do not personally keep kosher, they feel that a rabbi would undermine his/her own credibility as a teacher and role model if he/she did not “practice what he/she preached.” That being said, our congregants understand the difficulties of being an observant Conservative Jew in this area so while they would like our rabbi to be as observant as possible, they want someone who is flexible enough that he/she will be able to enjoy life in Loudoun County outside of our synagogue (i.e., someone who will be comfortable eating a dairy or vegetarian meal at a local restaurant even if it is not a kosher establishment). Consistent with this sentiment is the fact that 82% of our survey respondents said they would be comfortable with a rabbi who is willing to drive to services on Shabbat and Holy Days.

While it is very important to our congregants that our rabbi be an exceptional role model, they want to be inspired by his/her actions and not feel judged if their level of observance is less than his/hers. Many congregants said they do not want a rabbi who will merely preach or dictate to them what they must do, but one who will inspire them by making them see a purpose to everything he/she does. A rabbi who teaches through his/her own daily actions, rather than by preaching what congregants must do, will likely have much more success inspiring our congregants to achieve higher standards in their own personal lives.

In addition to serving as a role model for their personal lives, congregants want our rabbi to be an honorable representative of our congregation to the greater community. In this largely Christian area, members feel we need an upstanding citizen to be our public face within the local government and schools. Congregants want a rabbi who understands what it is like to live in an area where Jews are a minority. They want someone who understands anti-Semitism and is willing and able to effectively help us deal with the ignorance and prejudice we sometimes encounter in our community.

Pastor

While “Pastor” was not ranked as one of the top three roles of our rabbi, the importance of this counseling role to our congregants should not be underestimated. During our focus groups and individual discussions with members, it became clear that when people thought about their most memorable experiences (positive or negative) with past rabbis, many of those memories had to do with how well a rabbi performed during difficult times in their lives. Our congregants want a rabbi who will be there for them during times of crisis. They want someone who will be able to comfort them, advise them and help them cope when they are experiencing life altering events. Some want an advisor who will help them frame things in a religious perspective. Others want a “confidant” who will not only be there for them during their darkest hours, but who will continue to provide ongoing support and advice to them when most well meaning friends and relatives have resumed their normal day to day lives. To fill this important role as pastor, congregants want a rabbi who is warm, compassionate, a good listener and – as many have said – someone who just truly “gets it.” Congregants want a rabbi who has the combination of maturity, life experience and compassion that will enable him/her to support congregants through very difficult times in their lives.

Spiritual Guide

Members did not define the role of “Spiritual Guide” as a unique role to be performed on its own, but rather thought of it as a role that would be achieved through many other roles such as the ones described above (teacher, worship leader, role model and pastor). Primarily, when congregants referred to a rabbi as a “Spiritual Guide,” they seemed to want someone who would take a personal interest in their development. Some congregants want a leader who will help them climb the “ladder of observance” while others want a guide who will help them be the best person they can be without necessarily increasing their level of ritual practice. Either way, what congregants seem to want in a spiritual guide is someone who cares about them personally, will inspire them on an individual level and will be respectful of them whatever level of observance they currently practice in their daily lives.

Congregational Leader

Congregants want our rabbi to be a strong leader who is willing and able to make knowledgeable, informed and steadfast rules for our congregation as well as help resolve disputes among members and leadership. From the comments, it seems that congregants feel that at this point in our development, we need a leader with the ability to teach us, guide us and help us achieve our vision for the future. In the words of one congregant, “having a full time rabbi is the final and tremendously important piece that will complete the puzzle. I envision greatness for Sha’are Shalom with a full-time rabbi, yet I envision the status quo without one.”

Halakhic Authority

In addition to the roles described above, a majority of congregants feel that another important role our rabbi must serve is that of *halakhic* authority. Because of the diversity of opinions within our congregation, we need someone with the ability to find the commonalities among our diverse perspectives, consider all of the possible options for Jewish law within the Conservative movement, and help us establish and enforce consistent *halakhic* rules. In our survey, we asked if congregants thought we should consider hiring a cantor instead of a rabbi. (The survey explained that cantors “do not have the authority to make binding decisions on Jewish law.”) The response was an overwhelming no. Almost three-quarters of respondents said that if we could not afford to hire a rabbi this year, we should not consider hiring a cantor instead.

Social Activist

One interesting survey result is the split of our members on whether our rabbi should be a social activist. While congregants want our rabbi to be a leader and a voice in our local community, they are divided on whether “social activist” should be an important role for him/her to serve. One congregant expressed concern that if a rabbi gave his/her own political views on issues, it might make him/her seem less objective or tolerant to differing views among congregants. Other congregants suggested that a solution to this problem would be having the rabbi unite our community through non-divisive social action projects that we all agree are important, such as working to end hunger or homelessness.

Fundraiser and Administrator

Of all of the possible roles a rabbi can serve, our congregants agree that Fundraiser and Administrator are not roles that we want to be priorities for our rabbi. There seems to be a consensus among congregants that lay volunteers or staff should be working on fundraising and administrative aspects of our congregation and that the rabbi's time should be spent doing things that only he/she can do, such as the roles described above.

Part III: Appendix

A. Survey methods and response rates

During the course of our research, our committee conducted two surveys. The first survey was designed to gather information about our congregants, their views regarding the role a synagogue plays in their lives and their hopes regarding our future rabbi. The survey period ran from October 2, 2006, through November 31, 2006. Congregants were able to take the survey online through a survey website or by requesting a hard copy to be mailed to them. Members were informed about the survey via e-mails, weekly e-bulletins, our congregation's monthly newsletter and a flyer mailed to each of their homes. We had 96 responses to this survey. Of the 96 responses, 72 included their names and 24 were anonymous. Since some of the responses were anonymous, it is impossible to conclude exactly how many separate households were represented in the responses. However, after going through the named responses and accounting for multiple responses from individual households, we can tell that at least 57 separate households were represented in the results. When you add in the 24 anonymous responses, we can conclude that somewhere between 57-81 households responded to the first survey.

On February 25, 2007, a supplemental survey was sent to all congregants. The purpose of the supplemental survey was to gather our members' views on new rulings that were issued by the CJLS. The survey period ran from February 25, 2007 through March 14, 2007 and the survey was made available in the same manner as the first one. Congregants were encouraged to take this survey via an article in our congregation's monthly newsletter, e-mails and weekly e-bulletins. We received a total of 62 responses to this survey.

B. Focus group dates, methods and number of attendees

Our committee conducted three discussion groups to give congregants an opportunity to speak with us directly about their hopes regarding our future rabbi. The first discussion was held at the February meeting of the Board of Directors. There were 22 board members present for the discussion. The next two discussions were also held in February and were advertised via the monthly newsletter, flyers, e-mails and weekly e-bulletins. We had a total of 10 members attending these two later sessions and had personal discussions with several more who were unable to attend the discussions but had opinions they wanted to express to our committee. At the discussions, members were asked questions designed to elicit their past experiences with rabbis (both positive and negative) and questions that helped us clarify information we received through our first survey.

C. Memorandum to board on congregants' specific programming suggestions

To: CSS Board of Directors
From: Rabbi Research Committee
Date: April 8, 2007
Re: Potentially useful ideas gathered from congregants during our research (but not related to our future rabbi search)

During the course of our research, our committee learned a lot about our congregants' opinions, not only regarding our future rabbi, but also regarding how they feel about our congregation itself and all that CSS currently offers. Overall, congregants enjoy being part of the CSS community and appreciate the hard-working volunteers who lead the congregation and organize services, educational programs and activities. While people are generally satisfied, there were many suggestions made by congregants that we felt should be highlighted so that they are not lost among the rest of our research. It is interesting to note that some of these suggestions are for activities or programs that are currently being implemented at CSS. This suggests that although current programming may be consistent with what congregants want, communication may need to be improved to more effectively inform members of what is being offered or planned for the future.

Worship Services

- Many people want our services to remain traditional, but there is a large contingency of our congregation who would like to see more family-oriented services. After we finished our research, family services were implemented on the first Friday of every month, at an earlier time than our traditional services. We think congregants will be excited about this plan as it satisfies both the wishes of those congregants who want more family services and those who want the majority of our services to remain more traditional.
- From our research, a majority of congregants would also like alternative types of services such as those that include more singing, dancing and possibly musical instruments. If the monthly family services continue and an occasional alternative service is also offered (as they have been in the past), it seems that we would achieve the balance desired by most congregants.
- A few congregants said it would be useful to have a "Learner's Guide" at services to help them understand the meaning behind prayers and rituals. This would be a tangible way to make traditional services more meaningful to the many members who told us they lack the experience or religious training to understand all of the rituals and prayers and would like a way to increase their knowledge and understanding.
- A congregant suggested that more consistent programming, such as with family/tot services, would help people new to the area get to know each other on a regular basis.

- One final and noteworthy suggestion regarding services was that our congregation develop a means to gather a minyan, when necessary, to support congregants during times of need.

Social Activities and Social Action Projects

- From our research, we found that many congregants really enjoy the family-oriented social activities (such as pot lucks) and would like to see more of such activities. One suggestion was for a *havurah* (small friendship group) for young families.
- Other congregants also expressed interest in having more social activities for adults, and one congregant suggested planning singles activities with Beth Chaverim for members of both congregations as well as unaffiliated singles in the area.
- Several people expressed interest in increasing youth group activities at CSS.
- Several congregants also expressed interest in having more social action projects that would unite our members and get our congregation more involved with issues outside of our own community.
- A congregant suggested that CSS reconsider the policy of not allowing social/fundraising events at non-kosher restaurants.

Religious School

Most people seem very satisfied with the religious school. Some congregants suggested that post-bar/bat mitzvah opportunities be offered.

Adult Education

Congregants feel we have a wonderful adult education program. People are enjoying it, learning a lot and want it to continue to grow. Besides suggesting that our future rabbi play an active role in adult education at CSS, the majority of other suggestions regarding adult education were requests that certain topics be considered for future classes. The following topics were suggested by congregants: Hebrew, Trope/Haftarah reading, Torah study, classes on specific services such as the High Holy Days, and classes that teach the major Hebrew prayers, what they mean and why we say them. A few congregants also suggested offering pre-conversion classes.

Long-range Planning

Congregants suggested that CSS needs a long-range plan focused on issues such as growth and fundraising.

D. Raw data from first and supplemental surveys

Please note: Due to the length of section D of the appendix and the fact that most of the information contained in it is summarized in Part II of this report, this final section of the appendix is not attached to the printed copy of this report. This last section of the appendix (as well as the rest of this report) will be available for your review on the Congregation Sha'are Shalom website at www.sha-areshalom.org. To request a printed copy of this section, please contact our committee at rabbisearch@sha-areshalom.org or by leaving a message for us at 703-737-6500.

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