

January 31, 1964

FROM: RABBI HENRI FRONT, Director
Pa. Council of UAHC

TO: RABBI JOSEPH D. HERZOG

I want to respond to a number of things which transpired and which I saw during my recent visit.

1. The Temple Building. You have a warm and wonderful Temple building, situated in the appropriate section of the community. It is tastefully done, and the sanctuary lends itself to a feeling of sanctity in worship. Apart from the heating problems, I feel the most important lack is in the number of classrooms. The size of the classrooms themselves limits the number of students possible in each class, and the number of classrooms limits the number of classes which can be held at any one session. I would like to recommend that you contemplate a building program to build at least five more classrooms. These rooms should be at a right angle to the building or form a right angle so that a U-shaped building is the result of the merger between the present structure and the proposed one. Such a U-shape would lend itself well to protecting a patio where the children might play during recess or before and after school. It might also be a wonderful place to build a Sukkah and hold some outdoor activities such as a graduation service in the late spring. It would be a suitable place for outdoor tributes, and for a Garden of Meditation. Any number of things might be planned in such a patio area.

It might be possible to build the classrooms large enough to house more students, since it appears obvious that your classes are growing in size. Enough classrooms to have all your school on one day would certainly be a great benefit to the school itself. The feeling of largeness, of unity, the inspiration which the older students would bring to the younger ones, the possibility of holding joint services or exercises, the better administration of your school, the ease of transportation to and from school, and many other things could be made possible through the use of the new classrooms. You certainly should consider the use of sinks in the lower grades' classrooms, and a W.C. for the kindergarten room. A great deal of time would be saved with the inclusion of these plumbing facilities in the kindergarten and first grade. With an extra classroom or two being made available, it is possible to have audio-visual programs in the one of the classrooms, or even an adult study group on Sunday morning, made up of the parents of those children who are in the school. Perhaps one or two of the classrooms could be made with a sliding door between, so that a larger section could be made available when necessary. I can foresee any number of improvements in programming which might be possible with more classrooms.

Another reason that I could suggest for more classes is that the young and the older students use the same classrooms on different days. As a result the furniture in each class is either suitable for one group and not suitable for the other age group, or both of them are uncomfortable because you have had to purchase furniture which is "too large for the small kids, and too small for the large." Individual classrooms would mean there would be proper furniture. There is so little storage space and the classrooms are so small, that furniture cannot be taken out of classrooms for such activities as a dance group or exercise groups for the youngest children.

Your building is very neat and well kept up by the janitorial staff. You have no idea how many buildings are literally filthy and unkempt. You are to be commended for the good amount of money you spend for the upkeep, which will reduce, in the long run, the total amount which is required.

Yours is one of the few Temples which has never had a mortgage. Perhaps what is needed to increase the interest, devotion, and participation in the Congregational activities is a small debt. I know of nothing better to inspire a Congregation than a mortgage which must be paid off.

2. Constitution. I have read over your Constitution and find a number of things which should be changed. I know that the sample Constitution which the UAHC suggests leaves much to be desired in your particular case. Perhaps it would be a good thing for you to purchase several copies of Myron Schoen's book, "Successful Synagogue Administration." This volume should be in the hands of every Congregational officer, and passed down from hand to hand. It contains many things of value to Board members. One can learn from its pages, and from the wisdom which it reveals, based on the experiences of six hundred or so Congregations.

The Constitution itself might be improved through some of the following:

a. Purposes. I think that more is actually being done by your Congregation than the purposes suggest. Worship and school and burial are merely three of the aspects of Congregational life.

I notice that in your purposes of the Congregation you have not used some of the guidelines which you might receive from looking at the By-Laws and Constitution of the National UAHC. Some of the purposes of the creation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations might lend you to see the purposes of your own Congregation.

b. The article on dues limits the Board, rather than assists the Board. Perhaps changing this article so that authority to raise or lower dues is given to the Board of Directors, without mentioning an amount or requiring the assent of the Congregation might be just what is needed.

A Constitution is meant to be a general skeleton, a framework upon which the Congregation finds support. Too often a Constitution becomes a suit of armour which prohibits the growth and prevents action on the part of the Board. By having too many details spelled out too clearly, a Board is restricted in its actions. I do not mean that a Constitution should be loosely worded, or that it should be in such confused state that it can be interpreted at one time liberally and at another time conservatively. What I do mean is that by being too specific, sometimes a Constitution becomes outdated. May I bring up as an example your recommended Amendment II which is a recommendation that Section 7 be added to Article 4 (dues). This proposed amendment suggests that an assessment of \$6 per member be made on behalf of the UAHC. Since the time of the writing of this amendment the assessment has been voted upon by the Biennial Convention (the highest body of our Assemblage of Congregations) which made it obligatory upon each Congregation to have ten percent of its budget as UAHC dues. By the wording of your Section 7, you become out of date as the dues of each Congregation are lowered or raised, according to the will of the Biennial Assemblies.

c. The officers of the Congregation are elected annually. Yet, seven new members (one half the Board) come on the Board, and it is possible that officers of the Congregation can be elected from among the seven new members. It seems to me that no officer of the Congregation should be elected unless he has already served on the Board for one year. Yet this limitation, which is a wise one, is not found in your article.

d. I see no article which limits the participation on the part of the past presidents. Perhaps a time will come when your Board will be overloaded with "past presidents" who will in effect be life-members. Perhaps a "past presidents committee" should be appointed, with the immediate past president sitting on the Board representing the committee. These members could be relied upon for work or advice when there are difficulties, since they are in a special position of respect.

e. e. I see no "statute of limitations" to the number of years that a person may serve. Theoretically, it is possible for a person to be elected to the Board and re-elected every year or two until he passes away. It would seem to me that in order to forestall the possibility of inbred Boards, that some rule be made that a person may serve for a period of four or six years, but then must leave the Board for at least a year "sabbatical" before being eligible for re-election.

The nominations committee also is something which should be reconsidered. I am especially troubled by Section 4, nominations from the floor. Accepting nominations from the floor means that it is possible for one person to be selected, even though this person was not selected by a nomination committee which theoretically has studied thoroughly the qualifications for office of every member of the Congregation. It also means that friction and perhaps hard feelings will develop on the part of the person, who having been selected by a nominating committee, is displaced by the nominee from the floor. I think this is bad public relations for your Congregation, and I believe that this policy has already resulted in some dissatisfaction among those who have been displaced. If you desire to have some means to have nominations (apart from those names submitted by the nominating committee), then perhaps you might want to have nominations sent to the nominating committee by mail, as long as a name is submitted on a petition signed by five members of the Temple, and assented to in writing on the same petition by the person nominated. This petition should be mailed to the nominating committee several weeks prior to the "one month prior to the election". (Article X, Section 3).

f. I also notice that you do not have any provision for junior membership, associate membership or auxiliary membership. Perhaps there would be some opportunities for these, and at least you might have provisions for other than regular members

3. Board meetings. I would like to suggest that a loose-leaf folder be made for each committee chairman. Included in this folder should be a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Congregation, plus rules and directions for the committee itself. Also, a list of the Congregation's members with names and addresses, and a list of members of the Board and the jobs to which they are assigned. The mimeographed minutes of past meetings should be kept by each Trustee. You might also include a list of the dates of the Board meetings. This notebook can be a handy reference file for the person assuming that committee chairmanship the following year. Inserted into the folder should be a report of every activity, problem, and event which that particular committee undertakes. By writing a review and analysis of each event, showing the steps involved and the persons contacted, the names of business firms which supplied equipment or supplies, etc., a full history of the committee can be handed down year by year. It simplifies the tasks of the committee in the succeeding year.

4. Certainly you should mail to each Trustee, two weeks before or one week before the Board meeting, a mimeographed set of the minutes of the previous meeting and a copy of the committee reports from each committee. By having available at that time whatever committee report is about to be made, it saves the time of the Board meeting. If, for example, on January 23 every Board member were to receive a copy of the January Board meeting with whatever reports each committee member was going to make to the February meeting, every Board member could come into the February Board meeting armed with all the information necessary to make comments and pass on motions. It would not take up an hour or two of that February Board meeting to read the minutes, and to have oral reports from the various committees. Everything would be there in writing and business could proceed in a more orderly fashion. This method also insures that each committee will be active during the preceding month. It keeps everybody on his toes.

5. In the Constitution there is the matter of the employment and termination of the contract of the Rabbi. There is a great deal of discussion and difference of opinion on whether the contract of a Rabbi should be terminated by the Board of Directors alone, or by Congregational vote. Surely the engagement of a Rabbi should be made by the entire Congregation. The contracts thereafter can be discussed and arranged by the Board itself, without Congregational ratification.

The bone of contention between sides is whether the contract of a Rabbi shall be terminated by the Board, or, by the Congregation. As I mentioned at the special meeting Thursday night, "you pays your money and you takes your choice." I think a good case could be built up either way.

Certainly Section 3 of Article 7 (the duties of the Rabbi) are neither all inclusive or full delineated. For example, I do not understand what it means "to officiate at all functions where his services are requested." Who requests his service? An unaffiliated person? -- Only the Board? There are many more things that a Rabbi does than this Constitution implies. The 1961 "Handbook" of the UAHC, pp. 243 ff, gives some indication of the tasks and role of the Rabbi.

6. I am sending you, under separate cover, a copy of what I call a "social action kit". There are a number of articles, brochures, and pamphlets which can be of assistance in the formation and better running of a social action committee.

7. I have spoken to Abe Segal and Ellis Rosenberg, our Religious Education Consultants. One of them would join me for a day or two with you, either October 3-4 or October 10-11 for a teacher training session. Perhaps it would be possible, since some amount of money is involved which we both must share in, for us to have the following schedule:

- a. Observation of Sunday morning classes by Mr. Segal.
- b. Lunch for teachers and Religious School Committee members, during which time Mr. Segal and I could make whatever points are necessary.
- c. Following lunch, we could perhaps break up into two groups: Mr. Segal taking the teachers and I, the Religious School Committee. He could then work with the teachers on something such as "audio-visual techniques for classroom" or "planning the lesson." While they are in session, I could be working with the Religious School Committee on the functions and tasks and purposes of the committee. We then might exchange classes for a half hour or so for some other purpose, in order that the Religious School Committee have an opportunity to be with Mr. Segal.

May I point out that this is one of the ways which the Pennsylvania Council can be of service to its constituent members.

8. It is wonderful that you are using your post confirmants as assistant teachers. If, now, you could have a class for them, you would in effect have a high school program and a high school department. Teaching a class means learning the subjects yourself, and this is a wonderful way to continue a child's education past confirmation.

Speaking of confirmation, I noticed that in your Bar Mitzvah requirements you do not mention at all that a child is expected to continue to confirmation. This may not be a problem -- all you children might continue on until they have been confirmed. But at least the statement should be included in your Bar Mitzvah requirements.

9. I notice that in your wonderful curriculum that there is a great deal of consistency and follow-through in subject matter. It evidences a great gain in progress over previous curricula. I do notice, however, that there is no opportunity for arts and crafts, or use of audio-visual techniques. Though there be some who feel that these are "gimmicks" and are not necessary, they have proven to be wonderful aids and techniques in teaching, when properly used. The size of your classrooms and the number of them does, of course, limit the arts and crafts and audio visual aids which can be used. I heartily recommend that inclusion in your budget be made for purchase of whatever equipment is necessary, and that your teachers be instructed in the proper use of them.

10. Somehow, the long periods of time spent at your services on Saturday are not paying the dividends which you would hope. While prayer is the important aspect of a Religious School, I think you should again discuss among yourselves the purposes of the services and the best techniques for conducting them. I know that you have inherited something from your predecessor, but your Religious School Committee should not delude itself into thinking that the setting up of the services and the conducting of them fulfills the children's requirements for prayer. Such a formal service might fulfill the adults' requirements, but they leave something to be desired when translated to the Religious School.

11. Your children are beautifully disciplined, and this discipline carries over even into the classrooms, to and from services, and to and from school itself. By stressing the need for decency and courtesy, you have at the outset of the school year set the tone for the classroom. This means that your teachers do not have to be disciplinarians, but can be teachers.

12. Teachers, are, of course, a problem in the smaller community which is just far enough away from a large center to have to use its own teachers and own Congregants as teachers. Perhaps by a salary scale and a contract which calls for a probationary period of a few months in the first year of instruction, and regular teacher training course during the year, you can increase the efficiency of your teachers. I was most pleased to see the high quality of instruction which your teachers are producing. They may not be fully trained, but their hearts are fully in tune with what we are seeking from them. Perhaps you might want to institute a "Yom Hamoreh" -- "Teachers Day" in the spring of the year in which you honor your teachers. They are fully deserving of any honors you might give them.

13. You need some kind of traffic control outside your building during the Sunday School ingress and egress periods. Children dash across the street in order to get to the Sunday School in time, and an accident is possible. An ounce of prevention... I had the misfortune and horror to be a witness to an accident in front of a Temple one Sunday morning in another Congregation which I was visiting. It brought to the realization of the Board of Trustees the need for some kind of traffic control. Perhaps someone close to the city government would be able to help out with city-owned signs and even personnel.

14. I would look forward to the day when a Cantor-Educator or some other kind of Cantor-Religious School Supervisor might be in the employ of your Congregation.

15. The main problem of your Congregation, according to what I could gather from the meeting of your officers, seems to be personnel. It is true that many of your officers were elected while they were young, and before they could have full seasoning. Some of these persons will obviously have to run for office again in five or ten years. There is nothing wrong with having a man serve as president of the Congregation when he is in his early thirties, and then again twenty years later. The same probably exists in your Sisterhood. Your Men's Club, too, is not exempt. This

is a common problem to all of our Congregations. The slow maturing process is still the best way to have trained and "eager" candidates for office.

I will follow up this letter with another one after I have had a few more days to go over certain points which I am considering. So much happened and there is so much to say, that I do not want to burden you at this time with a longer report. This one is quite long enough - over long.

May I thank you once again for the opportunity to be with you, to learn about you and your activities, and to participate in your worship service. I am honored to have preached, and grateful for the opportunity to explain how the Union of American Hebrew Congregations desires to assist in the continuing progress of Temple Beth Israel of Sharon. So often people do not understand that the Union of Congregations is not a separate identity by itself but is made up of every Congregation in the country. The House of Living Judaism in New York City merely is the headquarters for this group of some six hundred forty Congregations. The personnel in that building gather information from each of the Congregations, from other movements in Judaism, and from many other sources, and distill whatever insights are to be found there and share these with the constituent members. Textbooks are produced, programs are analyzed and suggested, brochures and pamphlets mailed out, suggestions made and mimeographed. These things are done by a central office because they cannot be done by each individual Congregation. This is the purpose of the Union. It does not exist for its own sake. Indeed, the fact that it is the patron body of our Rabbinical Seminaries (in Cincinnati, New York, and Los Angeles) makes it all the more worthwhile and another reason why it should be supported.

Your Congregation has always been among the leaders in our State in sharing in responsibilities as well as the privileges of membership in the UAHC. I am grateful for the opportunity of meeting with you and sharing thoughts as we together labor in the Lord's vineyard, to do His tasks here on earth. As we are co-workers with God, so am I a co-worker with you in the immediate problems of your Congregation.

Cordially,

Dr. Henri E. Front, Rabbi