

REPORT OF THE RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

June 7, 1953

There is a prologue to this report. This was Joe Goodstein's committee. I do not know how long he was the active chairman of the schools committee as such, but I do remember Joe teaching us the 23d Psalm when I first attended Sunday School, and I know he was actively interested at all times. The Religious School itself speaks for him; he took a large part -- indeed, a more prominent part than any other lay member of our community -- in the school. With all of his many activities and interests, the schools were always his primary concern. A man's deeds are his monument.

We have had this past year 114 students in our Religious School, including nine in the High School class; ⁴26 in the Hebrew School, making a total of 140, or approximately the same as last year. I have not spoken to the Rabbi about it, but I am personally disappointed in the small Hebrew School enrollment; perhaps, sometime in the future, we will have a single, consolidated curriculum.

Our weekly religious school collection amounted to \$217.33; after disbursements of \$53.22 to the Shenango Valley Jewish Federation and \$15.35 to the March of Dimes, we have a credit balance of \$148.76. In addition, we received \$585 in registration fees, which are used for the purchase of film strips and the rental of motion pictures from the Union. We have a visual educational program, and we are encouraged by the student response to it. \$725.50 was paid out this year to teachers and substitutes on the basis of a \$15 a month salary; as I understand it, this money is part of the Sisterhood contribution to the Temple.

Our school year was high-lighted by a number of special events for the children. On Sept 29, there was a children's Yom Kippur service. On Oct 3, a Sukkos service centering about a beautiful Succoh arranged by the Sisterhood and featuring a fruit offering by the children. On October 10, in celebration of Simchas Torah, we witnessed a Consecration Service for the 11 children entering our pre-school class. On Dec 17, ~~there~~ was a Hanukkah program with a play, "The Magic Hammer" and on Dec 19, Hannukkah Sabbath, there was a children's dramalogue entitled "Idol of the Altar." On the afternoon of March 1, the children celebrated Purim with a comic opera, "The Purim Tale", directed by Mrs. Sam Routman, and a treat provided by the Sisterhood and distributed by Mrs. Lou Applebaum and her committee. On March 29, the Rabbi conducted a Model Sedar ~~for~~ in which the children participated; the morar, charoseth, and other traditional parts of the feast were ^{again} prepared and served by Mrs. Applebaum and her committee. On the Eve of Shavuot, the confirmants participated in a special Consecration Service, and, as you know, Confirmation ~~took place~~ of 15 young people took place on May 24th. Last Sunday, the children entertained and were entertained at the Congregational picnic sponsored by the Temple Men's Club. We are particularly grateful to the Sisterhood and to the Sisterhood members who worked to give meaning to these festival celebrations.

The school term ran from Sept 6 to May 17. Beginning Hebrew School students met just once a week, for an hour; the advanced Hebrew classes met twice a week for hourly sessions. Three Religious School classes met on Saturday for an hour of class work and for the Religious School Sabbath Service; the primary six grades met for two hours on Sunday morning.

Four young men became Bar Mitzvah this year: Sam Stahl on Sept 13, Alan Cohen on Nov 7, Richard Pocrass on Mar 13, and Robt Stern on Apr 10.

The teachers in our religious school were Miss Marla Schermer, Mrs. Gerald Barr, Miss Myra Goldstein, Mrs. Geo. Lurie, Sr., Miss Helen Shapiro, Mrs. Lou Routman, Mr. Howard Cole, Mr. Louis Epstein, and the Rabbi, who taught two pre-Confirmation classes, and the High School group, as well as all four Hebrew School classes. I should like to express our gratitude to each of them in a manner commensurate to their service, and I don't know how. I am not thanking people for lending their names to a committee, or for doing one evening's work, or for working on a specific project. This work was constant, recurrent, and not especially satisfying when, after all the preparatory work, and the pushing aside of one's other interests on Sunday morning, the teacher finds that three students have forgotten to bring their textbooks, and none of them has studied his lesson. Teaching a class in the Religious School means getting up early every Saturday or Sunday morning, careful preparation of the lesson every week, grading papers, and a number of other subsidiary tasks. And, these people are busy -- socially, with other Temple activities, and with their families. Our thanks to them is sincere and lavish. It is understandable that a few of these teachers have expressed a desire for relief. We would like very much to have other members of the Congregation take over, particularly members with teaching qualifications. We would like -- in fact, we need -- volunteers to substitute, and surely, it is easy enough for any of us to serve on an occasional Sunday morning.

The Religious Schools Committee this year was composed of Mr. Leon Bolotin, Mrs. Francis Miller, Mr. Alex Polangin, Mrs. Elliot Rabb, Mr. Sam Routman, Mrs. Walter Routman, and Mrs. Jack Stern.

I want to thank the Comm for its cooperation.

The Committee found itself in the center of a controversy over whether we should have a nine or a ten year curriculum, and we finally decided on a nine year program. At the same time, we adopted a plan whereby children would start their religious school training at the same time as they start their public school work, and thereafter, the Religious School grade and the public school grade would correspond. We feel that this was a constructive step toward standardization of our school. Henceforth, we expect to have a Confirmation service every year after completion of the ninth grade work. Previously, we had Confirmation whenever we had a class, and the confirmants were in the ninth, tenth, or even the eleventh grade in the public schools.

The debate over whether we should adopt a nine or ten year program became a subject of discussion throughout the community, and a renewed interest in our educational system was demonstrated. The interest was always there; I have myself been a party to a number of discussions on our schools since I returned to Sharon. But this year, the interest became more general, and more overt. The Committee membership was infused with the popular concern over education, and, suddenly, governing the activities of our religious schools became exciting and worthy. The Committee became enthusiastic about its work; suggestions for correction and improvement poured forth. We decided to initiate a system of requirements for promotion from one grade to the next, and, eventually, we hope to develop standards for promotion and definite prerequisites for Confirmation. I believe that every member of this Committee found our discussions stimulating and rewarding. I hope that this Committee will continue to be active and vocal, that next year's members will visit our schools often, and make exhaustive studies of our whole educational system.

A word about our high school course: For the past three years, the Rabbi has been meeting with post-confirmants every other week for study and discussion. We are enabled to maintain our contact a little longer, and to delve more deeply into studies of Jewish history, cultural traditions, and the current status of international and local Jewry. Religious education is not complete with Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation. The Rabbi is endeavoring, with these classes as with the undergraduates, to impart some understanding of what, who, and why are Jews.

I have mentioned the Hebrew school enrollment, and the fact that beginning students meet only once a week. I have told you that the Rabbi presently teaches three classes in the Religious School, four in Hebrew, superintends both schools, and trains the Bar Mitzvahs. It seems apparent that soon -- in a year, or two, or three -- it will be necessary to find a young person to assist the Rabbi as an instructor in Hebrew, as an educational director of the Religious Schools, and as a general Youth Counselor.

Finally: We seek your help. We want teachers, and substitutes. We want an active Schools committee. And we want more support from all of you at home. We want you to teach your children the value of a Jewish education, and the necessity for attending our non-compulsory schools. Make sure his lessons are prepared, and discuss his studies with him; you can digest our most elaborate assignments in a few minutes a week. Neither home nor school training is itself sufficient; we must work together to develop our young people into thinking, understanding Jews.

Respectfully submitted
Harold Foxman