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Report of Rabbi Arthur Brodey at the Annual Congregational Meeting of Temple Israel, Uniontown, Penna., Monday, May 25, 1964.

Mr. President, Officers, Members of the Board, and members:

I am happy to report on the spiritual progress of Temple Israel since becoming its Rabbi last September 1st. Even in this short period of nine months, I feel a surging forward of our congregational life, a tightening of our structure, and a new spirit that augurs well for the future.

The breaking of old patterns and the establishment of new ones is always a slow process, but the willingness to accept the new while retaining old traditions is a sign of health and brings new stimulus to growth.

It is hard to define the spirit, to measure it, to analyze it. There are some guideposts, however which reveal the movement forward, the new pride in accomplishment, the new hope, just as there are signs of weakness that must be strengthened; sacrifices that must be offered to make Temple Israel a living and dynamic expression of the deeper yearnings that cannot be expressed but which nevertheless motivate all of us.

The hard core of devoted workers, those who believe in Reform Judaism, who understand its history and meaning not only for American Judaism but even for the future of all of Judaism, these are the key to Temple Israel's future. To them no other Judaism is possible for them, and it is their task by sacrifice and devotion to move our members generally to the realization that Reform Judaism can be the most satisfactory expression of faith for them and their children.

Without that intense belief in what they stand for, religion becomes a pale and meaningless expression -- all things to all men. Others may believe as they wish but the true believer is committed to practices and beliefs which he has reason to believe fulfill his deepest needs, and makes his religion a central fact in his life.

ATTENDANCES AT SERVICES:

Our main worship service is Friday evening. There are many who will argue that attendance is not the criterion of a good member. But to me it is the heart of religious life. It is inconceivable that one can just pay dues, come to services on the High Holy Days, or on a few other special occasions, and thereby feel that he is fulfilling his obligation to truly support the Temple. Take divine services away and what have you left? An empty building without a heart, or a heart whose pulse is weakened so that it is only faintly audible as though death was imminent. Every member has the duty then to attend services for himself and his children. Every member must make a commitment to attend if not every week, at least a certain number of times a month, if the Temple is to nourish their spiritual life and that of their family with the living waters of Torah.

I do not have any record of attendance for September and October of last year. The High Holy Days were well attended; the Festivals much less so, and during these two months the average of attendance was at least equal if not greater than the following seven months for which I have some record.

For the twenty-four Friday evenings for which I have a record, we had a total attendance of 861 or an average of 36. This average would have been higher had our attendance not begun to falter the last few months. The above figures do not include the Bar Mitzvahs or the Brotherhood Week Sabbath. We had three Friday evening Bar Mitzvahs with an attendance of 569 or an average of 189. At one of these services we had a high of 260 present, standing room only. The three Saturday morning Bar Mitzvahs had a total attendance of 425 or an average of 141.

The Brotherhood Week Friday evening service to which we invited our Christian friends from Uniontown and towns nearby, had an attendance of about 205. Had the weather been more favorable, we might indeed have been swamped. The Confirmation Service had an attendance of 190. This would have reached a higher figure if our members had not felt that there would be no room and thus were scared away.

All in all we had a good average for a congregation of our size; a general improvement I am led to believe over the past years, but we live in hopes that we can by greater effort do much better. Perhaps the weakest attendance was at the Family Worship Services held during the year. Here is one place where we can definitely improve.

MUSIC:

Music is an important part of our Reform service. It is a necessary expense of a congregation. The ideal would be to have a quartet for the High Holy Days and Confirmation if we were able to afford it. We have endeavored to introduce some new music and for the High Holy Days this can be accomplished to a greater extent. We are grateful to Miss Newcomer, Mrs. Moyer and Mr. Alton for their devotion and effort, but particularly we owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Allan Barry not only for his singing in the choir, but as chairman of the Music Committee. He has worked hard and conscientiously and I am grateful for his close co-operation with me, as Rabbi, to whom the final responsibility for all that happens at a service rests.

Our congregational singing and our religious school music can be improved upon. I might suggest that a voluntary choir of adults and/or children to supplement our regular choir, might stimulate more singing as well as attendance at services. To do all this we are handicapped by a lack of a choir director in the professional sense.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES COMMITTEE:

Under the chairmanship of Mr. Leonard Pariser, we have from time to time explored the enriching of our services. I am grateful to him for his work in communicating for me with all the churches to attend the Brotherhood Week Service, and again to Mr. Allan Barry of the Religious Practices Committee for assigning members to sit on the pulpit on Friday evenings.

ADULT EDUCATION:

Adult Education is another index of the health of our congregational life. During the year we studied "Reform Judaism, Past and Present." We learned that Reform, Conservative and Orthodox had each their own histories and were not in any way interchangeable; that the fact we reverted back to some traditional practices in our own way did not make it Conservative or Orthodox.

We had nine sessions held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month with a total attendance of 139 or an average per session of 15.5. This is fairly high for an adult study group, but there is no reason why it cannot be higher. The members found the sessions interesting, stimulating and worthwhile. It is possible we might break up the sessions into two divisions, taking one subject for the first five sessions and another subject for the second five sessions.

We are grateful to those who attended and especially to Mr. Dan Pariser, Chairman of the Adult Study Committee, whose deep interest and active work deserve our heartfelt thanks. It was a job well done.

SISTERHOOD:

The Sisterhood is one of the most important arms of our Temple. It is their interest and devotion, their spirit of co-operation that can make or break our congregational life. For they represent the women, the workers -- the carrying on of many tasks without which we could scarcely function. They are the soul of our life as a Temple.

Nowhere could we find a finer group of dedicated women, more co-operative and harmonious. Their readiness to assume burdens, to take office, is indicative of a healthy Sisterhood.

It has been my privilege to work with them and guide them. I have attended their meetings and feel I have a strength behind me to accomplish my tasks as a Rabbi. They have assisted the congregation from a monetary standpoint and in many other ways. They have held socials twice monthly after services and I strongly recommend this social hour as a means of building up our Temple spirit of fellowship.

I sincerely believe that the Sisterhood can attract more workers by holding regular programs of interest, secular and Jewish at every meeting. Specialized study groups, such as The Bible, or a Hebrew Class could also attract participation.

All in all the Sisterhood has a fine spirit that I commend. I want to express my own thanks to Mrs. Leonard Freeman for her able and devoted leadership, to the Officers and Board for their efforts and for the kindnesses they and the Sisterhood members have shown Beulah and me on so many occasions.

May the Sisterhood go from strength to strength under the leadership of Mrs. Leonard Pariser and the new Officers and Board.

BROTHERHOOD:

Under the fine leadership of Mr. Herman Ficks Brotherhood was active in raising money for the Temple. It held one Breakfast Meeting at which I was the guest speaker, and several Breakfast Board Meetings. In addition it held a Brotherhood Sabbath Service conducted by its members, after which an "Ask The Rabbi" session was held in the Vestry Room. This service and discussion was a truly stimulating occasion.

In order to galvanize the Brotherhood to fuller and further activity and to attract more interest and workers, I recommend a monthly Breakfast Meeting for the members of the Brotherhood, at which time topics of current interest are discussed. The Brotherhood might interest themselves in building attendance at services in line with its own national project. I trust that under the new leadership Brotherhood will grow and flourish.

MEMBERSHIP:

This committee under the chairmanship of Louis Axelrad has made a good start. It attained six new members, four from Connellsville. We held a meeting of possible new members at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jerrold Mervis in Connellsville, and we hope that more new members will be forthcoming from there and nearby. There are not only these possibilities but also there must be other non-affiliated members in our territory, whom we could interest, if a concerted effort were made to interest them starting now. We should try to increase our ranks by another ten or even fifteen members. This can only be done if we ourselves believe in our Temple, in Reform Judaism, and enthusiastically work to obtain results because we believe in our own future as a Temple.

BULLETIN:

I want to express my gratitude to Mrs. Gerald O. Abels and Mrs. Sol J. Rosenbaum for their editing the Temple Bulletin. They have done an excellent job. Our sincere thanks go to Dr. Norman Belfer for his publishing of the Bulletin and other communications to the Temple members. If funds permitted we might consider a more formal format for the Bulletin.

PUBLICITY:

My own deepest thanks to Mrs. Morris M. Barry for her conscientious, willing and efficient newspaper publicity.

RELIGIOUS AND HEBREW SCHOOL:

The Religious and Hebrew School represents our hope for the future. The attitudes of our children as the attitudes of the parents -- toward the importance of religious training is the key to our survival as a Temple and as a religious group. This is indeed crucial and requires a full consideration in this report.

Religious education presents many difficulties anywhere but especially so in a small congregation. Our tasks are difficult because of resources, lack of qualified teachers, the voluntary nature of attendance, the lack of facilities, etc. to assure success. We know that with all its resources and advantages the public school system leaves much to be desired.

I believe that with reservation I will state later that you have done a good job, but I share with Mr. Sol J. Rosenbaum, the Superintendent, that there is much to be improved upon. But this should not mean that we should be pessimistic -- rather we should gather our forces and make the school even much better. This I can assure you can be done. I say this from a long experience as a teacher and as a superintendent.

Basically the school is well set up as to curriculum, text books and administration. We are using the best text books available and those used in the best religious schools. It is not floundering as to purpose and goals to be achieved.

Only this year the Education Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Arthur Snyder set up a series of regulations for Bar Mitzvahs, Bas Mitzvahs and Confirmation which is of great importance for the growth of our school; standards that are essential.

The Bar Mitzvahs as well as the Confirmation Services were very well received and I would like to say that both children and parents were exceptionally co-operative and deeply interested. But I want to express my own conviction which is generally held by the Reform Rabbis and Congregations that Bar Mitzvah should never be considered a substitute for Confirmation, held at the tenth grade level, when the child is first able to grasp the fundamentals of our faith. These standards of qualification are imperative, and I insist as I am sure you do that if these standards are faithfully adhered to, the time consumed by your Rabbi in preparation for the ceremonies themselves will be better used for the good of the congregation.

Much credit is to be given to the prodigious labors and dedicated devotion of Mr. Sol J. Rosenbaum, our Superintendent. His work is hard and often not appreciated. It should be. We all, including myself, owe him our deepest thanks as we owe thanks to our fine staff of devoted teachers who give their time and energy to your children. This year will be a crisis in teacher procurement and I urge every parent who is qualified and asked to teach to share that responsibility. It is a duty no parent can with a clear conscience avoid.

If there is a failure or weakness in the school it is of a different nature from what I have described above, and a failure that can be corrected with patience, hard work and understanding. It has to do with communication between parents and school, requiring a new more concerned, interested attitude on their part and even a realization by the school that it has some obligation to teach the parents how important they are needed. For what is at stake is the future not only of their children as Jews but of Judaism itself.

Once the proper attitudes are discerned parents out of self-interest if nothing else will co-operate, for no school can exist without the aid of the home which is central to the school's functioning.

These weaknesses can be summarized as the obligation of parents to instill the love of Judaism and learning in their children, and appreciation of the opportunity to learn; the building of Jewish home life, the example and inspiration of their own lives and devotion, attendance at services, study, as an example to the children, respect for teachers by parents and children, but more specifically regular and prompt attendance, proper behavior and dress, faithful performance of home work assigned with the encouragement and supervision of parents, attendance at assembly functions such as closing exercises, family worship services, co-operation with teachers. I believe that teachers and parents should directly communicate with one another rather than through a class mother; although there are many occasions in which a class mother can work with the teacher and school for general purposes.

Just as important is the realization that unless their children comply with the school regulations and disciplines, and pass their tests and examinations, they cannot be expected to be promoted to the next grade. Parents must be less permissive in their children's attitude to religious school. They should realize that children can't decide what must be taught or how it is to be taught any more than in public school; or whether they will attend and do their work. The opportunity to learn is there. Nothing is perfect and it cannot be expected to be perfect. Let us be grateful for what we have and improve on it.

The one P.T.A. meeting we had brought out only four parents. This was discouraging. I am sure that it can be improved upon, and that these meetings held more often, perhaps at more convenient times with prominent guest speakers can make our parents more aware of what their children are learning and why?

I hope that a strong Education Committee working with the Rabbi and Superintendent will start the process of making our Religious School all we really hope for it and expect of it.

HEBREW SCHOOL:

There are four Hebrew classes, two conducted by Mrs. Morton Opall and two by me. There should be at least four classes next year, one -- a beginner's class. I think these

classes have been satisfactory, but the children can work a bit harder. I want to thank Mrs. Opall for her fine work with the children and we are happy she will teach for us next year.

HIGH SCHOOL:

I strongly recommend consideration of a Post-Confirmation Class and generally a High School Department so that our children at a very crucial age are not bereft of moral training and guidance. A NFTY Youth Group could be incorporated in these activities.

FACILITIES:

I think you will agree that as we grow in numbers serious thought should be given to our lack of religious school facilities, which make it very difficult to teach our children properly, and in fact to our Temple facilities generally, including air-conditioning. The time may be not far away when consideration be given to a new Temple however the sacrifice. Other congregations' needs are met by the generosity of their members; I am sure our members can be just as generous and take pride in their Temple building, or at any rate there is no reason why deficit financing of the budget cannot be terminated by the voluntary raising of dues by a group of the members, who are in a position to do so.

CONCLUSION -- RABBI AND CONGREGATION:

It has been my privilege to work with you as Rabbi during the last nine months. I believe we have done much together, improved much, built a new spirit and a new pride, and I trust and pray that the next year will show even greater progress. Your co-operation and friendship has been gratifying. It has been rewarding to work with such fine officers and board members. Beulah and I thank you for your many kindnesses and support.

I would like to pay especial tribute to Mr. L. Irving Silverman, our treasurer, who has assisted me in many ways and performed many tasks that have made my work possible.

It is to the President that a Rabbi looks for guidance and support in his official dealings. Mr. Gerald Abels has demonstrated an intelligent grasp of the problems I face and the congregation faces. I want to thank him for his never-ending support, kindness and friendship. We are indeed fortunate to have him as our lay leader.

To Dr. Ludwig Roeder I want to express my affection and deep regard for his encouragement and support. May God bless him with continued health. I trust the congregation will be present next Friday evening, May 29th, when he is to occupy the pulpit at our services.

This concludes my report of the spiritual progress of the Temple for the last nine months. May we together go from strength to strength in the service of God, Israel and Humanity.

Respectfully submitted,
Arthur Brodey
 Dr. Arthur Brodey,
 Rabbi