



# **Please fill out this important Congregant Survey**

*There are only 6 questions!*

Ohav needs your feedback on ideas developed as part of a long-range planning effort. This planning effort is called "Project Lech Lecha." "Lech Lecha" is Hebrew for "Go forth." The feedback collected from congregants will be documented and will assist Ohav's Board of Trustees in setting priorities and developing action plans.

## **Directions for completing the survey:**

The attached survey is a summary of the six main ideas, or goals, described in the "Project Lech Lecha View: Part 1" document.

As you read through each of the six goals, think about the following for each section:

*What is your reaction to this approach?*

*Which parts do you most agree and disagree with?*

*What's missing from this approach that should have been included?"*

Send your completed survey comments to the Ohav Shalom office or email comments to [lechlecha@ohavshalom.com](mailto:lechlecha@ohavshalom.com)

**To read the full project document:** Go to [www.ohavshalom.com](http://www.ohavshalom.com) and click on "Project Lech Lecha Part 1" or Visit the Ohav office where paper copies are available.

# Ohav Shalom Project Lech Lecha Summary & Feedback Survey:

## Goal 1: Meet the needs of a diverse and evolving congregation through community

*The ability to bring people together and to form social bonds within Ohav is critical to our future. One of the primary reasons to join and maintain membership in any synagogue is the need for Jewish community. Not only does a community need to be welcoming when you walk in the door, but the synagogue needs to promote an environment where socialization is encouraged.*

### Objectives:

- Create a truly welcoming atmosphere and community throughout all aspects of Ohav operations and congregational life
- Actively increase the opportunities and levels of social engagement and participation
- Create easy pathways to find common interests
- Create approaches to easily initiate new programming
- Create programming priorities that reflect the interests and the needs of members
- Increase the level and depth of social networking both within and beyond the Ohav community

### Suggested actions:

- a. Implement an ongoing “welcoming” program at Ohav for new or prospective members. This may include outreach, welcoming dinners, Shabbat dinners, greeters, or other member bonding activities
- b. Use greeters at services and events to make all who enter feel welcome.
- c. Increase the level of personal contacts with all members (ex: telephone calls at Rosh Hashanah).
- d. Create a non-virtual facebook of members, with family pictures, to facilitate sharing, familiarity, and a sense of belonging.
- e. Build a program of active mentorship and/or a “buddy system” to increase the level of comfort of new members.
- f. Establish a range of alternative communication methods, such as an Ohav on-line community, to encourage the sharing interests, ideas, opinions and feelings.
- g. Develop and maintain an Albany-wide Jewish community blog or other community communication vehicle to allow people, at a community level, to promote discussion and offer suggestions relative to synagogue programming and offerings.
- h. Develop methods of obtaining feedback to better understand congregant needs and priorities relative to current programming, with sensitivity to age groups, interests, and other factors.
- i. Create a policy concerning use/collection/dissemination of members’ information (address, phone numbers, photos, etc.). Make information accessible to members, under guidelines.
- k. Increase the participation in programs by offering a range of classes/programs with different class lengths, levels, and costs. Consider creative methods to provide child care to allow attendance. Evolve a mix of programs to align better with members’ interests, for example social and cultural themes, family (inclusive) programs, child and adolescent programs.



## Goal 2: Create, sustain and grow a culture of inclusion within the congregational community

*The Jewish community needs to be more universal and inclusive. To ensure the continued vitality of a fully egalitarian Ohav, a recalibration of the balance between tradition and inclusiveness needs to be pursued. **The financial health of the congregation depends on membership***

### Objectives

- Promote the better integration of interfaith families.
- Update policies and practices to be more inclusive of gay and lesbian Jews and their families
- Promote and encourage the full inclusion of women within the Ohav community
- Encourage new memberships and membership retention. Make families with children a priority.

### Suggested actions:

- a. Gain greater awareness of the particular needs and issues of interfaith families.
- b. Encourage families to raise their children as educated members of the Jewish community.
- c. Foster participation of the non-Jewish spouse through service on *certain* synagogue committees.
- d. Offer a range of family and adult education programs to help both intermarried and non-intermarried couples understand the issues of an interfaith relationship and to better understand the depths and beauty of Jewish practice.
- e. Explore and develop a sensitive but clear policy, with the leadership of our Rabbis, concerning burial in our cemetery of the non-Jewish spouse of an intermarried couple.
- f. Consider, with the leadership of our Rabbis, implementing other ideas in *Al Ha-Derekh*, not already adopted. *Al Ha-Derekh* (on the path) is a roadmap of approaches, suggestions, and expectations offering a sincere concern for and encouragement of non-Jews to become part of Conservative Judaism as espoused by the USCJ.
- g. Explore, with the leadership of our Rabbis, an education and discussion process concerning the issues and factors which impact the recognition of Jewish lineage through patrilineal as well as matrilineal descent and concerning the issue of whether Conservative rabbis should be allowed to officiate at intermarriages or participate in some way.
- h. Explore the issues of possible gender bias that exists within the liturgy and its impact on the congregation.
- i. Develop a “Community Standards of Acceptable Behavior” relative to sexual harassment
- j. Consider adopting all or part of the recommendations of the inclusion program found in the Project Lech Lecha appendix entitled, “Characteristics of a Gay-Welcoming Synagogue”.
- k. Publish the congregation’s policies toward gay and lesbian members and families.
- l. Conduct research to better understand why certain groups join and why other groups choose not to affiliate with Ohav and/or Conservative Judaism.
- m. Identify the real and perceived barriers to joining Ohav Shalom and develop action plans to reduce barriers.
- n. Explore alternative Ohav communities for young families, such as Havurahs and Jewish play groups. This approach should be designed to provide a natural and comfortable path for the family which could lead to more formal inclusion in the Ohav community when the time or circumstances are appropriate.



## **Goal 3: Encourage the growth and acceptance of practices that allow members to express their Judaism :**

*Aim to make religious services and other spiritual activities responsive and relevant to different demographic groups within Ohav. Current traditional worship styles do not always resonate with all potential and current members of the Ohav community. However, it is important that we maintain an appropriate balance and sensitivity as we evolve into the future.*

### **Objectives:**

- Create new vehicles/approaches for members to develop meaningful spiritual connections and intimate spiritual experiences with prayer and God
- Create new rituals, using the power of voice, music, or other appropriate media
- Actively promote the concept of “Why Conservative Judaism” by increasing our congregation’s general awareness of the strengths of Conservative Judaism and its relevance today.

### **Suggested actions:**

- a. Explore alternative approaches or patterns for the Torah and other services, to allow for more direct experiences, to keep energy high and to encourage maximum participation within the service.
- b. Introduce methods/approaches that encourage direct experience with God, Torah, and prayer outside of formal prayer services.
- c. Encourage the idea of prayer as a community, personal, and emotional experience. Allow innovative structures and alternatives within the formal pattern of our services to foster personal spiritual experiences.
- d. Promote more open discussion and learning within the congregation about their spiritual experiences to enhance learning, personal growth, and participation.
- e. Alternate forums to explore spiritual experiences, such as a spiritual retreat for the board, *davvenen* lay leadership, and members of the congregation should be encouraged.
- f. Develop alternate religious service approaches including lively Friday night services and *oneg* Shabbat to entice participation by a greater range of congregants and draw younger congregational members.
- g. Encourage and enable Ohav members to share Shabbat and other holidays with current and new members through meal sharing and other family-centered activities.
- h. Increase the number of body-centered spiritual practices currently offered, both within and separate from prayer services.
- i. Provide education and training for the *davvenen* lay leadership to increase their knowledge of, and comfort with, varied and meaningful connective prayer methods and approaches.
- j. Explore the incorporation, under the leadership of the Rabbis, of gender-neutral language within the liturgy. One possible example to consider is the addition of the phrase, “*v’Al Kol Yashvei Teival*” (all the inhabitants of the world) wherever we use, “*Al Kol Yisrael.*” (All of Israel)
- k. Develop ways to harness the power of vocal music to encourage participation and spiritual growth.
- l. Encourage the experience and impact of participatory singing, creating an increasing sense of togetherness.
- m. Consider what musical instruments can be used within the *halachic* parameters deemed acceptable by the Rabbis.
- n. Create a youth-centered group for participation in services such as a youth choir to encourage the participation of youth and their families.
- o. Develop an awareness campaign to strengthen the concept of “Why Conservative Judaism” at Ohav. Campaign should focus on the specific needs and the motivations of different Ohav communities and age groups.



## **Goal 4: Share resources within the Capital Region Jewish community**

*Given the evolving demographics of the region and the trend of membership decline within the Conservative Movement, there would be significant value in establishing approaches that increase communications, trust, and sharing of limited resources.*

### **Objective:**

- Proactively prepare Ohav for the adoption of shared services, merger, or downsizing opportunities.

### **Suggested actions:**

- a. Ohav should prepare its organization for changes that could include sharing services, merger of resources, or other collective actions with other synagogues. The most important aspect of any shared or merged programs is to achieve change while sustaining our community and our mission.
- b. Ohav should assess our own strengths and liabilities and developing approaches to make us more viable as a sharing partner
- c. Ohav should create a “merger or sharing exploration committee” for each program under the direction of a board level oversight committee. Under the guidance of this committee the following activities should be included:
  - Explain and educate the congregation as to why the merger or shared services concept is being pursued.
  - Encourage a positive Congregational attitude concerning possible negotiation for merger or shared services. The attitude of “We can make this work” should become the operative stance.
  - Keep the congregation informed
  - If a sharing or merger is being developed, each congregation should deliberate to make sure that all the information is on the table. Engage in open and frank deliberation, with an opportunity for dissenters to voice concerns. (Recognize that some members may be unable to accept the merger and will choose to leave the synagogue.)
  - Merger/shared services Committee members must regularly consider gut-level “non measurable, but vital questions:” Can we live with this? Does this feel right?
  - Once a change has been identified, move forward. Set a firm date for the implementation of the change, and then allow a cooling-off period for people to adjust to the decision and complete transitional tasks.
  - Care must be taken in developing the implementation plan to support the change.



## **Goal 5: Promote greater interaction within the Albany Jewish community and beyond**

*For Congregation Ohav Shalom to flourish, we need an active and healthy Jewish community in the greater Albany area. . A stronger Albany Jewish community can be built by creating opportunities to join with other Jewish organizations and by reaching out to those Jews in the community who may not be affiliated with existing organizations*

### **Objectives :**

- Build a stronger Albany Jewish community by creating opportunities to interact and join with other Jewish organizations
- Increase the participation of the un-affiliated in Greater Albany with Ohav's community through externally focused programs and activities
- Increase the level and types of support for Israel

### **Suggested Actions:**

- a. Create a mega Oneg Shabbat service with other synagogues in the Capital District.
- b. Develop methods to increase outreach and interaction with the under-connected and unaffiliated..
- c. Encourage activities that take place outside the synagogue to increase our exposure and level of comfort for other people to participate.
- d. Increase the co-sponsorships of community events.
- e. Ohav should have many more publicized open events within the synagogue to encourage member and non-member participation.
- f. Look for, and create, opportunities to interact with other synagogues and Jewish organizations (merge activities, coordinate educational/social/community activities) – increase joint events/programs.
- g. Encourage participation in and publicize community and other synagogue events even if they are not “Ohav” events.
- h. Keep lines of communications open with other Jewish organizations/synagogues to coordinate schedules and events to prevent overlap and better serve the community.
- i. Ohav should form new partnerships (formal or informal) to be explored (ex. Kosher Price Chopper, association with a CSA farm).
- j. Encourage younger Jews to interact and possibly join the Ohav community by:
  - Recruiting in graduate schools by sponsoring food-related events; co-sponsoring programs with the schools' Jewish Students Associations
  - Developing singles programming at locations other than the synagogue (speakers at Starbucks; film series at public libraries or Spectrum theater, etc.)
- k. Engage the Federation to encourage programming with unaffiliated Jews in the area to increase their interaction with the Ohav Community.
- l. Encourage travel to Israel to enhance visible support as well as to increase personal spirituality, understanding of our Jewish roots and our sense of learning, etc.
- m. Encourage financial support for programs in Israel or those that support Israel.



## **Goal 6: Sustain the financial viability of Ohav Shalom**

*Attention should be focused on: a) expenses b) capital debt and c) changing demographics (the potential reduction in membership and resultant revenue reduction). As the value of Ohav as an innovative leader in the Jewish community in Albany is recognized and enhanced, it can be expected that we can achieve benefits in terms of additional resources.*

### **Objectives:**

- The encouragement of new memberships and membership retention of families with children needs to be a priority for the synagogue to stay viable.
- Reduce and eliminate the debt associated with Ohav's recent renovation
- Evolve the current "dues" mentality to a "contribution" mentality through creative changes to the current dues approach within two years of publication of Project Lech Lecha
- Develop approaches to increase the level of giving to increase the endowment of the congregation.
- Foster a "giving" attitude for the congregation to increase the financial base of the congregation to assure future viability
- Improve the level of the congregation's understanding of the synagogue's finances.
- All Ohav policies and procedures should be reviewed and updated on a periodic basis.
- Promote Ohav Shalom as a core asset to the greater Jewish community in such a way that the congregation will be able to maximize revenues from external sources
- Develop a new or revised multi-year view budget planning approach linked to the Ohav Shalom Long Range Plan
- The nature, roles, number, and functions of Ohav's professional staff should be assessed relative to the goals, objectives, and strategies of Project Lech Lecha



# Demographic Information for Feedback Survey

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years of membership at Ohav Shalom ? \_\_\_\_\_

Type of membership (family, individual, etc.) ? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years living in Albany ? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years of adult membership at other synagogues ? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have pre-college age children ? \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Jewish education and/or summer camp for your children? \_\_\_\_\_

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In which activities are you currently involved or would like to be involved at Ohav?

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Did you attend a feedback session ? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you find the feedback session informative/valuable/useful ? Please comment

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Which of the goals/objectives of Project Lech Lecha would you be most interested helping to implement ?

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