LEGACY CIRCLE: The Creation, History and Impact

By Irv Rothenberg

I’d like to take this opportunity to provide you with a brief summary of how we created the Legacy Circle at Congregation Shomrei Torah, some of the history of its growth, and finally some current statistics.

In early 2008, Congregation Shomrei Torah was contacted by the Jewish Federation and invited to a Bay Area training on how to establish a program of legacy and philanthropy in our community. The program was being funded by grants from a New York philanthropy group who had had a successful Legacy experience.

A group from Congregation Shomrei Torah including Rabbi George, Dianne Smith and myself traveled to San Francisco on numerous occasions to participate in these training sessions. There we found out how important it was to create a culture of philanthropy for the future survival of a Jewish congregation and its community.

Following our training, the board of directors approved the creation of a Legacy Circle and supported a campaign to fund a Long-Term Building Endowment Fund. (When we constructed our building, we had hoped to set aside 10% of the building funds raised to create a reserve for future repairs and maintenance but that never occurred due to building construction cost overruns.)

Our next step was to call on members of our community to explain the concept of Legacy and to educate people on how to accomplish our goal. Here again, Rabbi George was instrumental in helping us do meetings and explain the importance of the Legacy concept.

By 2011 we had established the Legacy Circle, held numerous events for its members, published a Legacy Circle Book featuring stories about the Donors and their reasons for leaving legacy gifts, created special Legacy Circle name badges, put in place policies and procedures for management and achieved 100% participation of the then-CST leadership in the program.

Now for some statistics:

- There are currently 121 members of the Legacy Circle.
- Twenty-four Legacy Circle members have passed on.
- We have $464,850 dollars in the Permanent Building Endowment Fund, which is the designated recipient of all Legacy Circle donations not specifically designated by the Donor for some other purpose or endowment and approved by the board and the Gifts and endowment committee.
- There is an annual distribution from the Building Endowment Fund (a spending policy of 4% based upon a 12-quarter moving average of the funds market value) to the congregation’s general fund (currently about $25,000 per year).
• In addition, more than $516,000 spent from the Fund has been spent on building-related costs. Some of the major expenditures include:
  ○ $ 153,945 on Solar panel repair and contract pay-off
  ○ $ 138,808 on Parking lot repair (may be FEMA reimbursed)
  ○ $ 87,284 on the sound system
  ○ $ 28,269 in 2019 (various projects)
  ○ $ 46,000 in 2014 (various projects)
  ○ $ 11,800 in 2008 (various projects)

Finally, the investment of the Permanent Building Endowment Funds is managed by Buckingham Strategic Wealth (in a fully diversified allocation of very low cost, efficient, socially responsible and environmentally focused where possible, asset class Stock and Fixed Income mutual funds approved by the Board of Directors). Current broad asset allocation is 60% equities, 20% alternatives, 20% fixed income. Net earnings on investments since inception of the fund have been 6.34% (annualized), which equates to approximately $406,700.

In conclusion, and on behalf of the entire Legacy Committee (currently consisting of Marsha Jacobs, Ann DuBay, Jan Gillman, Amy Pearl and myself), I want to thank you all for your generosity and commitment to providing a home for reformed Judaism in Sonoma County.

In the coming months the committee is planning a resurgence of efforts to grow and expand the Legacy Circle. We welcome your participation and ideas.

We would especially like to thank Rabbi George for the many hats he has worn, and his values of honesty, and integrity, innovation, compassion, dedication and support for our mission.

Your legacy gifts can carry on our shared values beyond our lifetime. Together we can give Sonoma County the Jewish Reformed centerpiece it needs for our children and generations to come.