

Size Matters

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Recently there have been many interesting and thoughtful conversations concerning the future of Havurah. The Rabbi Search committee is in full swing and planning for the Rabbi Joey's retirement in a few years. Also, a few months ago The Hazon Committee released an excellent Long-Range Plan detailing the values and priorities of our community and providing a clear picture of where we should focus our efforts and resources. While the Hazon report centers on the *qualities* important for our future, it does not touch upon the *quantities* – the numbers that also impact who we are as a community. To study the “quantity” question, Deborah Eisenbach-Budner and I have been exploring Havurah's past, present and future population and demographics.

The goal of our work is to feed concrete information into key future decisions about our space requirements, programming directions, and the quantity and roles of our leadership - both staff and congregants. This topic also opens up more fundamental questions: If and how do we want to manage our growth? How do we maintain our core values as our membership grows? And, how do our decisions impact growth?

We began our efforts by researching literature on the topic of congregational growth and transition points. The Alban Institute has a long history of excellent research in this area. Much of their work centers on church congregations, but the literature also discusses synagogues. The researchers categorize congregations into 4 main types based on size: Family, Pastoral, Program and Corporation. Generally speaking, each of the congregation types have a distinct relationship style among staff and congregants as well as different leadership structures, as summarized in chart below:

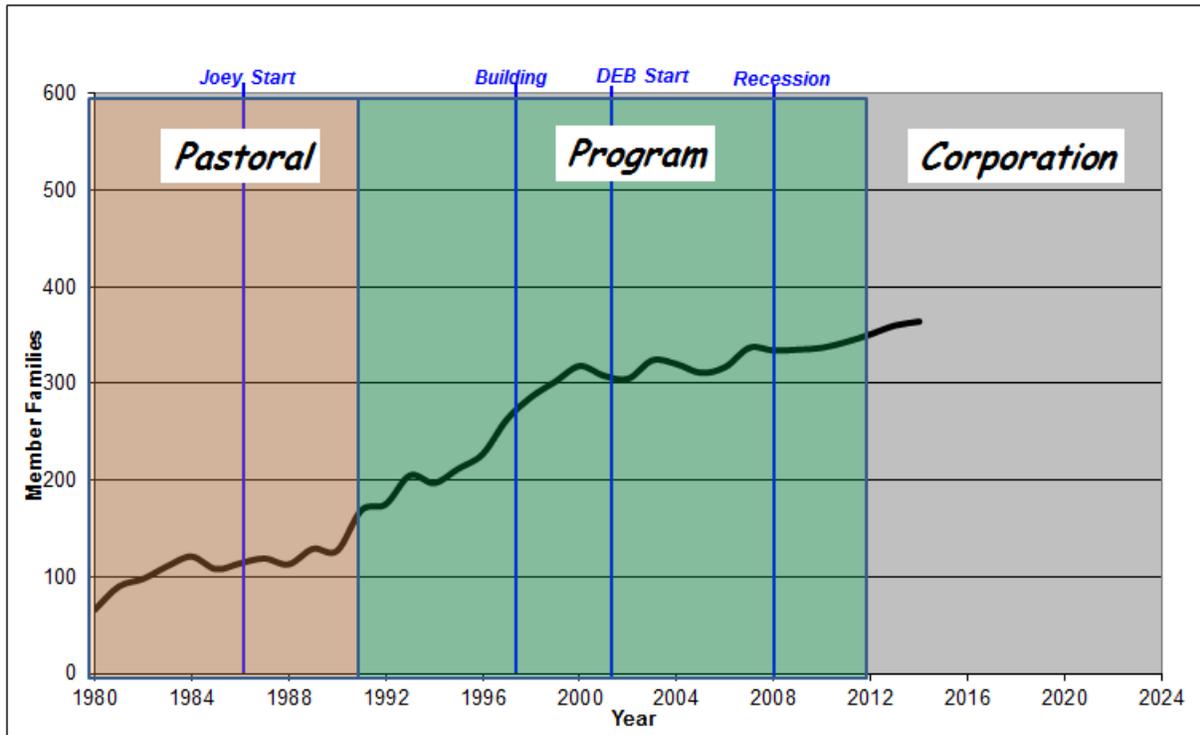
Type	Size	Relationship Style	Leadership Structure
Family	1 – 50	Tightly knit extended families center on matriarchs / patriarchs	Families make decisions. Pastor (part time) functions as Chaplin
Pastoral	51- 150	One large group centers on the pastor (Havurah participatory nature less dependent on Rabbi)	Pastor is center hub of wheel. Other part-time staff
Program	151 – 350	Center on skilled and empowered staff or lay leaders.	Program committees w/ empowered lay leaders. Board members are managers/policy makers. Pastor functions as the executive. Other staff act as pastoral or program resources.
Corporation	350+	Smaller “Congregations” of 30+ people	Pastor is CEO with Mythic qualities. Several Staff in charge of program areas. Program groups operate almost independently.

The chart shows that congregations often start small, driven by the families’ members. At some point (around 50 families) it becomes evident that a full time pastor is required. Then between 50 – 150 families, more structure and staff are required. As a community grows to 350 families, it will often become more staff led and/or depend on lay leaders who take on program leadership and governance (managers/policy makers). And congregant relationships with a single pastor/rabbi become less of a focus. Then, once a community hits about 350 families, the relationships tend to migrate toward age or interest cohorts, as there are too many people to maintain connections throughout – both for the leaders and within the community. The workload is too much for a single pastor to maintain relationships and the community tends to become divided into many informal sub-congregations.

The obvious question is “how does Havurah fit into this model?” The chart below shows Havurah’s growth since 1980 with the classic congregational categories overlaid. Roughly, the 1970’s was our *Family* period, the 1980’s was *Pastoral*, the 1990’s and 2000’s could be considered our *Program* Period, and by the numbers, Havurah has recently officially entered the *Corporation* category. The categories roughly match our experience in some ways (at least in staffing): in the early days, the community was run by families and a part-time rabbi, then Rabbi Joey was hired full time, along with part-time administrative staff. In the *Program* Period, Havurah hired Deborah full time to be our Education Director and a Community Organizer/Volunteer Coordinator was added. Both of these positions focus a great deal on leveraging congregant participation and leadership.

Of course Havurah doesn’t fit exactly into this model, and that has been intentional since the inception of the community. One feature that sets it apart from almost all other synagogues in the USA is the highly participatory nature of the Education programs, especially Shabbat School. This ethos affects how members create other programming, as well. This has budgetary and staffing implications and

fundamentally means that the members are more involved, and less staff dependent than in most synagogues, for their Jewish experience and community building.

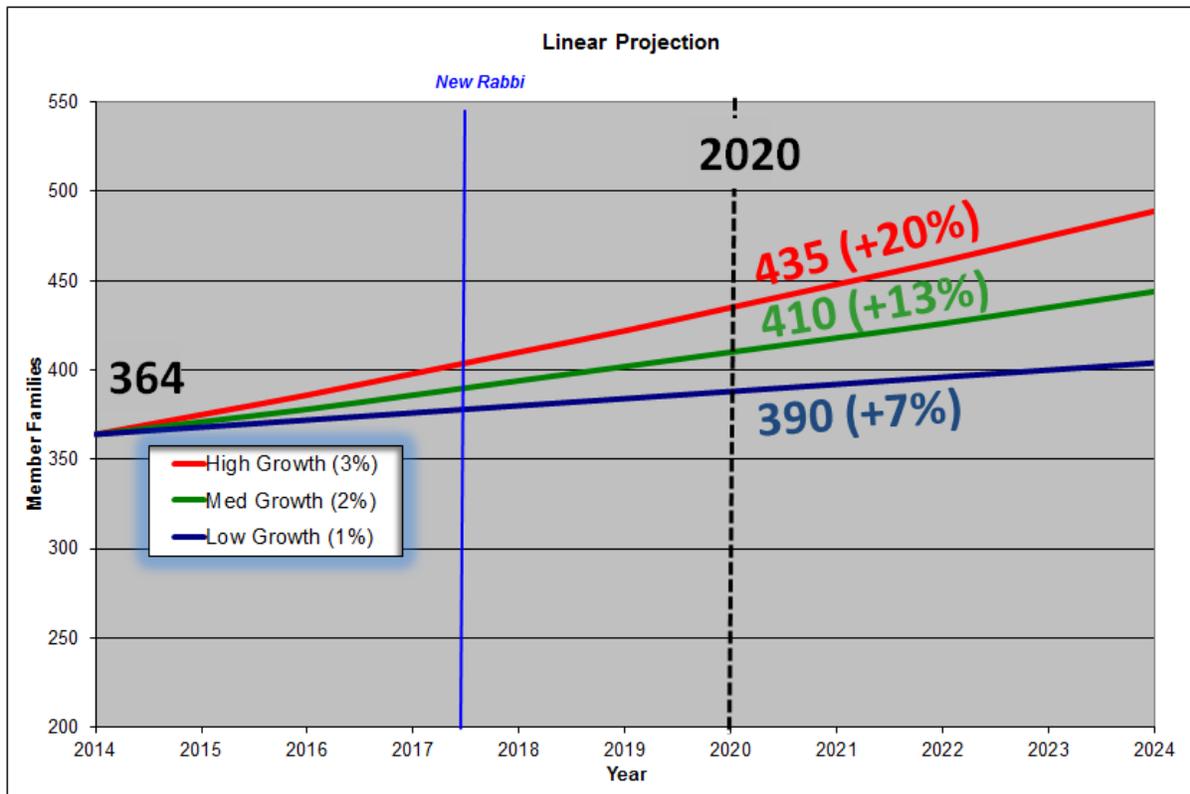


Next we endeavored to project Havurah’s future growth. Predicting the future is always difficult. With the standard disclaimer that “Past performance is no guarantee of future performance” it is useful to check out our historical growth rate.

Since 2000, Havurah’s average membership has grown about 1.5% per year. That doesn’t sound like so many but considering that there are, on average, 25 membership units joining and 20-21 leaving town, dying, or dropping their memberships each year, that 1.5% represents a lot of new families and/or membership units.

One interesting statistic is that about half of the new members have children who are Shabbat School age or younger. During the last few years the growth rate has picked up to 2.2%. Also, government estimates show that the general population growth in the area will continue to grow at about 1% per year. Considering all these numbers, the chart below shows three possible growth scenarios – 1%, 2% and 3%.

There is a reasonable chance that by the end of 2020 we will be close to 400 families, and possibly considerably higher. While growth is a sign of good health and vitality (and rather uncommon amongst the other larger Portland congregations), it also has considerable implications.



So, what does all this mean? We can argue about which side of the Program/Corporation line Havurah currently sits on, in terms of our community structure, culture, and relationships. However, it is clear that unless something changes, the current momentum is driving us into the Corporation category, size-wise, at least. As a community, we must decide if this classic model matches the relationship and leadership styles we want. Or, do we want to proactively work toward a different model, using our staffing, lay leadership, and other resources in innovative ways that maintain some aspects of the earlier stages? We hope that this information can help guide some important decisions over the next few years. For example:

- Should we invest in more space (expanding the current building or finding a larger space) and, if so, how? If we don't, what are the implications for our program and potential?
- Should we proactively manage our growth?
- What qualities do we want in our next Rabbi/spiritual leadership? What kinds of relationships do we value between staff leaders and congregants? Do we want a "CEO" style rabbi, required by the Corporation-type congregation?
- What are our overall staffing needs? What roles should congregants play?
- What are the implications for fundraising, budgeting?

We are continuing our research by delving deeper into the trends related to various cohorts within the community. We hope this information will provide even more data for decisions about our space requirements, staffing quantity and role definitions, and programming direction, because, as you can see – size matters or, at the very least, how we deal with size matters!