

Executive Summary of Results of Focus on the Future Sessions

The Discovery Committee invited the entire congregation to participate in small group discussions during January and February 2023 to share their thoughts on synagogue life and specific BAS policies to inform our rabbinic search. 218 members of the BAS community participated in a Focus on the Future discussion group. There were 23 groups held in person at BAS and four sessions conducted via Zoom.

Each participant was asked a set of two open-ended questions concerning services at BAS and building community at BAS. Participants described only the items *most* important to them and may have elected to describe more than one element, and thus the percentages will not equal 100%.

For purposes of easier review, Parts I, II, VI and VII below summarize in order of frequency the themes that generated at least twenty responses. All comments raised by participants will be reviewed and considered by the Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees and/or the appropriate chevras.

Participants were asked to share their opinion on the performance of interfaith marriage ceremonies at BAS (Parts III and IV below). Participants were also asked if they believed BAS should revisit its by-laws concerning the membership status of non-Jewish spouses and partners of BAS members (Part V below).

I. Elements of BAS Services that Participants Appreciated Most

- **Musical Elements—126 Responses (58%)**
- **Sense of Community/Welcoming Atmosphere—74 Responses (43%)-**
- **Like Current Prayer Service As-Is--55 Responses (25%)**
- **Congregant Drashes—42 Responses (19%)**
- **Traditional Elements—29 Responses (13%)**

II. Suggested Modifications to Services

- **Shorten Services—73 Responses (34%)**
- **Broaden Appeal to a Wider Demographic—39 Responses (18%)--**21 participants suggested that the service should be made more child-friendly. 11 suggested that we broaden the appeal of services to a younger demographic. 7 suggested that children lead parts of the service.
- **Discussion of Drash—39 Responses (18%)—**There were a number of comments about reinstating discussion of the drash in various formats, both during and after the service.
- **More English and Less Hebrew--27 Responses (12%)**
- **Have Alternative Services and/or a Learners Minyan—20 Responses (9%)**
- **Improve Acoustics in the Sanctuary—20 responses (9%)**
- **More Music—20 Responses (9%)**

III. **Should BAS Policy Be Changed to Allow a Jewish Wedding Ceremony for An Interfaith Couple?**

199 participants responded to the question of whether long-standing BAS policy should be changed to allow a Jewish wedding ceremony for an interfaith couple at Bet Am Shalom:¹

- 172 participants (86% of those responding) supported changing the policy,
- 13 (7%) opposed changing the policy, and
- 14 (7%) were unsure.

A number of participants supporting the change indicated that they would expect conditions to be required by the rabbi to perform such a ceremony (e.g. plan to have a “Jewish home”, raise children as Jews, participation of the couple in a Jewish education class and/or other conditions deemed appropriate by the rabbi).

IV. **Should BAS Policy Be Changed to Allow a Wedding Ceremony Co-Officiated with Clergy of Another Faith?**

178 participants responded to the question of whether the policy should be changed to allow a wedding ceremony for an interfaith couple co-officiated with clergy of another faith at BAS:

- 36 of the participants (20% of those responding) supported changing the policy,
- 115 (65%) opposed changing the policy, and
- 27 (15%) were unsure.

V. **Should BAS Revisit its By-Laws Concerning the Membership Status of Non-Jewish Spouses and Partners?**

195 participants responded to the question of whether BAS should revisit its by-laws concerning non-Jewish spouses and partners of synagogue members:

- 154 of the participants (79% of those responding) supported revisiting the policy,
- 28 (14%) opposed revisiting the policy, and
- 13 (7%) were unsure.

VI. **Aspects of BAS that Inspire You to be Part of the Community**

- **Sense of Community—99 Responses (45%).**
- **Like People in the Congregation—38 Responses (17%)**
- **Social Action/Tikkun Olam Programs and Philosophy--32 Responses (15%)**
- **Caring Community—28 Responses (13%)**
- **Clergy—22 Responses (10%)**
- **Adult Education Programs—20 Responses (9%)**

¹ We excluded from this calculation and for Part IV the response of participants who addressed whether the policy should be revisited without indicating their view on whether the policy should be changed.

VII. Suggested Changes to Build Community

- **Targeted and Small Interest Group Programming—36 Responses (17%)**
- **More Programming with a Secular Content—35 Responses (16%)**
- **Return to Pre-COVID Programming—27 Responses (12%)**--14 participants suggested that we bring back pre-COVID congregational events (e.g. adult Chanukah party, pre-Slichot gatherings at members' homes etc.).
- **Increase Focus on Attracting Young Families for Membership and Involvement—25 Responses (11%).**
- **More Intergenerational Programming--22 Responses (10%)**

Next Steps

Our next step will be to disseminate all the feedback from these conversations to the appropriate committees in our community. The sentiments regarding services will be passed on to the Ritual Committee for further exploration and likewise, ideas from the community building question will inform the work of many of our committees and chevras, including Tikkun Olam/Social Action, Membership, and Programming.

The results of the by-laws question will be shared with a small committee tasked with drafting proposals for a new membership section of our by-laws. These proposals would be reviewed by our Board of Trustees and then a recommendation would be put forth before the BAS community for discussion and a vote.

Finally, the newly formed Rabbinic Search Committee will consider how best to integrate the feedback from the Intermarriage and Interfaith questions, and everything else we've learned throughout the Discovery Process, into our rabbinic search process to ensure we find a new rabbi whose philosophy, temperament and skills align with our values and priorities.

The Discovery Committee is grateful that so many of you engaged in this process and shared some very personal and thoughtful insights that will help shape our future.

Warmly,

The Discovery Committee

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