

Park, Kansas (www.bnaijehudah.org).

The IJP project was “a response to our congregation’s need for healing” from a rift following changes in rabbinic leadership and a move to a new building, Rabbi Nemitoff says. “One of the ways we decided to do that was through shared visioning—taking a business approach to understanding our core purpose and values.”

The process took three and a half years. By 2007 the congregation had identified its core purpose as nurturing Jewish meaning, connection, and continuity; and its core values as open hearts, *kedushah* (holiness) and *derech eretz* (common decency). The challenge was to determine what role the synagogue should play—how it could help individual members achieve these core Jewish values.

“We are a sacred congregation made up of individuals, [each of whom] connects with God and understands Judaism differently, and looks at the world through a unique lens,” Rabbi Alexandria Shuval-Weiner says. Respecting those differences meant that “top-down Judaism”—where the rabbis and administration determine programming—would no longer work at B’nai Jehudah. That’s where the IJP—modeled on the public school’s Individualized Education Plan—comes in.

“Every congregant, in an ideal world, will create his/her own Jewish path, and the synagogue will serve as partner in helping him/her achieve these Jewish hopes, dreams, and desires,” Rabbi Nemitoff says.

Two Legacy Heritage Innovation grants (\$27,000 in 2008–09 and \$21,000 in 2009–10) helped pay for a rabbinic life coach, who then trained *see’ot* (guides) to assist individual congregants in developing their IJPs. A computer program tracks members’ goals, and a program coordinator organizes the initiative.

Creating each member’s Individualized Jewish Plan is an intensive process. A *see-ah* spends an hour and a half talking with a congregant about his/her Jewish identity today and where he/she hopes to head. To meet this person’s needs, the *see-ah* then searches for resources within the larger Kansas City

community or, if necessary, beyond. The *see-ah* offers suggestions at the next meeting, and the two write concrete goals which become the IJP. Goals are reevaluated in six months, and again after a year.

Congregants’ needs, desires, and goals vary. Some want to learn Hebrew or the choreography of a service to feel more comfortable participating on Friday nights. Some are seeking connections with congregants who share similar life stories—being intermarried or having children with special needs, for example. Some want to learn more about the Middle East conflict. Some wish to incorporate more Jewish ritual into their lives.

With 1,100 member families, it may take up to 10 years before all of B’nai Jehudah’s interested members complete their IJPs, but already the program is having a positive effect. “Individuals are perking up and saying, ‘This is the right place for me; my community is hearing me; my soul is being nurtured the way I need it to be,’” Rabbi Shuval-Weiner says. “That’s the exciting piece of it so far.”

Rabbi Nemitoff expects the IJP to “transform who we are as a congregation. If it means our services have to change 180 degrees from where we are because we have 500 members clamoring for X, then we’ll do X. We will go where our congregants lead us, and we will all grow Jewishly.”



If you have a programming dream and are searching for that unlikely grant, where do you go?

For agencies not bound by region, The Legacy Heritage Fund and URJ Taste of Judaism may be your best bets. The Legacy Heritage Innovation Project (<http://legacyheritage.org/ip/intro.php>) supports synagogue projects that deepen Jewish identity for adults and children, connect diverse age groups, and integrate different aspects of Jewish living (prayer, study, and social action). Temples may apply for grants in three program areas—congregational education (a Shabbat-centered educational model; December 2010 application deadline), music (January 2011 dead-

line), and Israel engagement (January 2011 deadline). The URJ’s A Taste of Judaism (<http://urj.org/cong/outreach/>) offers two types of grants: one, for Reform congregations that haven’t run a Taste of Judaism program in three years (covering advertising and lecture expenses for the next program), and the second for synagogues that have completed recent Taste of Judaism classes (providing a 50% matching grant for advertising expenditures). Completed applications are due on May 15 of every year.

For local grants, try your Jewish federation (<http://www.jewishfederations.org/section.aspx?id=5>) or search the Internet using a combination of “Jewish,” “grant,” “funding,” and “synagogue.” The San Francisco-based Koret Foundation (www.koretfoundation.org), which funds programs that connect Jews to one another, culture, and history in the Bay Area, Poland, and Israel, accepts applications throughout the year.

If you dare to dream, and apply for a grant, it might just become a reality. □

Books

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Mose is an unconventional and much beloved teacher at a progressive high school in Madison, Wisconsin. When a new principal, Hyman Clark, comes to the school, he and Mose get off to a rocky start, and Mose suspects that anti-Semitism is the reason. Ellen is in a position to help him; she is in a relationship with Alex, the superintendent of schools, a divorced man seventeen years her senior. Alex adores her; Ellen is young, innocent, and eager to please.

When Alex promotes Hyman to the position of assistant superintendent of schools, Mose insists that Ellen make Alex aware of Hyman’s actions and what he considers anti-Semitic behavior—such as inviting a “peace group” to speak at a school assembly that lambastes Israel as “a racist Zionist state.”

Set against the backdrop of Israel’s war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, this contemporary remake of the biblical tale explores the modern faces of anti-Semitism. □