

between 200 and 300 people, Rabbi Anthony Fratello says, but still he felt something was missing. Observing that retirees and young families weren't mixing as well as he thought they might, he re-envisioned how the temple's motto, "Generations Coming Together," could become the basis of a new program that would harken back to a time when people routinely met in each other's homes for Sabbath supper. Called Grand Shabbat, the program would bring together groups of 10–12 congregants—and in some cases up to 22—for dinner and dialogue following an early 5:30 PM service.

"It seemed simple enough," recalls the program's co-coordinator, Rich Goldhaber (photo #2), "until we realized that we would have to deal with things our ancestors never dreamt about—food allergies, pet allergies, handicapped access to homes, kosher vs. non-kosher diets, etc."

He and his wife and co-coordinator Natalie created a seven-person committee to work out logistics for the first event. They designed one form to be completed by people who wanted to host a meal and another for those interested in being guests. More than 300 people signed up. Hosts provided a dining facility, candlesticks, and wine glasses; the meals themselves were potlucks. Wine and challah were provided free, paid for by auctioning off to one of the 30 host families the honor of having Rabbi Fratello and Cantor Aaron Kaplan at their table for Grand Shabbat.

The committee also produced a book of prayers and songs for the participants and tried to assemble groups not made up of existing friends. "Our goal was to mix generations and encourage new acquaintances so that on Friday evenings, when people entered the temple sanctuary, there were new 'familiar faces' to greet them," Goldhaber says.

It worked. "The guy sitting next to me and I never stopped talking," Goldhaber says. "It was about 11 o'clock when people left, and only because they had to be up early the next morning. And the other day I walked into temple and saw a couple that was at our house; instead of wav-

ing, which I used to do, I went up to them and we talked for 10 to 15 minutes. It changes the whole concept of relationships in the congregation."

The program also attracted less active congregants. As a result, temple leaders say, people started attending services more often, and now older and younger members are warmly greeting each other. Both the Union for Reform Judaism and the local Jewish federation acknowledged this with awards, the former with a \$1,000 Epstein Communicate! Award ([urj.org/communicate/award](http://urj.org/communicate/award)).

A second Grand Shabbat potluck took place this past January, again to great success. Meanwhile, Goldhaber says, some congregants are continuing to host weekly or monthly group dinners on their own, "which is the biggest compliment you can get."



Temple Shalom in Dallas, Texas ([templeshalomdallas.org](http://templeshalomdallas.org)) has turned Shabbat into a teen outreach opportunity. Its monthly Blue Jean Shabbat service (which runs at the same time as the main service) offers young people at the 775-member congregation a chance to find their own spiritual place in the synagogue and with each other.

Students in grades 6–12 design, lead, and participate in the service. The youth group board plans the worship, choosing readings, prayer melodies, and songs (occasionally inserting non-Jewish songs, too). "We decided that the readings we used to do got a bit repetitive, so we came up with our own, either writing new ones or finding related texts on the Internet," says Matthew Stock (photo #3), 15, a youth group board member and Blue Jean Shabbat songleader. (Song leader training is offered through a religious school class for older youths.) Teens are encouraged to show up wearing whatever they've worn to school and to bring friends from the community.

These days, teens also offer a *d'var Torah* and organize each service around a subject that interests them, anything from ethical eating to social justice to loving

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## QUOTABLE The Blogs

"Imagine my shock when several of my almost 20 ninth graders told me they had to beg their parents to let them come to pre-Confirmation. The parents were worried that their kids already had too much on their plate....So what is it that has kids begging their parents to sit in a classroom for an additional hour-and-a-half once a week?..."

"The 'Three R's' have transformed our youth community. Our teens deeply crave relationships, respect, and relevance, and when we deliver all three, we see a real *tikkun* (repair) happen. They need enduring and trusting relationships, not just with each other but with youth professionals who can set the tone for a caring environment.

Teens are so used to shutting down because they are talked to and talked at more often than listened to in a way that reflects the dignity they deserve. When our teens feel they will be listened to free of our judgments, and when we reflect only love and care for their well-being, they open up their hearts, souls, and minds. Teens want to talk about drugs, sex, peer pressure, parents, technology, academic pressures, stress, and where they belong....Teens want to know what wisdom and guidance Judaism can offer them in their everyday lives. It is quite astounding what a simple anonymous index card, a prompt, and a trusting environment can elicit from a group of teens. They are practically begging us for a caring community that will give them the 'Three R's' to help them thrive....When we build relationships through listening, respecting, and relating to our teens, we will increase the unity and coherence of their lives and ours, and witness true *tikkun*."

—Craig Parks (director of Youth Programming, Temple Solel, Cardiff by the Sea, CA), on [rj.org](http://rj.org)