Temple Israel of Hollywood

*As you look at each model, we encourage you to keep the following questions in mind:*

* *What aspects of this model align with your visionary description?*
* *What does not?*
* *What intrigues you about this model?*
* *What questions do you have about this model?*

**Background**

Temple Israel (TIOH) is a Reform congregation located in Los Angeles in the Hollywood neighborhood. TIOH started the Mitzvah Day movement in Los Angeles, now its own 501c3 non-profit organization with 50,000 volunteers and called Big Sunday. There are 261 total students enrolled in the Religious School including 106 kindergarten-third graders in their Sunday school, and 87 fourth-sixth graders in their bi-weekly program. Approximately 60 teenagers take part in their Sunday afternoon Teen Program. The congregation also has a day school with 192 students.

Read about Big Sunday in the Jewish Journal: <http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/big_sunday_one_temples_mitzvah_day_goes_citywide_and_inclusive_20070420/>

TIOH participated in The RE-IMAGINE Project of Los Angeles from July 2007 to December 2009, a project of The Experiment in Congregational Education in partnership with the Bureau of Jewish Education Los Angeles. In this project a Task Force convened to create a vision for k-7 Religious School education and design an alternative model that will help them reach their vision. When Temple Israel decided to start on a path of innovation in its Religious School’s education programs, it was aware of several issues. Any changes would have to take into consideration these three factors.

* The existing programs were good enough – while there had not been much innovation at the school over the previous ten years, there also was not much complaining. People were satisfied.
* Parents were not involved at all in running the school. There was no parent committee, and the school was staff driven.
* Religious school students and parents were not a priority given that the school was relatively small and the day school families dominated the budget and the programming.

A fourth and unexpected factor was that the director of the religious school left the congregation midway through The RE-IMAGINE Project. The lay people chose to move forward with their visioning process while an interim director ran the school for a year. Much to their credit, the TIOH search committee chose a new Religious School Director because of her desire to innovate and continue on the path of The RE-IMAGINE Project. When she joined the congregation, the project continued, a new model of religious education was chosen, and work started on implementation.

**A New Vision**

TIOH’s new vision centers around the idea of a tent. The Task Force recognized that many religious school parents feel disconnected from the school and from the congregation. The Task Force chose the imagery of a tent to represent their desire to be welcoming to the entire community.

When the new Religious School Director came on board, she immediately seized upon the imagery of the tent. In introductory house meetings with groups of parents, she led a text study about the tent and talked to parents about their desire to be connected. She also sought to continue the strong lay participation of the Task Force, adding new members from among the parent population.

***Temple Israel of Hollywood Religious School Re-Imagine Vision Statement***

How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel!
--Numbers 24:5

*Our school, like Jacob’s tents in the desert, provides a haven for Jewish life in the midst of our bustling city and our busy lives. In our tents, we come together as a community to learn, celebrate and connect. In our tents, we create memories that lead to an enduring connection to Jewish life.*

***We come together to learn:***

*We have different portals into Jewish learning for different types of learners. We offer exciting, innovative programming that is challenging yet accessible. We create lifelong Jewish learners.*

***We come together to celebrate:***

*Together we celebrate holidays, life cycle events and communal cultural events, and we celebrate with joyful song, dance and prayer.*

***We come together to connect:***

*We are a diverse group, coming from many different neighborhoods and backgrounds, but together we are a vibrant, caring and unified community. In our tents, young children, teens and adults all feel at home. We forge strong bonds between kids, between families, between kids and teachers, and between kids and the clergy.*

**A New Model of Education**

The TIOH Task Force considered two different models for family education that would help them reach their vision. One model was a Shabbat afternoon family education program and the second was titled Los Angeles as the Classroom.

See Appendix I for a description of the models.

After discussion, the Task Force decided that while the LA as the Classroom model would connect strongly to the congregation’s values about social action, the Shabbat afternoon model was more likely to help them achieve their vision of bringing people into the tent.

See Appendix II for a description of the Shabbaton model.

**Implementing the Vision**

Like many congregations, TIOH has been hit hard by the recession. While the congregation was committed to innovation in the Religious School, the realities of budget constraints made it almost impossible to add funding to the area. TIOH was able to secure grant funding from two sources. They received a grant from the Legacy Heritage Innovation Fund (see [www.legacyheritage.org](http://www.legacyheritage.org/ip/)) and funding for an Education Intern from the Union for Reform Judaism’s Just Congregations (see<http://urj.org/socialaction/training/justcongregations/>) and Jewish Fund for Justice (see [www.jewishjustice.org/](http://www.jewishjustice.org/)). These combined grants allowed them to move forward with plans for the first year of implementation.

They are hoping to attract 25 families to the program in the first year, each with children in 3rd through 6th grade. Appendix I

RE-IMAGINE Task Force Model Possibilities

*Note: These were the initial descriptions of these models that were considered by the Task Force.*

**Model #1**

**Shabbaton Model**
Families will gather together on Saturday afternoons (3:00-6:00 p.m.) 22 times a year for:

* Parallel student and adult learning
* Family education
* Evening and Havdalah services

This program is open to families with students in Grades 3-6 and has a year long theme, which changes every year and repeats every four years (so families can stay in the program without repeating a theme).
Toward the beginning of the year there will be a mandatory Family Retreat (Friday night until Sunday lunch), which will take place at a nearby camp. Programs will focus on people getting to know each other and what lies ahead and will include shared ritual.

Hebrew lessons will take place weekly, in one form or another. Some ideas:

* Small Hebrew classes at the Temple
* Neighborhood gatherings
* 1-1, 2-1 or 3-1 tutoring

**Variation #1 on Shabbaton Model (Sunday Afternoons vs. Saturdays)**
Same as above, but families will gather together on Sunday afternoons (3:00-6:00 p.m.) 22 times a year for:

* Parallel student and adult learning
* Family education
* Evening services

**Variation #2 on Shabbaton Model (Sunday Mornings vs. Saturdays)**
Same as above, but families will gather together on Sunday mornings (9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.) 22 times a year for:

* Parallel student and adult learning
* Family education
* Morning services

**Model #2**
**LA is Our Classroom**
Families will gather together at TIOH on Sunday mornings or afternoons and utilize field trips around Jewish LA for the support of their study of associated history, Jewish values, rituals and Hebrew vocabulary.

The Program will include:

* Parallel student and adult learning
* Family education

This program is open to families with students in Grades 3-6. The program would go in five week cycles, which change every year and repeat every four years (so families can stay in the program without repeating a theme). The five week cycles would include:

* For 3 weeks, families would study a value/ritual/historical moment
* On the 4th week, families would take a field trip to a location which would augment their learning (i.e. a food bank, Museum of Tolerance, etc.)
* On the 5th week, families would return for reflection

Hebrew lessons will take place weekly, in one form or another. Some ideas:

* Small Hebrew classes at the Temple
* Neighborhood gatherings
* 1-1, 2-1 or 3-1 tutoring

**Variation #1 on LA is Our Classroom**
Instead of families gathering together at TIOH on Sunday afternoons (timing?), they would form small groups (5 families per group), which would meet in a private home. Each group would be facilitated by a different teacher.

Appendix II

Description of Shabbaton Program

**Shabbaton** will be open to Religious School families with students in Grades 3-6, and will serve as an alternative to our current drop-off/ pick-up Religious School model.

Families that elect to be in our **Shabbaton** program will gather together at TIOH on Shabbat afternoons from 3:30-6:00 p.m. twenty-two times a year. During this time, families will engage in the following: Parallel student and adult learning, Family education, and and Havdalah services

**Shabbaton** will have a yearlong curricular theme, which will change every year and repeat every four years (so families can stay in the program without repeating a theme), as well as a yearlong social justice focus.

Toward the beginning of each year, there will be a mandatory Family Retreat (Friday night until Sunday lunch), which will take place at a nearby camp.

Students who participate in our **Shabbaton** program will gather together in small groups one other time during the week for Hebrew instruction. These small groups will either meet at private homes or at the Temple. Students will be grouped according to grade and Hebrew level. Parents will take an active role in organizing the groups.

**Shabbaton**will be overseen and implemented by a joint lay/staff group.