

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Beth Emet Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Worship Committee  
Eddie Feldman, Co-chair  
Simon Anolick, Co-chair  
Cantor Erin Frankel

**DATE:** December 17, 2007

**RE:** Kabbalat Shabbat Services

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Since its reconstitution in the late spring of 2007, the Worship Committee focused on a comprehensive review of the Shabbat at Beth Emet initiative (“SBE”) that the clergy initiated in March 2007, with particular emphasis on the Kabbalat Shabbat services. We have completed our review and now report our conclusions and recommendations to the Board of Trustees. Through Cantor Frankel, the clergy has participated in the Committee’s discussions, is aware of our conclusions and endorse our recommendations. Before the end of the year, the Committee and clergy will report our conclusions and recommendations to the congregation by letter.

Beginning June 11, the Worship Committee met six times over the next four months to discuss the issues related to the SBE and Kabbalat Shabbat services. Committee members are Chava Alpert, Betsy Fuchs, Andrea Gardner, David Graham, Paul Greenberger, Barbary Levy, Barbara-Ann Lewis, Susan Melczer, Lenore Reif, David Roston, Myra Shneider and Sari Weintraub with Debra Aron serving as our Board sponsor. The committee was selected to represent a cross-section of the congregation and comprises people that attend various services. Although the Committee touched on issues other than the SBE and Kabbalat Shabbat, which we will discuss in the future, we concentrated on Kabbalat Shabbat.

To begin our process, Cantor Frankel taught how the changes reflected in the SBE are grounded in the principles of *oneg*, *k’dusha* and *m’nucha* that the clergy expressed to the congregation in launching the SBE initiative. The Kabbalat Shabbat services were instituted as part of a comprehensive view of Shabbat as a sundown-to-sundown experience, centered on joy, rest, Torah and study.

The changes for Friday evenings were instituted to emphasize the “oneg,” or “joyful” aspect of Shabbat. They included changing the starting time of services from 8:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., removing the Torah service from Kabbalat Shabbat services, having a wine and cheese reception before services in lieu of an Oneg Shabbat after services, having formal programming and dinner after services on the first and third Shabbat’s of the month, instituting a home Shabbat program on the second Shabbat of the month where congregants enjoy Shabbat dinner in one another’s homes after services, moving the clergy from the bimah to the landing at the bottom of the steps leading up to the bimah and changing and increasing the musical content of Kabbalat Shabbat services. In November, another change was instituted when Beth Emet introduced the new siddur, *Mishkan Tefilah*. The clergy’s objectives in changing Kabbalat Shabbat services are to increase the enjoyment and participation in Kabbalat Shabbat for the clergy and the congregation, and the SBE initiative is in the spirit of Beth Emet’s leadership in the Union of Reform Judaism.

After the changes to Kabbalat Shabbat services were made, the clergy and lay leadership received numerous comments from the congregation regarding the changes, the process in which they were made and how the changes were (or were not) communicated to the congregation. While there were a range of comments, the criticisms of congregants who disliked the changes coalesced around a few central points:

- *Time.* For some congregants, the 6:30 start time was problematic. Many people commented that arriving at services by 6:30 or to the wine and cheese reception between 5:45 and 6:30 was inconvenient or not feasible. This is because, for them and for various reasons, it is difficult to get to Beth Emet at this time on a Friday night. In addition, the new time requires major changes to people’s Shabbat dinner rituals. These congregants felt that they had lost their Friday night worship opportunity, which for some was their primary worship connection to the synagogue and had been so for many years.
- *Torah.* The other most common criticism was the loss of a Torah service followed by a *d’var* given by one of the clergy or a guest. Especially for those who do not attend Shabbat morning services or do not believe that Shabbat morning services provide the same opportunities to hear Torah, the loss of the intimacy and pageantry of the Torah service, of hearing the chanting and of learning from the *d’var*, meant that these congregants felt they had been severed from the central sacred text of our tradition.
- *Process.* Some congregants felt disenfranchised by the process by which the changes to Kabbalat Shabbat services were made. They felt that there was inadequate communication that the changes were being considered, that they did not have an opportunity to provide input into the process and that the reasons for the changes were not adequately explained.

As a result of these comments and to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to provide feedback, the Worship Committee decided in its second meeting to send a letter

to all congregants informing them of the evaluation process it had begun and requesting comments regarding Kabbalat Shabbat services. That letter was sent in August. Over the next few weeks, we received about two dozen comments via e-mail, regular mail and word of mouth. The comments we received were consistent with those described above. As mentioned, we will be sending a follow-up letter to the congregation reporting on our findings and recommendations.

It must be emphasized that the Worship Committee received many comments praising the new Kabbalat Shabbat format. Congregants commented on how they like the feel of the services and the joy that is prevalent. Based on the limited available data, the number of Kabbalat Shabbat service participants has appeared to increase (and are generally higher than prior attendance at 8:00 services). In addition, several congregants who did not initially like the changes or were skeptical are now happy with them. It appears to the Worship Committee that the changes are being accepted and endorsed by many. Nonetheless, the Committee was unanimous that the concerns regarding the time of services and the Torah service should be addressed in some fashion. A large part of the deliberations of the Committee was spent brainstorming and debating various options for addressing these issues.

To address the “timing” issue, the committee reviewed a number of options: Returning services to the 8:00 p.m. start time; alternating the starting time each week between 6:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. (e.g., first and third Friday nights would begin at 6:30, and second and fourth at 8:00); once a month having a late service at 8:00 p.m.; once a month having both a 6:30 p.m. service and an 8:30 p.m. service; and keeping the current format of having only 6:30 services without offering any late service option. After extensive discussion, some Committee members favored alternating start times and some favored having a late service once a month. At the Committee’s last meeting in October, the Committee voted on these options. First, a majority favored offering a late service once-per-month over the “alternating start time” approach. Second, the Committee voted on whether that Friday night service should be the only service that night (beginning at 8:00) or whether it should be an 8:30 service following the 6:30 Kabbalat Shabbat service. Based on logistical concerns and the clergy’s strongly held desire for maintaining the consistency and momentum that has developed for the 6:30 service, the Committee decided to recommend that services continue to begin at 6:30 p.m. every week, and that on one Shabbat of every month an 8:30 p.m. service be offered.

This recommendation generates several related issues that were discussed by the Committee:

- Which Shabbat? The Committee initially thought the fourth Friday made the most sense, since there is no dinner and no programming following the 6:30 service. However, one member pointed out that the last Friday often coincides with secular holidays (Thanksgiving, New Years, Memorial Day) that might depress turnout for a service that will happen only once per month anyway. Holding the service on the second Friday, or a more fluid schedule, were discussed. In light of various considerations including Cantor Frankel’s

anticipated maternity leave and Kabbalat Shabbat's summer schedule, there will be two services on the fourth Shabbat of January, February and March.

- What Content? Will the later service be like the Kabbalat Service? Like the old 8:00 service? Will it include Torah and a *d'var*? In light of the introduction of *Mishkan Tefilah*, all services will change, so the 8:30 service would not be a clone of its past self. Also, given the challenges of integrating the new *siddur* into one Friday night service, it would not be feasible to try to create two new services at the same time. Thus, the late service will be essential identical to the early service. The Committee does recommend that the late service include both a Torah service and a *d'var*, as discussed below.
- Who Will Lead? The Committee recognized that two services would put an additional burden on the clergy and in particular the Cantor. The Committee anticipated that the Cantor likely will not be able to lead both services in the same evening. Cantor Frankel intends to be at two of the three late services and the remaining early service. She is arranging for musical leadership for those services that she will not attend. In addition, one rabbi will lead each service.

The "Torah" issue was the first one the Committee addressed, and reached consensus quickly. For over 50 years, Beth Emet has read Torah on Friday nights followed by a *d'var torah*. As discussed earlier, for many congregants, this is a fundamental part of their Kabbalat Shabbat experience, and the only time they see the Torah and hear it being read. The clergy was concerned that returning the full Torah service would break the flow and joy of the Kabbalat Shabbat experience, as well as adding at least 20 minutes to services delaying the start of dinner. Because of the strong sense of loss that had been expressed, the committee asked the clergy in July to evaluate whether a reinstated Torah service might be feasible within the spirit of the new Kabbalat Shabbat service format. In August, we received a favorable response. Therefore, we recommend that on the third Shabbat of every month (when 6:30 services are followed by a catered dinner) there be a Torah service. The clergy are working on how that service may be "choreographed," and it will very likely be different from the familiar one previously used at the 8:00 service. But the objective will be a portion of the service that will allow congregants to see, hear and experience Torah directly. Additionally, we also recommend that the once-a-month late service include a Torah service. Whether that Torah service will look like the vintage Beth Emet version, or be more like the new 6:30 version will be determined by the clergy and, like other aspects of the services, may evolve over time.

During our discussions, many additional suggestions were made and have already been instituted. For example, over the last several months, the Rabbis have been increasing their discussion of Torah in the Kabbalat Shabbat services. The Rabbis' *d'vrai torahs* now include study of the weekly *parasha* to increase the opportunity for learning. To provide more time for people to socialize, the wine and cheese reception begins at 5:45 and has been moved into the Crown room, with a candle ceremony that has facilitated an elegant transition to worship and that has been well received.

Although Shabbat was commanded at Sinai, the particulars of celebrating *erev* Shabbat were not. Shabbat may have been literally etched in stone, but the Kabbalat Shabbat service was not. As such, Shabbat services can be a dynamic and evolving process. The Kabbalat Shabbat service has already changed since the SBE initiative was begun in March, and will continue to do so when appropriate. As Kabbalat Shabbat services continue to evolve, Worship Committee believes that the Kabbalat Services will continue to be a fulfilling and satisfying worship experience of Beth Emet, and we look forward to continuing to work with the clergy on this issue and the many other worship issues that the Committee will discuss in the future.