



1040 N Harlem
River Forest, IL 60305

Rabbi Search Survey

Preliminary Analysis

June 28, 2009

Executive Summary

- Who We Are
 - **Diverse in all respects**
 - **Conservative Jews**
 - Worship is central
 - Concerned with application of Jewish thought to current events and personal meaning
 - In need of growth, resources
- What we need in a Rabbi
 - **Welcoming, tolerant**
 - **Engaging personal style**
 - Passionate, energetic
 - Insightful, makes text relevant
 - Effective with young people
 - Caring, personal
 - Help develop membership
 - Part of the OPRF community

Broad representation of the community in 151 responses

Who Responded to the Survey?

- 151 responses
- Demographics supplied by approximately half
- Most are adults aged 30-64
- More women than men
- More than one-third have children under 18
- Most are Oak Park / River Forest residents
- Small group (9%) new to WSTHZ in last 5 years
- About one-fifth have been members 5-15 years
- About one-third have been members over 15 years
- Moderate to regular attendance at Shabbat (Friday or Saturday) and holiday services and social events

Organization of the Survey

- Liturgy and Worship
- Rabbi as Educator
- Rabbi Role in Community
- Rabbinic Priorities
- Rabbi Personal Characteristics
- WSTHZ Self-Assessment
- Advice for Search Committee

Organization of the Analysis

- For each section of the survey:
 - Liturgy and Worship
 - Rabbi as Educator
 - Rabbi Role in Community
 - Rabbinic Priorities
 - Rabbi Personal Characteristics
 - WSTHZ Self-Assessment
 - Advice for Search Committee
- Overview of Findings
- Details – quantitative
- Details - comments

Liturgy and Worship

Overview

- Largely endorse current siddur, amount of Hebrew
- Desire more congregation and youth participation
- Some interest in variation in format
- Some interest in instrumental music (especially Friday Night Live), but some strongly opposed
- Interest in keeping Friday night informal
- Interest in egalitarian language
- *Comment theme: Focus on identity as a Conservative synagogue*

Liturgy and Worship

Friday Night, Erev Shabbat Services: As compared to current Friday night Shabbat services (excluding holidays) at WSTHZ, please describe what you'd like to see in worship services:

<i>Percent</i>	Less	Same	More	Comments (#)
Youth participation and leadership	1%	37%	52%	
Variation in format from week to week	3	39	46	No (4) Yes (2)
Congregational participation and leadership	3	44	45	
Instrumental Music	13	34	37	No (4) Yes (5) strongly worded in both directions
Amount of Hebrew	10	62	19	
Adherence to Siddur	10	63	15	Add matriarchs to amidah (2)

25 Comments, eg:

I think the bottom line is that we need to define our synagogue as a Conservative synagogue, and use that as the basis for determining the level of emphasis on prayer, Hebrew, and religious practices. We don't want to be in competition with the Reform temple across the street -- we want to be the option for Conservative Jewish families in the western suburbs. We should be reluctant to move closer to Reform because then we aren't any different than the other Reform synagogues.

Liturgy and Worship

Shabbat Morning Services: As compared to current Saturday morning Shabbat services (excluding holidays) at WSTHZ, please describe what you'd like to see in worship services:

<i>Percent</i>	Less	Same	More	Comments (#)
Variation in format from week to week	3%	45%	47%	yes (2)
Congregational participation and leadership	2	47	46	more (2)
Youth participation and leadership	1	47	46	more (2)
Instrumental Music	12	49	27	no(4); yes (2)
Adherence to Siddur	11	72	12	egalitarian (2)
Amount of Hebrew	17	67	11	maintain (2)

20 Comments

Distinguish from Reform (3)

As a big tent or umbrella congregation we need to make the Shabbat service comfortable for the more conservative (lower cases "c") among us. At the same time the service should be accessible to the growing percentage of participants with no Hebrew.

Shabbat service is the heart of the congregation...Use new ideas to keep prayer "fresh and meaningful."

Liturgy and Worship

When you think about what makes worship services inviting, what comes to mind?

71 Responses (# which mention this theme)

Clergy and lay leadership welcome, good ushers, inclusiveness for new people (eg giving page numbers) and also recognition of continuity of steady attendees (eg referring to themes of prior sermons/services, ongoing shul activities, etc). Respect for all who are present, attentiveness to mood or concerns/confusion especially of new people/guests, but not tailoring the entire service to b'nai mitzvah guests etc so that it becomes "us" and "them." Sincerity and affection for the congregation, the tefillah, and the purpose of the service.

Welcoming community (40)

Participation by congregation (22)

Sermon (18) - 9 suggested importance of relevance/interactive discussion

Kavannah, meaningful/spiritual (15)

Use of engaging melodies / music (15)

Involve youth (13)

Explanation of service elements (7)

Other topics: Keep informality of Friday night, welcome interfaith, preserve Conservative identity

Nice kiddush, welcome b'nai mitzvah guests but in context of service, shul leaders should be visible

Many mention celebrating life cycle events and simchas

Liturgy and Worship

What are important qualities of sermons or divrei torah that have been meaningful to you?

73 Responses (# which mention this theme)

I have always looked forward to Rabbi Mirelman's sermons. Sermons should be anchored in religious texts. (For comparison, a few years ago I went to another Conservative synagogue in Chicago on Yom Kippur, and the rabbi gave a speech about the importance of yoga on the most solemn day of the year without once mentioning/quoting from Torah. A religious theme was totally absent from the rabbi's sermon. Ultimately, I found the sermon to be secular in nature and lacking depth. It didn't provide a religious message that I craved. It felt like New Age pop.) It is good to have a theme that is relevant to today -- be it current events or issues that families face or struggling under this economy. But the ideal sermon ties in a theme that is relevant to our daily lives to something in the Torah that we might have missed. A meaningful sermon allows us to pause for a moment and find greater meaning or purpose in lives. I very strongly want our new rabbi to deliver these kinds of sermons.

Apply to current events (42)

Anchor sermons in Jewish text, teachings, history (37)

Connect to congregants' personal experience (26)

Interesting, accessible delivery and style (25)

Scholarly, insightful (11)

Liturgy and Worship

Please provide any other comments you would like the committee to consider about WSTHZ's future direction in liturgy/worship.

44 Responses

We need a leader who is comfortable with his/her Judaism in practice and prayer. A leader who can speak with congregants, not at them. A leader who is comfortable with young and old, rich or poor. A leader who is part of our community, and invested in our community. A leader whose family is part of the congregation.

Echoes of the same themes as above: participation, community, egalitarian liturgy, music, engaging leader, sermons which are relevant

Social action mentioned twice

Daily minyan mentioned twice

Rabbi as Educator

Overview

- Approachable, accessible, welcoming
- Charismatic style, articulate speaker
- Knowledgeable, insightful, makes Judaism relevant to our lives and era
- Good listener, nonjudgmental
- Appealing to youth, a frequent presence but not necessarily closely involved in the school
- Good relationship with b'nai mitzvah
- Offer study and lecture opportunities
- Build relationship with students as well as adults
- Conveys passion for Judaism

Rabbi as Educator

When you think about what makes a rabbi a great teacher, what comes to mind?

75 Responses (# which mention this theme)

- Charismatic, effective teaching style (40)
- Accessibility to all levels (age, knowledge, observance) (36)
- Erudite, scholarly, insightful (28)
- Welcoming, good listener (26)
- Ability to reach youth (15)
- Articulate speaker (12)
- Loves Judaism (12)
- Makes Judaism relevant (11)

Rabbi as Educator

What should be a rabbi's role in adult education?

<i>Percent</i>	More Important	Less Important
Study group leader	72%	6%
Lecturer	68	9
Speaker / teacher in the community, involvement in outside education	30	30
Facilitator for outside lecturers	14	25
Book reviewer	9	57
Writer of scholarly articles	6	72

16 Comment(s)

All comments are enthusiastically in support of the Rabbi's role. Some also note that adult education should not depend on the rabbi's personal involvement in each event.

Rabbi as Educator

What should be a rabbi's role in youth education (including teens, children and pre-school)?

<i>Percent</i>	More Important	Less Important
Resource/guide to faculty	50%	29%
B'nai Mitzvah preparation	44	31
Influencing curriculum	39	45
Active in directly teaching classes	35	48
Participation in youth services	31	47

20 Comments

Comments emphasize need for approachability and involvement at all levels of education.

However, some comments suggest that the rabbi focus on older youth more than younger.

There are several observations that the school is in good hands with the educator.

Rabbi Role in Community

Overview

- Participation is expected in local and interfaith community, Jewish community, and social action
- Some suggest that the rabbi focus at WST first, then expand presence elsewhere
- Expanded focus on relationship with Israel would be welcome

Rabbi Role in Community

How involved should the rabbi be in communities/organizations outside of the temple?

<i>Percent</i>	Participate	Lead
Social Action	52%	44%
Chicagoland Jewish community (e.g., JUF, other synagogues, etc.)	54	42
Local interfaith community	55	41
Chicagoland interfaith community	72	23
National religious organizations	83	13

13 Comments (# which mention this theme)

Outreach and relationships with other Jewish organizations; social action; interfaith and community relationships

Other Comments

Rabbi should have a visible significant role outside WST (13)

Rabbi should focus at WST, at least initially (4)

Rabbi should not articulate views in the name of WST (3)

Rabbi Role in Community

When considering WSTHZ's current level of involvement with Israeli culture, how much congregational involvement would you like to see in the future:

<i>Percent</i>	About Right	Should Increase
Cultivating relationships with Israel (e.g., trips, visiting scholars)	27%	66%
Education about Israel for adults	31	59
Israeli cultural events (e.g., visiting artists, secular holidays)	31	59
Education about Israel for youth (all ages)	33	50
10 Comments		

Note: virtually no responses said "too much"

Rabbinic Priorities and Personal Characteristics *Overview*

- Life cycle, illness, counseling, and support
- Approachable, energetic, enthusiastic
- Welcomes diversity in all respects
- Inspiring and personally engaging

Rabbinic Priorities

Of the following rabbinic duties, how important is each of these to you personally?

<i>Percent</i>	Slightly/ Important	Very/ Extremely
Available and attentive to life cycle events (e.g., bris, wedding)	12%	87%
Support in illness	31	68
Counseling and support of youth	35	64
Counseling and support of adults	42	58
Good pastor (i.e., interested in advising on personal issues)	43	54
Expert arbiter of Jewish law and practices	48	48
A good fundraiser	51	42
Involvement in youth activities (all ages)	59	39

Rabbi Personal Characteristics

The personal characteristics of a rabbi that are most important to you personally

	#	%
Approachable	58	38.4%
Connects individually to members of the congregation	53	35.0%
Enthusiastic - energetic - vibrant	51	33.7%
Inspires congregants to participate in synagogue activities	49	32.4%
Accepting of a wide range of observance by our members	33	21.8%
Inspires congregants to observe, participate and perform mitzvot	30	19.8%
A strong leader	25	16.5%
Flexible (i.e., approach to people, situations, liturgy, etc.)	25	16.5%
Good with adolescents	24	15.8%
A good listener	22	14.5%
Good with children	16	10.5%
Participates in social functions of the synagogue	16	10.5%
Able to work with lay leadership	15	9.9%
Attentive to the needs of older members	9	5.9%
Scholarly (i.e., active in research and writing)	8	5.2%
A good administrator and well organized	3	1.9%

WST Self-Assessment *Overview*

- Widespread, powerful emphasis on diversity
 - Observance, interfaith, social, racial, political
 - Desire for profoundly tolerant and welcoming community
- Deep love for WST community
 - *But* concern that it is dwindling, needs energy and focus (and more members)
 - Concern about financial resources
- Desire to maintain a strong, yet tolerant, Conservative Jewish identity
 - Contrast to Reform – no desire to blur the lines

WST Events Meaningful to Congregants

**What WSTHZ religious event is most
meaningful to you?**

66 Responses

*69 different events were mentioned - # with 5+
mentions:*

High holidays (26)

Shabbat (17)

B'nai Mitzvah (7)

Friday night services (5)

Minyan (5)

**What other WSTHZ event or activity is
meaningful or important to you?**

55 Responses - # with 5+ mentions:

Kallah

Shabbat

Simchat Torah

Adult education and lectures

Youth education

Friday night services / dinners

WST Self-Assessment

What is the single most important thing a prospective rabbi needs to know about our congregation?

62 Responses (# which mentioned this theme)

It is a small and active Jewish reflection of the diverse and sometimes complex community, world and time in which we live.

Diverse, needs to be inclusive (36)

Needs energy and focus (12)

Needs more / younger members (5)

Needs to be more of a community (5)

WST Self-Assessment

What are our congregation's strengths and weaknesses?

56 Responses (# which mentioned this theme)

Strengths

Warm congregation, members will to step up to activities (29)

Diverse membership (18)

Religious School (5)

Weaknesses

Not enough members and/or not enough participate (15)

Need more financial resources (5)

Not enough engagement with young people (6)

Not enough social interaction (4)

Board vision/engagement is lacking (3)

Advice to the Search Committee

- Questions to ask: How will the rabbi...
 - Build a sense of community?
 - Engage young people and families?
 - Increase membership?
- Other advice:
 - Focus on the right personality fit for WST over any other specific criteria (7)
 - Try to recruit a woman (4)

Discussion and Next Steps