

Some of you may recall that at our Congregational Meeting in November, the community voted to initiate an extended Values-Based Decision Making process, to evaluate whether we should change our membership policy. Our bylaws currently state that only Jews can become voting members at TBI.

The policy does not mirror our present reality. Many individuals who are not Jewish contribute to the life of this community, whether as partners of Jews or engaged from other motivations. The TBI community has selectively ignored that policy when voting on certain decisions in recent years. Perhaps most important, conversations with members and with non-Jewish member spouses have revealed that there are widely varying conceptions of what a person who is not Jewish is allowed to do in this community; where, how and when they are welcome. Regardless of our outcomes, we need to address those misconceptions.

In December, Board Member Bruce Kreitzberg agreed to chair a Membership Policy Task Force, and Esther Jacobson-Tepfer, Tracy Tessler and Geraldine Moreno-Black volunteered to join. The members of the Task Force began by investigating trends in contemporary Jewish communal membership. They have received in-depth data from over 20 demographically similar Jewish communities; communities that, like TBI, are liberal, big-tent, and the largest synagogue in their city or region.

On March 10th at 7:00 pm, March 12 at 12:30 pm, and March 17th at 7:00 pm we will offer a study session on “The Role of the Other in Jewish Community.” This session will include engagement with traditional Jewish texts regarding this issue throughout Jewish history, as well as the Task Force’s findings. We are offering this teaching three times in order to maximize participation. If you are unavailable for any of them, and would like to convene a parlor meeting session to receive the information, please be in touch with me to arrange that. Beginning with these conversations and continuing into April, the Task Force will solicit feedback from the community about what values must influence our first draft proposal for our late May congregational meeting. It is my hope that, in addition to bringing our policies and our practice in line with each other, we also engage in a communal conversation about how TBI can be both inviting, inclusive and true to our Jewish cultural framework.