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## ■ GETTING STARTED

### A FANCIFUL (BUT INSTRUCTIVE) TALE

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Temple Oy Vey had just marked its sixty-fifth anniversary with a month-long whirlwind of events. A group of experts had led a well-attended panel discussion about the current state of the Middle East peace process. A new wing of the religious school had been dedicated. Past presidents had been honored at a special dinner banquet. All the living former cantors who could travel had come back to Oy Vey to participate in a special concert. A grove of trees had been planted in Israel in the temple's honor, and a generous benefactor had arranged for the temple grounds to be relandscaped. All month the building had been alive with excitement as new and old members alike basked in the excitement. Only the Friday night and Saturday morning worship services that featured no special anniversary-related programming had remained essentially the same: They had not been affected by the glow radiating around them. Bar and bat mitzvah students had dutifully chanted their Torah and haftarah portions. Parents had beamed and guests had offered their congratulations. But, as usual, with the exception of the invited guests, the sanctuary had been generally devoid of members at these "regular" services.

For some time prior to the anniversary celebrations, the rabbi and cantor had been talking privately about worship at Oy Vey. Reluctant as they were to acknowledge the fact, both realized that they had been "coasting" for some time. They had worked together long enough to have their routine down pat. They knew each other's cues, jokes and bimah styles. Service preparation only required checking in with each other five minutes before the start of the service: "Service II or III tonight?" "Which *Oseh Shalom* do you want to do?" Truth be told, both were somewhat bored with worship at Oy Vey and disheartened by the seeming indifference of most of the congregants. After the excitement of the anniversary celebrations and the energy and spirit that had been generated by that excitement, the flatness of "regular" worship services had become impossible to ignore.

The rabbi and cantor knew that numerous Reform congregations had been down this road before them. Many of those synagogues had begun to revitalize worship, experiment with new models and "think differently" about music, choreography, space and leadership styles. But Oy Vey was sixty-five years old, possessed a lengthy and proud history and had many longtime members who appreciated the synagogue's traditions. Even thinking about *trying* to make some changes in worship gave the rabbi and cantor a headache. Still, they were determined to move forward. After consultation with the Union's Department of Worship, Music and Religious Living, the rabbi and cantor shared what they had learned with a few key lay leaders. Here is the plan of action that they developed in order to create a long-term "road map" for their efforts in the area of worship exploration and transformation. Their plan can be tailored by any congregation to meet its own specific needs and interests.

## THE PLAN

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### The Rabbi

- Begins the "conversations" that the congregation will have about worship and worship transformation by leading several discussions with the Board of Trustees using Engaging Worship: Two Study Sessions for Congregational Boards.

- Initiates a course of study about the worship experience and liturgy with the Ritual Committee using Let Us Learn in Order to Do.
- Schedules a special meeting with the Ritual Committee after a significant amount of study and after having sensed that congregants are open to experimentation with worship. This is done in conjunction with the cantor and Ritual Committee chair. Together, they view the short film *Visions of Prayer* and use its accompanying study guide to shape their discussion.

Meanwhile...

### **THE CANTOR**

- Convenes a task force composed of interested members of the Ritual Committee, the Music Committee and the choir to study *Divrei Shir: Words of Song—A Curriculum for the Study of Synagogue Music* (Available from the Union's Department of Worship, Music and Religious Living).
- Studies Synagogue Choirs As Instruments of Prayer: Their Importance, Organization and Techniques and *Kolot Yaldeinu: Voices of Our Children—Resources and Repertoire for Children's Choirs* and uses both to implement innovations with the adult and children's synagogue choirs.
- Develops a program using *The Art of Cantillation* (URJ Press) for adults who wish to learn to chant Torah and haftarah.

Meanwhile...

### **THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

- Receives regular updates from the Ritual Committee, rabbi and cantor.
- Decides to initiate a series of congregational meetings (focus groups) on the topic of worship. It works with the Ritual Committee to train discussion leaders and coordinate the meetings using *Panim el Panim: Face to Face—A Guide for Congregational Conversations about Worship*.
- Asks the Ritual Committee and clergy to draft a Worship Vision for review by the board based on all of the study the committee has done and the conversations that took place during the *Panim el Panim* guided focus group sessions.
- Encourages the committee and clergy to continue the conversation in a variety of forums.