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A GUIDE FOR NEW MEMBERS

Dear Friend:

Ours is a unique congregation. It is a bold attempt to realize what Rabbi Stephen Wise described just before his death, as the "ideal congregation". Rabbi Wise said that such a congregation should be "vigorously liberal in philosophy but traditional in observance". When Rabbi Louis Newman spoke at our congregation last year, he said, "This is the type of congregation Stephen Wise always wanted to see!"

What does "Liberal" mean? A congregation is liberal when it governs itself not only by what is written in the holy books but also by the needs of the present and the future. It is liberal when it is unafraid to change what has become out-moded. It is liberal when it consciously tries to introduce customs and practices into its observance which beautify and exalt Judaism. With this type of outlook we could not be an Orthodox or Conservative congregation.

How much of the tradition do we observe? The tradition is always our first point of reference. We observe the tradition wherever it is meaningful today, or wherever it brings beauty or ethical thought into our lives. We also observe the tradition when, by doing so, we are able make large numbers of our members feel "at home".

For example: we wear HATS, not because the failure to wear it would be a sin, but because we choose to do so, that more of us might pray together. We maintain a kosher kitchen in the Temple, although we do not teach that you must keep a kosher home to be a good Jew. We ride to Temple, because we do not feel that the automobile and its ease of travel was envisioned when our ancient Rabbis made the laws concerning Sabbath or Holiday travel. We encourage the maintenance of many ceremonies in the home, but we do not teach that the failure to maintain them is a sin. Men and women sit together at our Service, and women participate in the Service on occasion. We do this because we feel that the ancient treatment of women is out-moded. The Rabbi's sermon is in English and may deal with current social problems as well as with religious problems. We distinguish between the moral law and the ceremonial law. We maintain that the observance of the former is mandatory, although the observance of the latter is not.

We have a Cantor and mixed choir at our Services. Traditional melodies are sung. We have an organ. We have Bar Mitzvah for boys, Bas Mitzvah for girls, and Confirmation at the age of 16 for both boys and girls. We have a Sunday School at which Current Events and Jewish History are taught. We have a mid-week Hebrew School. Text-books are written from the Liberal view-point.

and arts and crafts are employed.

The basic distinction between our congregation and a so-called "Traditional" or "Orthodox" or "Conservative" congregation is that we MAINTAIN THE RIGHT TO CHANGE, and do make changes in the tradition when we feel that history, ethics, and intelligence indicate that the change is needed.

Our Religious Service is divided rather evenly between Hebrew and English. We believe that the needs of the person who is accustomed to prayer in Hebrew and the needs of the person who does not understand Hebrew must be met. Our Service is understandable and meaningful to all. We use the Liberal Prayer-book with special supplements. Torah readings are carefully explained in the English also.

CREATIVE PROGRAMMING: Our congregation has already developed an Adult Education Program which includes Hebrew, Jewish History, Customs and Ceremonies, Bible, Etc. More people attended our classes this last year than have attended the united school of six neighboring congregations. *we have one of the most successful adult programs in the country.*

YOUTH GROUP: We have engaged a professional youth adviser for our teen-agers this year.

OURS IS THE FASTEST GROWING CONGREGATION ON LONG ISLAND. THE REAL REASONS CANNOT BE PUT DOWN ON PAPER!

Sincerely yours,

Herbert M. Baumgard
HERBERT M. BAUMGARD, Rabbi