

Temple Israel Tent Talks

One Congregation. One Conversation.



- **62** Tent Talks Completed Across the Congregation
- **380** Community Members Participated (*Including Congregants, Clergy, and Staff*)
- **31** People Facilitated TI Tent Talks

TI Tent Talks were held in these groups and cohorts:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leadership Council ● Religious School ● Teen Education Committee ● LGBT Congregants ● Riverway Project ● 477 Initiative ● Temple Israel Staff ● TILLI ● Families with Young Children ● 6th Grade Students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monday Night School ● Qabbalat Shabbat Oneg ● Walking Through the Door ● Finance Committee ● Torah Study ● Men's Mussar Group ● Parents of College Students ● Pilot Tent Talks with Various Congregants ● Facilitator Training Sessions ● Families with Children in Brookline Public Schools
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TI Tent Talks Core Themes

Throughout the process of the TI Tent Talks initiative, we have heard 380 Temple Israel members share stories about who we are and who we want to become. Out of the 62 Tent Talks we've had this year, we've discerned five core themes which best represent the issues central to the hearts of our community.

Life Transitions

"Everything in my life is in transition. I get through one day, one hour at a time."

We are a community of people in transition, made evident from stories shared by people ranging from our Religious School students to TILLI participants. In nearly every Tent Talk, the question of "Where are you right now in your life?" elicited a variety of responses centered around the theme of navigating the shift from one life place to another.

Aging, Death, and Dying

- Life in retirement: What to do next?
- How do we make this chapter of life meaningful?
- Creating space and support structures for issues of grieving, death, and dying

Managing Life's Transitions at Any Age

- Moving into new jobs, homes, relationships, children
- The Empty Nest: some find it liberating, others find it lonely.
- Aging Parents

Connection and Engagement with Clergy

"I wasn't particularly invested in Judaism, but I found support from a rabbi, and that drew me toward a more meaningful Jewish life."

We heard extremely variegated past experiences with clergy. Many people shared a strong desire for developing a more personal relationship with the clergy, during both joyous and challenging moments. Alternatively, we heard deep thankfulness from those members whose lives have been touched by the clergy's personal care and interest.

Desire for Clergy Connection

- Seeking stronger personal clergy engagement with individuals
- Yearning to receive clergy support during hard times



Appreciation for Clergy Support

- Gratitude for feeling “known” and “seen” by clergy
- Feeling “brought in” and “embraced” by clergy

Finding Spiritual Nourishment at Temple Israel

“Keep stimulating my mind, [but] learn how to stimulate my heart!”

“I need a deeper spirituality - it makes me feel torn about this place. We outsource too much to the professionals.”

A great number of Tent Talks involved an emphasis on finding a spirituality that some feel is lacking from their personal experience at Temple Israel. Often, we heard members express a disconnect between finding intellectual stimulation and spiritual connection.

Creating Holiness in Our Community

- How do we create meaningful rituals for significant life moments, beyond the “conventional” ones?
- How do we find holiness and meaning in our lives?

Juggling Life’s Commitments

“We aren’t the ‘sandwich generation,’ we are the ‘panini press’ generation.”

The TI Tent Talks showed us a glimpse of the daily stresses associated with balancing all that life throws our way. A new generation of people is navigating their ability to engage in their Temple community with the hectic realities of modern, working family life.

- Feeling overwhelmed balancing careers, raising families, and trying to maintain a community at Temple Israel
- People looking for a way to feel balanced, grounded and Jewishly engaged at the same time.
- An overarching need for greater institutional flexibility to alleviate the stress of balancing our commitments.



Strong Desire for Belonging

“My biggest problem with Temple Israel was just breaking in.”

Central to our community is a need to develop authentic relationships and to feel a true sense of belonging. TI members are grateful for opportunities that foster community engagement and hungry to “be seen and heard.”

Creating Community Connection

- People are looking for a sense of belonging, which one participant defined as “the feeling that people are happy to see you when you come to TI.”
- Strong desire to “normalize” small-group conversations as a regular practice at Temple Israel.
- Building opportunities for people to engage with each other after Qabbalat Shabbat services.

Additional Concerns

The 5 themes which emerged from the TI Tent Talks cannot fully encompass the depth and breadth of experiences and stories shared in this initiative. Below are some additional shared concerns which arose over the course of the past year.

- **Financial Issues**
 - We heard a variety of concerns related to finances. Many people are feeling financial stress manifest in different ways. There’s a concern about the “taboo” nature of financial discussions and the perception that people are alone in their financial struggles at Temple Israel. Issues of income inequality and socioeconomic segregation are also felt within the Temple Israel community.
- **Diversity**
 - One participant urged Temple leadership to “never do anything that reduces the diversity of this community.” Our members see the richness of our diversity as “hugely important to our future.”
 - The Temple Israel community has a strong desire to find more multigenerational engagement opportunities, breaking down the demographic silos that keep this congregation divided.
- **Social Justice Concerns**
 - Regarding TI’s connection to social justice, one congregant asked, “if we’re not going to do it, who is going to do it?” The community cares deeply about social justice and feels pride in the Temple’s commitment to pursuing justice. People are looking for more opportunities to engage in diverse justice work and appreciate the “social justice



oriented” nature of the clergy. Economic inequality and climate change are two issues seated deeply in the hearts of our congregants.

- Toward the end of the campaign, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), of which Temple Israel is a member institution, held a major political action event at Trinity Church. With 90 members present, Temple Israel was the most well represented synagogue at the event. The TI Tent Talk leadership was instrumental in mobilizing Temple Israel and, following the gathering, our facilitators and steering team members heard a strong resonance among those present around the issues that the event lifted up: gun violence prevention, criminal justice reform, health care cost containment, affordable housing, and education.

The TI Tent Talk Experience

“This is what I crave, what I miss, what I long for and wish for: these connections in TI Tent Talks.”

“We created this initiative to do what we needed all along - just talk to each other!”

“Temple Israel is one of my neighborhoods, it has variety, and that’s what I like in a neighborhood.”

“My story, and the story of every member of our community, together sews the fabric of what makes Temple Israel vital and significant.”

“You can have surprisingly vulnerable conversations with strangers in a place like this!”

“This is a place where you learn about the world.”



