Jewish Community in the Post COVID-19 Era: The Impact of Online Modalities on Creating Community within Non-Orthodox Synagogues

Jacqueline Grad Menaker

Academy for Jewish Religion

M.A. Project

2025/5785

Final Draft

February 20, 2025

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the many colleagues and friends who shared their insight and professional expertise to help facilitate this study, especially during a year of great challenge in the Jewish community. Each participant devoted time, thoughtfulness, vision, and heartfelt perspective. Your contributions are deeply appreciated. Thank you to:

Rabbi Abby Michaleski, Beth Israel Congregation Vineland, NJ; Rabbi Cantor Mark Goldman, Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El, Plantation FL; Rabbi Jack Paskoff, Congregation Shaarai Shomayim, Lancaster PA; Michael Kancher, Executive Director, Congregation of Reform Judaism, Orlando, FL; Rabbi David Evan Markus, Congregation Shir Ami, Greenwich CT; Temple Beth El of City Island, NY; Rabbi David Wise, Etz Hayim at Hollis Hills, Bayside, NY; Cantor Lauren Goodlev, Beth David Reform Congregation, Gladwyne, PA; Rabbi Cantor Jessica Fox, Temple B'nai Abraham, NJ; Rabbi Hazzan Jerry Blum, Great Neck, NY; Rabbi Jonathan Kremer, Shirat Hayam, Ventnor, N; Rabbi Andrew Kaplan Mandel, Central Synagogue, New York, NY; and a colleague and dear friend who wished to remain anonymous.

Additional thanks to the leadership and community of Shirat Hayam, Ventnor, NJ, Rachel Heimovics Braun, Dr. Janet Wagner, Dr. Jodi Handler and Shira Orit.

I am grateful to Rabbi Dr. Matthew Goldstone, Assistant Academic Dean and Dr. Ora Horn Prouser, Academic Dean and CEO of Academy for Jewish Religion for creating a nurturing, supportive, and rigorous academic environment in which one can truly thrive.

To my advisor, Dr. Janet Krasner Aronson, Associate Director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Steinhardt Social Research Institute at Brandeis University, thank you for your expert guidance and belief in this project.

And, finally, to my husband and coach Mitch Menaker.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

In an article written in April 2022 for Tablet magazine entitled "The Rise of the Online Synagogue: What it May Mean for the Future of American Judaism", Ron Wolfson and Steven Windmueller (2022) asked the following question:

> Despite some of the technical and impersonal characteristics of online technology, is it possible to create meaningful relational engagement between these participants and the congregation so that they do, in fact, see themselves as belonging to the synagogue and welcomed as members?

Emerging from the COVID - 19 pandemic that lasted from March 2020 to May 2023 there are clear signs that hybrid worship and education models, online synagogue membership, and virtual programming are here to stay. The focus of this study is to ascertain the significance and impact of the evolving relationship between congregant, community, and clergy as it exists within a fully digital or hybrid modality.

This qualitative study investigated the use of digital modalities in non-Orthodox synagogues within the areas of worship, education and programming, and life cycle and pastoral care since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key informants from each of the diverse participant congregations completed an online survey and attended a one-hour interview held on Zoom. Key findings revealed ways in which congregations could foster better relationships and stronger communities through online modalities. They also highlighted communication benefits between clergy and congregants, tools for membership outreach and in-reach, and opportunities for expanded programs and interaction. This research also discovered technological, religious, sociological, and financial challenges participating congregations faced. The research highlights the need to acknowledge that the current use of online modalities in non-Orthodox synagogues is a growing phenomenon that may impact the way Jewish community is viewed

and potentially strengthened. Further research utilizing a wide sample of human subject participants is recommended.

Chapter One - Introduction

When I began my new position as Reform Spiritual Leader at Shirat Hayam in Ventnor, NJ in May 2020, little did I know that for the following two years almost all interaction with members of my new congregation would occur through a Zoom screen connected to a laptop computer or handheld electronic device. COVID-19 invaded our world, a lockdown was in place, and the synagogue's doors were closed. The fact that I was not traveling this road alone brought little comfort. How could we possibly meet, engage, and create community without physical proximity? Of course, in time we all found new ways to create a new normal in worship, education, programming, life cycle, and pastoral care as we navigated the global pandemic. During the years that followed I observed the interaction between members who chose to continue to engage on Zoom in worship and educational settings. It appeared that side chats were full of personal sharing and that relationships had begun to develop between folks in different geographical areas which extended beyond the end of a Friday night Erev Shabbat service or a weekly Torah study.

I observed that week after week "Zoomers" were staying online long after the evening Shabbat service ended. Attendees from different parts of the country were contacting each other socially and were engaged in each other's lives outside the worship or educational programming that brought them together. On the rare occasion that travel brought them to another's home community, the in-person connection was like that of a reunion of old friends.

I began wondering if a relational community could develop through online/virtual modalities that not only feels like an extension of the synagogue family community but enhances it. Is it possible that the potential for relationship in community was so great that a "spiritual home" for a family of four in Las Vegas or six in Knoxville can be located on the Jersey shore as I had observed in my work?

For the elderly and those in poor health who struggled with the technology at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, once they became more proficient in using the platform or received assistance to better connect through their digital devices, the community became a lifeline, long after the pandemic ended and synagogue doors reopened. In one case a member from south Florida was Zoomed in from hospice for his wedding anniversary blessing. He died the next day. In the immortal words of Buffalo Springfield, it began to feel like *"there's something' happening here."*

Inspired by my observation of these experiences, I began a study of how congregations were using online spaces during and after the pandemic. My emphasis focused on those activities still in use eighteen months after the COVID-19 pandemic ended.

As I researched this topic, it became clear to me that very little scholarship existed to explore the now emerging phenomenon of individuals continuing to come together on a regular basis to participate "digitally" in worship, educational, and/or life cycle offerings within some non-Orthodox synagogue settings in the United States.

It appeared that relationships between community members that began out of necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic were continuing beyond the pandemic. Inspired by my observation of these experiences, I began a study of how congregations were using online spaces during and after the pandemic. To help shape my understanding of how communities are built, I utilized the concept of "social capital" that was introduced by Robert Putnam (2001).

This project began with a review of the historical framework prior to the dramatic pivot to digital modalities at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a study based upon a sample of experts working in non-Orthodox synagogues today, gaps in the scholarship were explored through new qualitative research. Research was conducted via an initial online survey followed by individual

interviews conducted by the researcher and respondent on Zoom. The data was analyzed, emerging trends were reviewed, and outcomes were discussed.

This study utilizes a convenience sample of brick and mortar synagogues of diverse size and demographics primarily situated on the East Coast of the United States. Included in the study were synagogues that identify as Traditional Conservative, Conservative, Reform, Independent, Renewal, Reform/Conservative, Movement Affiliated, Multi-Denominational and Non-Denominational. No "online only" or lay-led congregations have been included in this study. Although a few of the participating congregations in the convenience sample were known for their work in creating community through online modalities such as The Neighborhood at Central Synagogue, most synagogues were not chosen for their work in virtual community building and the representative clergy had differing views.

Orthodox Jewish communities are outside the scope of this study, primarily because of strict halachic considerations for worship, Shabbat, and holiday observance regardless of the stream of Orthodoxy. However, "there can be little doubt that many of the challenges and opportunities faced within the non-Orthodox worlds exist in Orthodoxy as well (Schiff, 2023)." Nonetheless, the Orthodox community may use technology outside of prayer settings, for example for classes. Some of the opportunities for community online engagement that were birthed from the pandemic are being utilized where applicable, to some degree in Orthodox communities as well. Note that throughout this paper, the term synagogues should be understood to refer to non-Orthodox synagogues.

This study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. How have synagogues continued to utilize online modalities and in what ways have they changed or evolved in the year after the COVID-19 pandemic ended?

2. To what extent have meaningful communities been established in these spaces? What are the potential implications, if any, for synagogues in the United States?

3. What are some best practices to support congregations' use of online modalities in order to create a more cohesive and expanded Jewish community?

4. What are some of the challenges and opportunities created by the use of online modalities in synagogues and how can they help us navigate an evolving Jewish landscape in the future?

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Although literature exists regarding different aspects of the use of online modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic, literature that specifically explores the period from June 2023 to the present is sparse. The most relevant and up to date data is from the Synagogue Studies Institute FACT/EPIC 2023 report, as quoted in Jacobs (2023), which states "85% of respondents to its survey offer online worship, versus 24% before the pandemic." Meanwhile, 70% of respondents to the FACT/EPIC 2023 survey, representing Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist congregations across the U.S., expect to still offer an online/virtual worship option in five years; more than 59% use Zoom for study sessions and approximately 60% for administrative meetings. While this data speaks to a percentage of usage and shows the increased interest in the current state of online modalities in non-Orthodox synagogue life, it does not explore the quality of the interaction of the participants which is vital to our study.

2.1   Current Research of Online Modalities in Jewish Spaces

Current research does include an exploration of online religious service attendance post COVID-19 pandemic (Jacobi et al., 2022). But the study was limited to online attendance only and did not explore the nature of community that may or may not arise from the online experience. This gap in the literature invites a deeper study. This researcher agrees with the argument that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and accelerated trends that were already occurring in American synagogues prior to 2020 as well as the continuing needs for connection and community in North American Jewish life (Levey, 2024). Deeper exploration into the nature of the current quality of Jewish community through online modalities is warranted.

The idea that all Jews are responsible for one another (*kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh)* is a core Jewish principle found in the Babylonian Talmud (Shavuot 39a). It is our obligation to make sure each one in our community has their needs met. We cannot turn away from a fellow Jew who needs our help and

support. This important Jewish principle is a basis for the following studies. One study (Braun-Lewensohn, 2023) explored minority Jewish communities around the world during the pandemic and concluded that the strength of their communities was an aspect of the members' well-being, but did not approach their study from an online modality experience and was limited to the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another study (Aronson et al., 2022) noted that a synagogue's outreach to community members in the United States during the pandemic boded well for future membership, whether the community member had been active prior to the COVID- 19 pandemic or not. Members of communities who utilized online modalities regularly during the pandemic felt connected during a time of isolation and challenge (Aronson et al., 2022).

All of these studies focused on the Jewish communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and raised the question for this researcher about how Jewish community has been evolving since the COVID-19 pandemic and what, if any, impact online modalities currently have on these Jewish communities.

2.2   Current Research on Online Modalities in Non-Jewish Spaces

Although our work is focused on the non-Orthodox Jewish synagogue, we can learn from other faith communities. From a Catholic perspective, one study asks the question regarding what kind of community is developing in the virtual space. This study primarily speaks to the role of ritual in the Catholic Church particularly the physicality of receiving the sacraments which is deemed essential to Catholic ritual practice (Palumbo, 2021)).

The research acknowledges that experiencing ritual through digital means is continuing, regardless of opposing views in the Catholic Church . This study drew its data during the COVID-19 pandemic (Palumbo, 2021). This information is relevant to our study because in- person ritual is important within the Jewish community, as well.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Social Capital

Social capital may turn out to be a prerequisite for, rather than a consequence of, effective computer-mediated communication." ~ Robert D. Putnam (2001)

The evolution of what we now observe as online gatherings for worship, education, and life cycle events is a dynamic process which may be understood through the theoretical concept of social capital as a mechanism for building community.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, one definition of community is a group of people who are considered as a unit because of their shared interests or background (*Cambridge English Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 2025). In determining a good working definition of community for our purposes, the following qualities should also be present. The community must be able to

> account for both a community of place, and something more dispersed i.e., (the Jewish
> community),and the sense of togetherness. It must explain the sense of identity and belonging
> and it must explain why 'community' has the normative (moral) power that it does – how
> communities shape our sense of what 'good' and 'bad' means. It must be able to explain why
> "community" is different from other social groups — such as "society", "family" or just a group of
> people and must be able to account for the fact that people can be part of different
> communities simultaneously (Lowe, 2021).

A sociological concept that can help to understand the importance of communities is "social capital." The term "social capital" was first coined by Robert D. Putnam of Harvard University in his groundbreaking work, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2001). He teaches that "social capital refers to the *connections* among individuals and the norms of *reciprocity* and *trustworthiness* that arise from them."

Building social capital between people is really about building trust between people. When we speak of feeling a sense of community with others, often we refer to a connection that builds upon social capital.

This study seeks to understand the nature of the interactions between individuals in online synagogue spaces in order to assess if social capital (as defined above) is being created.

If so, this may explain why and how communities can be developed through online modalities. One possible mechanism is the use of personal and private chats and connections outside the formal synagogue. As well, the connections may lead to the development of a support system in which case a "model community" may emerge.

How does social capital function specifically within faith communities? According to Putnam (2001, p. 64): "American churches (he includes all religious institutions of whatever faith, including mosques, temples, and synagogues) over the centuries have been incredibly robust social institutions." Even with a downward trend in affiliation since the height of the 1950s Putnam (2001, p. 66) goes on to say that "faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America."

While we may automatically imagine large in-person gatherings in a house of worship as the primary environment for creating social capital and therefore religious community, social capital does not need a specific physical space to exist. "As Reverend Craig McMullen said, 'the church is people…it's not a building, it's not an institution, even. It is the relationship between one person and the next (Hammond, 1998, p. 44)."

2.4   Community in the Jewish World: Historical Importance of the Synagogue

But in the Jewish world specifically, as we begin to look at the impact on Jewish community and particularly non-Orthodox communities in the United States today as it relates to online modalities in the

post COVID-19 era, there are additional complications. How do we interpret the historical connection to the importance of a synagogue structure (building)? How do we account for the Jewish ritual requirements for in-person participation surrounding *davening* (prayer and worship), Shabbat and holiday observances?

While the idea of "church is people" may seem to translate to other faith communities, praying in a synagogue has very deep rabbinic and historic roots. The Shulhan Aruch, a 16th century code of Jewish law states that a person should make an effort to pray in the synagogue with a congregation. (SA OH 90:9)

This rule is based upon a talmudic teaching that one must pray in a synagogue because it is set aside and established for public prayer. (BT Berachot 6a) The synagogue was considered by some as the place where the intention of the heart was found. (HaMeiri, Beit haBechirah)

Another important historical aspect of the synagogue is the sanctity in which it is imbued during the recitation of certain prayers as well as other times. The sages decreed that rabbinic sanctity should be instilled in a way that was similar to the Temple in Jerusalem. (Ran, commentary on Rif, Megillah 8a)

The importance of in-person gathering for worship is so central to Jewish practice that as early as 2001, it was determined by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly in a *t'shuvah* by Rabbi A. Reisner that a minyan in "close proximity" in person in the same physical space must exist before any further electronic modality could be employed (Reisner, 2001).

During the COVID-19 pandemic this Jewish legal (*halachic)* rule had an impact in halachically informed non-Orthodox congregations. The decision to allow for livestreaming on Shabbat and holy days (*chagim)* in Conservative congregations during the pandemic is discussed in section 2.6. (Heller, 2020)

2.5   20th Century Technological Changes.

Robert Putnam (2001) identified early concerns about the impact of technology on society. The lack of foresight regarding the use of the telephone as a means of social connection between individuals foreshadows the magnitude of the role that the internet and digital modalities play in human social interaction today.

> For those of us who wish to anticipate the impact of the Internet on social relations, the astounding series of poor predictions about the social consequences of the telephone is a deeply cautionary tale. Alexander Graham Bell himself originally expected the telephone to serve the sort of broadcasting function that would later become the province of radio — 'music on tap.' Well into the 20th century telephone executives were so convinced that their primary customer was the businessman that they actually discouraged 'socializing' by telephone (Putnam, 2001, p. 166).

Decades after the telephone became a new space for communication and relationship building between individuals, television provided a means of communication with a mass audience in the American religious landscape.

It is important to note that technological modalities have been part of American religious life long before the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, in the earliest days of religious programming on television were based upon previous success on the radio and Roman Catholics, Protestants and Jews were the dominant faiths represented. For the Jewish community, a notable event was the historic radio broadcast of Jewish religious services by the U.S armed forces in Germany in 1944 (AJC, 2019).

In 1952 Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen led the way in offering an engaging pastoral style on television that would later become the fertile ground of later evangelical Christian ministries to actively

use technology to unite religious communities and broadcast their religious message to the masses which exploded in the 1960s and 1970s (Horsfield, 1984).

Then the internet age, along with its endless possibilities, arrived.

In 2009, eleven years before the COVID-19 pandemic began, that Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) President Rabbi Eric Yoffie spoke to the delegates of URJ Biennial in Toronto did the potential impact of the internet on synagogue life reach the ears of thousands of Jewish leaders of the Reform movement (Kaplan, 2013).

In the years that followed there had been some use of online modalities in non-Orthodox synagogues in America. For example, Adath Yisrael, a Conservative synagogue in Merion Station, PA began livestreaming High Holy Day services in 2013. Congregation of Reform Judaism in Orlando began a direct live stream of High Holiday services in 2015. Malverne Jewish Center implemented Zoom use for Shabbat services and classes in 2019. By this time more synagogues were beginning to offer one-way live streaming of High Holy Days and Shabbat morning B'nai Mitzvah services.

But the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 opened up an unprecedented opportunity for all aspects of online usage. Zoom usage, in general, jumped from 10 million users in December 2019 to 300 million users in April 2020 (World Bank, 2001). As the lockdown became enforced, it is not surprising that non-Orthodox synagogues explored using new online modalities to connect with their members.

2.6   During the Pandemic: Transitioning to Online Modalities

The global shift to online modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic was felt by communities of all faiths, sizes, demographics, and locations. And the pivot was quick. In a survey assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in its early months conducted between May 19 and July 30, 2020 that at least three

out of four adult respondents had engaged in some type of online synagogue programming in the previous month (Aronson et al., 2022).

The few congregations that had already utilized online modalities were ahead of the curve in some respects, but most synagogues were not equipped to easily transition to online religious life. And it was not just technology that was challenging, an entire way of relating to the synagogue community had shifted in an instant. Clergy became video production experts, halachically informed congregations had to make tough decisions regarding connectivity on Shabbat, choir members had to learn to sing alone onto a prerecorded track and record themselves on their own digital devices and suddenly synagogue sanctuaries became television studios.

As the pandemic unfolded pivots occurred throughout much of the Jewish world. When it came to Shabbat and holiday observance, as well as convening for weekday *minyan,* the use of electronic online modalities and the transition proved challenging to everyone in different ways.

Online technology for worship is primarily of interest to the non-Orthodox because halachically observant Jews do not use electricity on Shabbat or *chaggim*. But, deeply held halachic considerations were guided and informed by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism through the CJLS of the RA. Although the earlier teshuvah published in 2001 allowed for online streaming as long as a minyan was physically present, Rabbi Joseph Heller's May 13, 2020 Teshuvah, *Live Streaming on Shabbat and Yom Tov* paved the way for the Conservative movement to move forward during the pandemic in broader ways which have had lasting impact. At the time Rabbi Heller wrote, "COVID-19 has accelerated a trend that was already well underway, of communities and individuals offering ways to join virtually in Shabbat and Yom Tov rituals (Heller, 2020)."

The initial transition to fully online modalities in Reform congregations was not as clear cut as one might imagine. A guidance issued by the URJ, CCAR, ACC and other leadership bodies on March 31, 2020 urged

all of its communities to actively use platforms like Zoom and Facebook live because of safety concerns (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2020). But the extent to which communities embraced all of the technological offerings was nuanced. Guided by Jewish law (*halacha*), if not governed by it, the Reform rabbinate and by extension its member communities throughout the country made the best decisions regarding the extent to which they would utilize online modalities "by exercising their autonomy in thoughtful conversation with tradition (Washofsky, 2024, p. 11)."

Some Reform clergy, leadership and members of Union for Reform Judaism temples found the pivot to digital modalities challenging. Many were skeptical about the quality and meaningfulness of ritual acts like reciting the mourner's kaddish online at home, not being able to engage in person with others while praying and especially the restrictions on communal singing (Debs, 2020).

But, as time went on and the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic determined the necessity for physical distancing until May 2023 synagogues employing online modalities became better equipped to handle the "new normal" and clergy and lay leaders understood that the connections made through new inline modalities, although not ideal, were vital to keep communities together. It was reported that in some cases attendance at hybrid services and programs "exceeded pre-COVID levels (Cohen, 2023)."

2.7   Looking Towards the Future

This project is important and timely given the transition from the beginning of the pandemic to our current moment in which non-Orthodox Jewish communities in the United States are continuing to use online modalities in worship, educational, and life cycle scenarios. But what does this actually look like?

The pandemic appears to have exacerbated and accelerated this change. Are we witnessing the creation of Jewish community in non-Orthodox synagogues in the United States through the use of Zoom and other online platforms where online modalities have remained in place since the end of the pandemic? Are we discovering new opportunities in virtual spaces to build social capital between individuals?

Now that the dust has settled on the global pandemic and we begin to assess the new ways in which we engage with each other, are these technological enhancements improving synagogue culture or inhibiting it?

This study will primarily explore the view that the presence of social capital which leads to community and therefore Jewish community has the potential to be created anywhere, including a virtual space where "Jews rely upon one another, who know one another and join together in times of joy and sadness (Wertheimer, 2021)." Due to technical limitations it may be harder to sing together, but increased *kavanah* (spiritual intention) may be the byproduct of the feeling of community and established trust among Zoom *daveners* who pray in hybrid modalities

Conversely, we will explore whether the absence of a hug after services, lack of in-person connection during a kiddush luncheon or oneg Shabbat and other points of social contact proves to be an inhibiting factor for online attendance. For some congregations we may find that the convenience of continued availability of online modalities will keep members from coming into the synagogue again. Although our study will focus on modalities that enable person-to-person interaction, we will also compare interactive modalities with impersonal one-way livestreams that are easier to implement technically.

The literature helps frame the questions that were posed earlier in the introduction. Current use of online modalities, guided by non-Orthodox Jewish professionals and supported by communities of intention to create new spaces in which holiness and social capital can thrive. The gaps in the literature and rapid changes that have occurred in technology and non-Orthodox synagogue life since the COVID-19 pandemic ended provide strong support for a study of the impact of online modalities in creating community within non-Orthodox synagogues and therefore we hope to provide answers to the following questions.

1. How have non-Orthodox synagogues continued to utilize online modalities and in what ways have they changed or evolved in the year after the COVID-19 pandemic ended?

2. How has social capital and meaningful relational community been established in these spaces? What are the potential implications, if any, for non-Orthodox synagogues in the United States?

3. How might we establish best practices to support congregations' use of online modalities in order to create a more cohesive and expanded community?

4. What are some of the challenges and opportunities created by the use of online modalities in non-Orthodox synagogues and how can they help us navigate an evolving Jewish landscape in the future?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The goal of this study was to develop an in-depth view of online Jewish experience at a diverse set of US non-Orthodox congregations. Interviews were conducted with 13 key informants. Each interviewee is a synagogue professional overseeing programs which employ the use of digital technology to engage with its members and others. Interviewees were selected through a convenience sample, through the personal connections of the researcher. Despite an effort to represent a diversity of experiences and environments, all participating congregations were located on the East coast of the United States. We acknowledge this geographical limitation and do not feel it made an impact on the findings.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the Participating Congregations

Congregation	Respondent Code (used in narrative below)	Location	Member Units	Denomination, Affiliation
Congregation of Reform Judaism	CRJ	Orlando, FL	500	Reform, URJ
Beth Israel Congregation	BIC	Vineland, NJ	90	Conservative/Renewal, unaffiliated
Temple Kol Ami-Emanu-El	TKAE	Plantation, FL	750	Reform, URJ
Anonymous	ANON	Washington, D.C. area	580	Reform, URJ
Congregation Shaarai Shomayim	CSS	Lancaster, PA	320	Reform, URJ
Congregation Shir Ami	CSA	Greenwich, CT	75	Reform aligned, unaffiliated
Temple Beth El of City Island	TBE	Bronx, NY	75	Independent, Renewal, unaffiliated
Etz Hayim at Hollis	EH	Oakland Gardens,	355	Traditional

Hills Bayside		NY		Conservative, USCJ
Beth David Reform Congregation	BDRC	Gladwyne, PA	300	Reform, URJ
Temple B'nai Abraham	TBA	Livingston, NJ	600	Independent, unaffiliated
Temple Isaiah of Great Neck	TIGN	Great Neck, NY	60	Reform, URJ
Shirat Hayam	SH	Ventnor, NJ	325	Reform, URJ & Conservative, USCJ
Central Synagogue	CS	New York NY	3200	Reform, URJ

Background data was collected from each respondent prior to the Zoom interview. An online survey was developed using Google forms to collect information about three core areas of worship, education and programming, and life cycle and pastoral care. The survey asked for data from three time periods: before the COVID-19 pandemic (prior to March 20, 2020), during the COVID-19 pandemic (between March 20, 2020 and May 15, 2023) and after the COVID-19 pandemic (May 2023 to November 2024). Following the review of the survey data, each respondent (12 of the 13 surveyed) participated in a Zoom interview. Congregations will be identified by their abbreviations throughout the study (Table 3.1, column 2).

Chapter 4 - Findings

The tables below summarize the data collected from the synagogues about their use of online

modalities. The tables report separately about the three core areas.

Table 4.1 Number of Synagogues Utilizing Online Modalities for **Worship Services** Before, During and
After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Worship Service	Before Pandemic (Prior to 3/20/20)	During Pandemic (3/20/20-5/13/23)	After Pandemic (5/13/23-11/30/24)
No Online Modalities	8	0	0
Erev Shabbat/Kabbalat Shabbat	4	12	13
High Holy Days Services	5	12	11
Shabbat Morning Services	3	9	7
Weekday Minyan	1	5	4

Since the COVID-19 pandemic ended 100% of the synagogues surveyed have continued to engage in

some form of online modality during worship services.

It is not surprising that online modalities for synagogue worship increased during the COVID-19

pandemic from before COVID-19. However, the continued level of online modality employed after

COVID-19 for Shabbat Evening/Kabbalat Shabbat, Shabbat morning, High Holy Day Services and weekday

minyan are important to study as pre COVID-19 pandemic numbers are lower across the board in all the

surveyed synagogues, regardless of size or denomination.

Table 4.2 Number of Synagogues Utilizing Online Modalities for **Education and Programming** Before, During and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

Class/Program	Before Pandemic (Prior to 3/20/20)	During Pandemic (3/20/20-5/13/23)	After Pandemic (5/13/23-11/30/24)
No Online Modalities	13	0	1
Weekly Torah Study	0	12	12
Multiple Session Classes	0	12	9
Single Session Classes	0	12	8
Ongoing Programs	0	7	4
Single Session Programming	0	8	4

 In Table 4.2 we notice that the change in the use of the online modality is even stronger in education/programming than for worship. None of the synagogues reported the use of online education/programming prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. 12 out of 13 congregations have continued to employ online modalities of some kind after COVID-19.

Table 4.3 Number of Synagogues Utilizing Online Modalities for **Life Cycle/Pastoral** Before, During and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

Life Cycle/Pastoral	Before Pandemic (Prior to 3/20/20)	During Pandemic (3/20/20-5/13/23)	After Pandemic (5/13/23-11/30/24)
No Online Modalities	10	1	0
Synagogue Funeral Services	1	12	6
B Mitzvah Tutoring Sessions	2	11	12
Pastoral Counseling Sessions	1	10	9
Shiva Minyanim	0	10	7
Graveside Funeral Services	0	10	4
Bereavement Meetings/Funeral Intake	1	9	8
Premarital Counseling Sessions	0	8	10
Conversion meetings	0	6	3
Baby Namings	0	6	3
Weddings	0	2	1

Table 4.3 highlights the use of online modalities through different life cycle moments and pastoral counseling sessions. Again, the increase during the COVID-19 pandemic is not surprising as there was no other way to engage with members of the community during these important moments. Only one congregation reported no use of any form of online modalities for life cycle/ pastoral during the pandemic. This was the data provided to the respondent and may have been due to a clergy transition. But, 100% of the respondents reported some form of online modality usage for life cycle and pastoral care after the pandemic. However, changes to which congregations continue to utilize online modalities

vary from synagogue to synagogue. Three observations are notable: B Mitzvah tutoring sessions and premarital counseling sessions have not only been retained at a high level since the pandemic, they have increased. Bereavement/ funeral intake meetings have dropped minimally but still retained at a reasonably high level. This may be due to a newfound convenience and the positive results experienced by all parties. An almost 50% drop in online usage for synagogue and graveside funeral services from the period during the pandemic to the period after the pandemic may reflect the fact that everyone could gather safely in person again. Likewise, the retention of online modalities for funerals post pandemic, even at 50% less than before, may suggest that some form of digital streaming needs to be provided for family and friends who cannot travel or attend the funeral in person. A 50% drop in online modalities was also noted by six respondents in conversion meetings and baby namings since the pandemic. However, although this modality was not used at all prior to the pandemic, its retention is notable. The drop may relate to the clergy or congregant's preference for in-person engagement. The retention may show that online modalities provide a viable option to clergy and families alike. Beyond convenience, the expansion of access may provide a more inclusive life cycle experience.

During the interview process the following themes emerged regarding the use of online modalities in synagogues after the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1   Online Modalities: A Necessary Evil or Welcome Development?

100% of the congregations reported that they are currently engaging in some form of online modality for worship, life cycle events, and pastoral care. 13 out of 14 respondents offered an online modality option for education and programs during the past year. The use of online modalities within synagogues is "here to stay" in one way or another (CS), whether or not communities embraced the opportunity or restricted usage to the minimum needed.

Strong feelings about the necessity of using online modalities were expressed by several respondents and it impacted the type of use (i.e., Zoom hybrid or direct livestream) and the occasions for its use (i.e., widespread use of Zoom or restricted to educational purposes only.) For example, one respondent dislikes having to run the technical piece, but he does it and does it well. He sees the benefit to his community and actively promotes and engages usage (CSS). Another "hates" Zoom (CRJ) and direct livestream for services and education and supports only the minimum necessary utilization (CRJ) and others restrict usage due to halachic concerns (EH).

But several of the respondents felt that online modalities, especially platforms like Zoom and hybrid spaces, are a community space like any other (SA). Clergy who actively promoted and were comfortable facilitating hybrid modalities observed as increased opportunities for community engagement and interaction.(SA, SH, CSS, CS)

We can learn from the choices being made that for those whom the use of online modalities in synagogues is a "necessary evil" and technology is limited what is absolutely necessary i.e., minimally for direct livestream of Shabbat services for accessibility and Zoom only for a weekly class. We learn that for those whom the use of a variety of online modalities in synagogue life are providing opportunities to discover the potential of these new "community spaces."

4.2   Fostering Relationships and Developing Community

For those actively engaged in promoting connections between attendees of services and programs, members of a congregation or class or affinity group through online modalities, particularly through hybrid models, the purpose is no different than it is within a physical synagogue space. "Foster relationship. That is the work." (CS). One may observe the presence of a relationship by an awareness of and concern for one another as described by several respondents. "They miss her if she is not there…she is part of the community." (TBS) or the fact that an online participant is so integrated that "everyone

knows her." (CSS) Others noted that the use of Zoom helped to develop a "social community" while also acknowledging the priority of the synagogue leadership to promote and retain the "community aspect." (BDRC)

When the intention to foster relationships and develop community through the use of online modalities is a priority, the pathway to deeper connection between individuals is expanded. When individuals come together in these settings, they feel part of a community.

4.2.1 Empowerment and "Feeling Seen"

Fostering relationships and developing community through online modalities may lead to more than just feeling part of a community. For example, participants who are encouraged to take an active role in an online affinity group or easily accessible virtual gathering like the ones offered by the Neighborhood@Central Synagogue. The Neighborhood is a "fully virtual online community" connected with the large, popular synagogue in New York city. This cohort-based community within a community does not provide "pastoral attention or officiation" and worship is offered livestreamed only for most of the year. Neighbors run the virtual gatherings, discussions and community-led small groups. Neighbors are always " looking for ways to feel seen and easy ways to participate". (CS) For example, their community-led small groups are managed by their neighbors. And because the neighbors run the Neighborhood, this "creates empowerment." (CS). Some congregations offer leadership roles for ritual committee members devoted to the needs of online members. These roles provide an important voice for those who engage through online modalities.(SH)

Engagement and the sense that participants are "being seen" by those around them in a virtual or hybrid setting, helps reinforce their inclusion in a meaningful community. We learn that this can happen online, not only in person.

4.3 Social Interaction Occurring in Hybrid Settings

Hybrid settings allow for interaction between participants in two or more spaces and include an in-person component. This goes beyond a Zoom-only experience where everyone is technically in the same "space." The interaction that can occur between attendees of a service, class, or program has the potential to move beyond the stated purpose of the gathering. Attendees may make the effort to communicate with each other in a personal way. Some observed a "social interaction holdover from the pandemic." Even after the use of Zoom-only was expanded into a hybrid setting in one congregation, participants would continue to greet each other and chat for fifteen minutes even though they were meeting in two or more different spaces. Not only has the hybrid modality continued to offer an opportunity to gather for spiritual, educational or programmatic purposes, "this social interaction has continued." (CSS)

Understanding the importance of social interaction occurring between participants through the lens of a hybrid setup is significant. In communities that only offer direct livestream, the potential for social interaction and the capital that may result is lost.

4.3.1 Through multiple locations

Since first connecting in a hybrid setting during the pandemic, several respondents have observed deepening relationships between those based in the home congregation and others around the world. These relationships continue to flourish. In one case, through the connecting point of hybrid Shabbat services between synagogue members in Lancaster, PA, Western Maryland, and a small town in Italy, evidence of care, concern and reciprocity occurred.

Members in Maryland and Lancaster provided difficult to attain Kosher for Passover products for Roberta in her small town in Italy, because "Roberta was fully embraced by our congregation, and now everyone knows her." (CSS)

One respondent reported that a member regularly joins hybrid services and classes from the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius. If she doesn't appear the rest of the community gets concerned. They miss her if she is not there. She is definitely part of the community even though she will never be, physically." (CSA)

These scenarios highlight how trust, care, and concern can develop between individuals living anywhere in the world. People may meet online through a hybrid modality for a synagogue worship service or program, but the nature of the relationships that emerge form the basis of social capital and extend beyond the purpose of the gathering.

4.3.2 Keeping the community together in hybrid settings

After the COVID-19 pandemic, when communities were once again able to gather in person,100% of the congregations interviewed continued to employ some type of online modality. The decision to retain the use of Zoom and offer a hybrid experience, whether through worship, learning, programming, or life cycle reflected a conscious choice to help keep the community together.

Some communities like BDRC and BIC, which did not offer direct livestream before COVID-19, transitioned to Zoom and stayed there, even at the expense of audio quality because the primary objective was to keep the community together. Zoom provided the visual and interactive component to keep participants connected beyond the chat-only feature of Facebook Live (BDRC, SH) or the TV watching experience of livestream (BIC). Even if the Zoomer attendance is lighter now than during the pandemic (SH, BDRC) they "have maintained the community aspect." (BDRC)

In a community that did offer a livestream alternative, one rabbi went so far as to cancel direct livestream and only offered Zoom during recent High Holy Days because of the need to see, greet, connect and interact with all of the community who attended HHD services virtually during the difficult year since 10/7/23. He admitted that the decision to offer zoom only was very intentional and even

selfish. "I like to know who is there and don't want to be background noise while someone is doing laundry…we must connect as a community."(CSS)

4.3.3 Separate Zoom and room communities

Communities have observed different levels of interaction between "Zoomers" (those who join via Zoom) and "roomers" (attendees who are present in the physical space). Direct interaction between "Zoomers" and "roomers" can be both technically and socially challenging.

Not all congregations see the value of integrating the Zoom community with those present in person, however sometimes there is intentionality in creating a sense of community within the Zoom space. One congregation has a dedicated board member who Zooms into Shabbat services in Gladwyne, PA from her home in New Hampshire and welcomes everyone into the separate congregational Zoom space. There is no engagement with the in-person community, and that is OK, "We know they are with us, but they also have their own thing going on. This works for Beth David." (BDRC)

Others offered hybrid modalities with the intention of promoting interaction between Zoom and the room. But they noticed that Zoomers and roomers were disconnected from each other and engaging "in two very different conversations as two different social communities." (BA)

In the first scenario a separate online communal space was created. In the second case, priority was given to providing opportunities for interaction and connection between all participants. Regardless of the original intention, both types of respondents observed an interaction in their spaces that extended beyond the official reason for gathering. The unique quality of the community (BDRC) and the social aspect arising within the community (BA) are both reported through the employment of online modalities. Interaction with the in-person community is not necessary for social cohesion of the online groups, but it remains a missed opportunity for bonding with the larger group.

4.3.4 Integrated Zoom and room communities

A successful hybrid model which connects in-person attendees with those online requires a technological set-up that fosters interaction.

For example, respondents whose services remain fully hybrid may have an AV professional positioning the video camera and second camera facing the congregation (phone on tripod) so Zoom participants can see those in the room. A large screen at the front of the chapel displays all the participants on zoom so all those attending in person can see everyone on Zoom. (SH). In other scenarios the facilitator is the clergy person who is adept at running the technology and facilitates communication between all members. (SA, CSS, BIV)

At a moment during the service, the service leader may invite those in the room and those on Zoom to wave at each other and acknowledge each other creating one communal space. "Hybrid services are hybrid services, people are waving, people are communicating, checking in on zoom and in the room." (SA)

Throughout the service, attendees might be invited to participate from both home or in the congregation by chanting a prayer in Hebrew, offering a prayer in English, sharing a blessing (SH).

During a conversion blessing for a married couple, one member was physically in the chapel holding the Torah and the other, who had immunosuppressant issues was highlighted on the large Zoom screen. Both received blessings from clergy and all attendees - both in person and on Zoom - responded with the *shehecheyanu* prayer.

This type of experience affects the wider congregation. Relationships are strengthened as individuals transition from only being "roomers" to becoming "Zoomers" and vice versa as barriers break down and

deeper connections are fostered. As these relationships develop, social capital may grow as both in-person attendees and online participants recognize each other as part of the same community.

4.3.5 When Zoomers and Roomers meet

Years of hybrid Zoom interaction between participants in worship, educational and programmatic experiences can foster deep relationships evidenced by eventual in-person meetings. In one scenario, a rabbi and congregant were both planning weddings for their children, one in Pennsylvania and the other in Italy. After years of online connection, they met in person for the first time. The respondent reported feeling a connection which developed into friendship and shared, "I even had the pleasure of meeting her daughter in person. Our children became friends and welcomed their first babies just months apart." (CSS)

In one case, a family of six who is in the process of conversion in New Jersey, lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. During a school break in Orlando, they met for lunch at the home of a fellow Zoomer. Photos from the gathering were shared in a designated text group.

In another situation, a congregational president of a New Jersey synagogue regularly engaged in social conversation with a couple in Florida before hybrid Friday night services began. During a trip to South Florida, they all met up for dinner and a photo of that social gathering was shared with the entire synagogue community.(SH)

We learn that under circumstances which allow for the social interaction to occur in online modalities, elements of social capital may be fostered and community may be built. These qualities include: trust, reciprocity, a sense of belonging and a willingness to reach out to others in a social or caring way. Congregations that do not offer hybrid or Zoom only modalities will not benefit from this kind of community building.

4.4 Communication Benefits Between Clergy and Congregants

4.4.1 Focus and productivity improvements

After the pandemic 8 out of 14 respondents continued to provide bereavement meetings and funeral intakes via Zoom. For some respondents these virtual meetings have led to improved focus and productivity, especially when supporting a member in one location and relatives in different parts of the country. As one person shared, "Zoom allows me to be 'in the room' so to speak with everyone at the same time and there is no need to make twelve phone calls." (SS)

10 out of 14 respondents currently offer premarital counseling sessions via Zoom or Facetime two more than during the pandemic. Without distractions in the office or challenges in travel between parties, respondents have found wedding planning and premarital counseling sessions can be "meaningful" and "much easier" and "brilliant" online. (CSS, TKAE, SH, SA)

The continued use of Zoom, and in some cases, an increase of online modalities for lifecycle planning, may indicate that the digital format provides a necessary convenience for both clergy and congregants. This may also suggest that the outcome of these digital meetings is as authentic as if they were held in person.

4.4.2 Zoom planning no barrier to in-person life cycle events

When it came to finally meeting in person for the life cycle event, respondents reported that the online planning provided "no barrier to communication" in person. For some this lack of barrier extended to Zoom weddings. In both settings the "technology was no barrier and everyone was comfortable." (TKAE)

The pastoral conversations that occur during premarital sessions and funeral intakes are often sensitive and confidential in nature. In order for the lifecycle event to feel authentic, a sense of trust must be developed during the planning between clergy and congregants. We learn that it is possible to create a trusting relationship through virtual modalities that is no less authentic than one developed in person.

4.5   Synagogue Membership Outreach and In-Reach Tool

4.5.1 Younger members and working professionals

Since the pandemic, some respondents noticed that in order to engage parents of young children and

working professionals to serve on committees and in leadership roles a Zoom option was essential.

As one respondent shared, "Offering Zoom options creates better engagement with younger

demographics who have busy lives, families, work commitments." (BA)

This includes potential synagogue leaders who travel, usually members in the younger demographic.

When congregations insist that members attend meetings and events in person some may feel that their

needs are not being met and do not volunteer or participate.

4.5.2 Older adults, members with health challenges

Several respondents acknowledged the importance of offering Zoom and online hybrid access to

members within older demographics and to those with health challenges. (BA, SA, BIV, SH, TKAE, CSS)

Older adults may make the choice to only participate online due to convenience. (CRJ). Additionally,

retirees with second homes in another location outside of the home synagogue community will only be

able to participate if an online option is offered.

If there is no opportunity to engage from a distance, congregants may be inclined to connect with other

synagogues who do offer online modalities. These congregants may even choose to become full or

associate members of other communities.

4.5.3 Access point for the "never affiliated"

Beyond creating access points that may lead to inclusion, one respondent observed that creating an easy

to join online distance only online community like the Neighborhood which is affiliated with Central

Synagogue in New York is a great "way in" for those who have never joined a synagogue, are considering

Judaism, or just curious. He shares,

The Neighborhood is ⅓ affiliated and ⅔ non (never) affiliated. Neighbors are folks on the margins, some would never have considered joining a synagogue. They have always existed on the "outside" of synagogue affiliation or mainstream Judaism. The Neighborhood has been their entry way to Judaism. (CS)

When a synagogue promotes an online communal space including a special membership for populations outside its primary location, the potential to create an entirely new affiliated community expands.

4.6   Interaction during Board and Committee Meetings

Several respondents remarked about their experiences with online board and committee meetings even though the question was omitted from the initial survey. Since the pandemic congregations have held Zoom-only, hybrid, and in-person meetings.

4.6.1 Improvement to focus and flow of meeting

For some congregations offering board and committee meetings online the flow appears to be more focused than in person. One respondent reported that 80% of their board meetings are now held on Zoom and that the experience has been positive. (TKAE) Another added that "board meetings are much improved and on target." (BA)

For others, however, it is a requirement to attend board meetings in person whenever they are scheduled, but a computer is always on hand to "Zoom someone in", if necessary.

A seasonal congregation with large increases in-person attendance during the summer months required board meetings to be held in person during that time. But, it was noted that parents of young children and working adults often had conflicts that necessitated the use of a hybrid set-up.

The improved focus and better time management experienced in board meetings with little apparent side chatter is often offset by a period of social time established before the meeting begins. (TKAE) For

some, though, the inability to share a hug or an in-person conversation makes the Zoom-only model unappealing.

4.6.2 Private chat between members

Not all communication that happens during the course of a board or committee meeting is related to the work itself. Sidebar conversations in the private chat function or on people's cell phones occur often and board and committee members often veer into personal discussion through these other modalities. (SH) Using digital modalities to run business meetings may actually create more opportunities for social interaction.

4.7 Opportunities for expanded programs, services, and interaction

Respondents shared that current technology for online interaction provided opportunities to offer expanded programs and services for their congregants. Additionally, technology like the Zoom platform and others offers special features that enhance the experience of the participants and variety for facilitators. The necessity of using available technology during the pandemic, for some, opened the door for facilitators to become more creative with their services, education and programming in the present day.

4.7.1 Multi-modality programming

Some respondents were excited about the possibilities which have now come to fruition. They sensed that "this was an opportunity not only to continue to provide programs and services but also to mix up the kinds of programs and services that were being offered." For example, the expanded use of PowerPoint and Google Slides helped create services with an artistic component which provided another context for prayer like visual *t'filah.* (TBS, SA)

Several respondents shared that they were not experts in the use of this technology, but learned. They found that by offering variety, community members were drawn to the new modes (visual *t'filah*, etc.)

through online modalities. (CSS, TBS, SA) Despite the lack of training and experience, one respondent said that he became his "own desktop publisher." He added, "I was able to offer a multi-modal experience which could continue after opening up again." (SA,TBS)

We learn that although these technological options may work in an educational setting for some, for others with a strong view against the use of technology in worship settings these innovations may not be welcomed and may not be offered.

4.7.2 Use of chat

The use of the chat function on Zoom provided options for service participation, as well as social interaction. In one congregation a board member who lives in a different state than the home congregation is given the role of Zoom co-host during a Friday night Erev Shabbat service. The co-host actively encourages the participants to "chat" with one another, and welcomes members of our community. For the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer for healing, they "recite a name by typing it into the chat box." (BDRC) After the service concludes, everyone shares "sweet things from the week" with the Zoom screen in gallery view. They engage in chat communication. The group is older and not huge, but "they are grateful." (BDRC)

For communities comfortable with encouraging use of the chat function during worship services, classes, and/or programs the benefit may be deeper engagement and social connection between individuals which may contribute to a feeling of community.

4.7.3 Use of breakout rooms

The use of the "breakout room" feature during educational programming provides smaller groups of people with the opportunity to further explore a presented topic or study more closely together. However, often these spaces create an environment to interact socially and check in with one another. As one respondent shared,

All of these virtual educational and programmatic 'touch points' involve participants engaging

directly with each other online, utilizing the technological features of the platform that creates

opportunities for relationship building. Many breakout rooms have offered an opportunity for

classmates to check in and catch up. (SA)

Some reported that relationships were specifically built between class members based upon the affinity

and small groups they joined which utilized tools such as breakout rooms. (CSS)

4.7.4 Use of whiteboard and other features

The use of the whiteboard and other features on Zoom may promote increased interaction in hybrid

settings between Zoomers and roomers. As one respondent relates, "our educational setting is a fully

hybrid access point and Torah study has been very successful." He adds that he has "amazing success"

with features like the whiteboard and that classes are "very interactive between the roomers and

Zoomers." (CSS)

Although many respondents would prefer weekly classes to be in person with everyone sitting around

the table, the technologies have made a positive difference. This includes the use of other "excellent"

technologies like which connects to Zoom and shows a wide-angle view of the table as well as members

gathering on other designated platforms aside from Zoom. (BA, SA)

100% of respondents reported that they have continued using online modalities for educational

purposes. Weekly Torah study remains the favorite time of the week for several respondents. (CSS, EH,

SH) As such, online modalities will continue to be employed into the foreseeable future creating

innovative ways for community members to learn and socialize together.

4.8   Role of the Facilitator

Most of the respondents served as clergy in key decision-making roles in the synagogue. As such, they

brought their attitudes, biases, religious convictions, membership perspective toward membership, and

personal preferences to their use of online modalities after the pandemic ended. Some facilitators led with great intention to use the technology as much and as meaningful as possible. Others restricted the use of online modalities as soon as the pandemic ended.

4.8.1 Leading with intention to create community and provide alternative spaces for both online and in-person participation

When facilitators led with intention to develop community through the use of online modalities, results could be positive. One facilitator noted that after the pandemic, attendees who had found him online during the pandemic, stayed. He leaned into every available technological tool that Zoom offered and made sure that the congregation had phone numbers and addresses. He offered breakout rooms and anything that could facilitate connection. He deliberately encouraged connection with congregants who were not based in the geography of his synagogue which included "several crypto Jews from the Pacific Southwest and a Kabbalist from Columbus OH." He added, "I think I am pretty good online and there is little distinction to be had." (TBS, SA)

4.8.2 Leading with intention to restrict online access and promote in-person attendance

When facilitators led with the intention to bring people back in person and off of the Zoom platform after the pandemic, the possibility of innovative online connections ceased.

One rabbi shared that "in the early days of the pandemic, admittedly late to the Zoom room, I insisted on *davening* (praying) together outside on the patio. If there was no *minyan* and the mourner's kaddish could not be recited. Now, morning minyan occurs in person and via Zoom on weekdays, but ten people must be present in person in the synagogue. This was very intentional from the beginning. *Daveners* have returned in person. I always saw that we would come out of it and what the consequences would be." (EH)

He ensured that in-person gathering was always the priority option at his synagogue.

However, the same facilitator is very adept at successfully integrating hybrid modalities in educational settings only, he reluctantly acknowledges that,

> We are definitely reaching out across the country and beyond. Classes are hybrid, and I have become adept at facilitating the Zoomers and ones in the room in this setting. However, I wish everyone was in the room. (EH)

In another case, the facilitator wanted to make sure people were coming back into the synagogue, from early on after the pandemic ended. Although she welcomes hybrid engagement, certain honors in the Torah service must be offered in person. (BIV)

Each facilitator had a different comfort level regarding technology use of online modalities which could be offered in their communities. The differences could be related to a variety of factors including halachic issues (Jewish law), membership concerns and innovative opportunities.

In most cases, the facilitator determined how the community would engage with online modalities in worship, education and programming and life cycle and pastoral counseling.

4.9   Challenges

No matter the level of online modality employed by congregations, everyone experienced a challenge in some way. The challenges were primarily technological in nature, however challenges related to issues of *halacha* (Jewish law) and those of a sociological nature were also observed. Another challenge related to monetizing the online experience.

4.9.1 Technological challenges

Respondents observed a variety of persistent technological challenges including: when the internet goes sideways, projector malfunctions, or when someone keeps unmuting and is watching the news. (SA) For those without additional support, it is difficult to run Zoom from the pulpit.(ANON)

Another shared that "room vs. Zoom is not great as some in the room are not looking to cultivate a connection to the online presence because they are in the room and have difficulty extending their awareness with the folks in cyberland." (SA/TBS)

Not every facilitator can manage the experience and modulate the varying technological needs as well as the pulse of the roomers and Zoomers. Size and budget matter. Some common concerns in smaller congregations include having to worry about running the technology, larger congregations have the resources for recording studios. When a special program is unprepared technologically, either without support or proper planning in advance, the entire event may suffer. (SH) Sometimes programs are just better in person. One respondent referred to a fantastic art program that was offered in a Zoom only format but there were multiple challenges due to technology and the modality didn't do it justice. (CSS)

And, of course, in most cases through Zoom-only and hybrid modalities "we can't sing together." (BIV)

4.9.1.1 No Zoom - direct livestream only

Some communities are adamant about offering a direct livestream of services in order to promote in-person attendance because the technological environment in Zoom-only and hybrid settings is just a challenge and not authentic. Not all are convinced of the necessity of an interactive modality. One colleague shared that "services had been streamed for twelve years. We brought in Zoom during the pandemic, but have stopped prioritizing hybrid services and only offer live streaming. We need to be present." For this facilitator, "present" means being physically present in another's space. In response to the decision to discontinue hybrid and Zoom services and return to livestreaming, he shared, "They said you couldn't go back…well that's exactly what we did. (ANON)

In this circumstance, there appeared to be no strong desire to expand interactive connection through technology, despite being a community that was very comfortable with technology for other purposes including the use of iPads for musicians and large screens for visual *t'filah.*

4.9.1.2 *Choosing Zoom over the room*

Some facilitators are worried that congregants will not only stay away but forgo local synagogue membership because of the technology. One shared,

> I hate hybrid mode. It made people lazy. It's so much easier to sit home with a glass of wine, switch over to Central. A long-time member said we were going to come to the High Holy Days last year, but we decided to stream instead. Fewer people show up in the sanctuary, and streaming affects the numbers. But we can't get rid of it.(CRJ)

The technology is perceived as a challenge while acknowledging that Zoom has become the preferred gathering mode for a long time in person Shabbat morning study group. This successful group met in person for years. It went to Zoom during COVID and has never returned to the building. The platform works so well for the group members that if "the only option was to attend in person, the congregants would choose not to attend." (CRJ)

For some, the choice to utilize the technology to connect with one another is perceived as a challenge to the norm of in-person communal gatherings in Jewish spaces.

4.9.1.3 *Three-dimensional vs. two-dimensional*

One respondent noted that the continued use of online modalities in synagogue life can create recentering of community. She noted that a three-dimensional in-person experience cannot compare with a two-dimensional virtual connection. This may lead to overall a poorer quality of social interaction.

Regardless of the current use of online modalities in their respective congregations, many of the survey respondents acknowledged challenges, their members may prefer to stay home. Local members will say, "Oh I don't feel like going in, I will zoom instead." (BIV) The very idea of what "being present" means is being challenged by the opportunity to utilize online modalities.

4.9.1.4 Lack of touch and different energy

Another challenge presented by the use of online modalities in a synagogue setting is the lack of physical touch and change in energy associated with the virtual space. One rabbi shares,

> Technology was essential for survival during COVID - a rigid stance would have prevented continuity post- COVID. However, one quality that is missing is touch. Yes, it's a relationship but it's not a satisfying relationship. I realize the need for people to Zoom, not just because it's more convenient but everyone comments that it's 'so different' in person, there is a qualitative difference, an 'energy' that's missing otherwise. (BIV)

4.9.1.5 Religious/halachic considerations

There will always be a need for a more stringent approach for those who serve the most traditional Conservative communities. No matter what one's definitions and distinctions are regarding Jewish worship practice, the in-person character holds a deep historical, cultural and religious pull. It is interesting to note that one way live-streaming has remained at EH. The intentionality is not unlike the Reform congregation that only returned to livestream and "went back" to the pre-COVID format.

One respondent stated, I was a very late hold out during the pandemic and made a Shabbat concession. Once we returned in person, we would leave the live stream turned on the entire time one way through *mincha/ Ma'ariv* with no interaction the other way. Those who want to can watch the livestream but there is no engagement at all. (EH)

Similarly, one community noted that Conservative Shabbat morning services feature a live stream via Zoom feature operated by a non-Jewish technician who functions as the host. There is usually no communication from the members of the Zoom stream except to share a name for the *mi shebeirach* for healing prayer. The Zoomaster handles the mute and unmute function. (SH)

For some, religious experience just doesn't work online. And it's not for lack of trying. One respondent reflected on his own experience and shared that he once joined his own synagogue's minyan to recite *kaddish* while he was out of town. It was the only time he ever logged on. Sadly, he shared, "*kaddish* was weird - I could only hear my own voice." (EH)

It is important to note that members of Jewish synagogue communities will experience challenges in different ways. By understanding the needs of a particular community, we may understand these challenges a little better.

4.9.2 Sociological Challenges

Some respondents are concerned about long lasting and wider reaching sociological challenges for the Jewish community. For example, one rabbi reflected that she felt that in a world of stuckness there is no risk involved in a Zoom only service. It is safer to stay home. But the "solution is isolation without having to confront separation from others." (BIV) And with all the technological advancements and the ability to connect digitally with one another any time of the day or night, for some "Jewish community is in person." (ANON)

4.9.3 Financial Challenges

Although this study focuses on the development of community through online modalities utilized by synagogues, it is important to note where monetization fits in. For one community there is no hard and fast rule about pledges, dues, and donations and does not offer an online membership. They ask attendees what is meaningful for them to contribute. (CSS)

One respondent acknowledged people have joined the congregation as full members and live 90 minutes from the synagogue. They attend almost every service and program online. Others living out of state have joined as full members, as well, despite the distance. These members would benefit from a special online membership, but it is not offered. (SH) Another shares, "the economics of community are

a little different" with a distinction between onsite and online - it becomes what are you willing to pay. This is changing across the board. His community suggests a donation of $540 but offers options and emphasizes that no one is turned away. (CS)

It appears that if there is perceived value people will pay, no matter how far away they live. Making a financial commitment in some way makes a statement to the larger community that they belong. However, no clear pathway to monetizing the online experience has emerged.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Our study examined the ways in which synagogues have used online modalities since the pandemic ended and how that may have changed or evolved over time. We sought to learn to what extent meaningful communities have been established in these spaces and what the potential implications might be, if any, for synagogues in the United States. We noted some of the challenges and opportunities created using online modalities in synagogues and explored how they can help us navigate an evolving Jewish landscape in the future. Finally, we explored some best practices to support congregations' use of online modalities that might help to create a more cohesive and expanded Jewish community.

Our interviews of congregations highlighted the development of caring Jewish communities rich in social interaction (CS, TBS, CSS, SH, SA), deeper and more meaningful relationships with clergy (CSS, TKAE, SH, SA), and opportunities for synagogue board and committee members to engage (BA, TKAE). We have seen that the role of the clergy/facilitator and the support from lay leadership is vital to integrating or restricting online modalities in the synagogue setting (TBS, SA, EH, BIV).

5.1   Current Utilization of Online Modalities

All of the study respondents reported use of some form of online modality for worship since the pandemic ended. In most cases, participation has doubled from pre-pandemic usage for worship services. (Table 4.1) In the area of education and programming none of the congregations surveyed utilized online modalities before the pandemic, yet 12 out of 13 congregations have continued to offer this option since the pandemic ended. (Table 4.2)

Similarly, all of the congregations surveyed reported the continued use of online modalities for life cycle and pastoral counseling since the pandemic ended. In some cases, online usage has either increased or, at minimum, been retained at a 50% higher level than before the pandemic began. (Table 4.3) The frequency and specific use of digital modalities varied from synagogue to synagogue. For some

congregations, the use of Zoom-only and hybrid models has been actively promoted and used widely in a variety of settings. (CSS, SA, CS, SH, BDRC) Others offer direct livestream-only in worship settings due to halachic considerations (EH) or facilitator preference. (ANON). Yet these same communities offer more interactive digital modalities in educational settings, even though they would prefer attendees to gather in person. (CRJ, EH) The data suggest that the use of online modalities in synagogues may be more than just a passing trend necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and is "here to stay." (CS)

5.2 Establishment of Meaningful Communities

Congregations that actively offer the option of Zoom and hybrid settings as another "synagogue space" in which individuals interact have observed personal connections develop between them. Members are missed if they are not present and are recognized as "part of the community." (TBS) Creating a "social community" and retaining a "community aspect" were achieved online in congregations where digital modalities were prioritized. (BDRC)

"Social interaction has continued" (CSS) during the allotted time for interaction before and after a service, class, meeting, or program. Living in diverse locations did not prevent social interaction between community members (CSA, CSS). In some cases, under the appropriate circumstances, social interaction developed between those in the room and those on Zoom. When participants changed their modality of choice (i.e., the Zoomer became a roomer or vice versa), they felt known to each other. (SH)

The data show that a potential implication of online social interaction is an increased opportunity to strengthen Jewish communities. For example, in person meetings (when they occur) can solidify an already existing relationship that was developed online that exhibits the qualities of care and trust between members (CSS, SH). These qualities are necessary to develop social capital to evolve and strengthen any community, including synagogue communities (Putnam, 2001).

5.3   Challenges and Opportunities within an Evolving Jewish Landscape

Just as all respondents reported some continued use of an online modality since the end of the pandemic, all respondents reported a challenge using online modalities in one way or another. Technological challenges proved to be the most common (SA, ANON, SA, TBS, SH). Some communities restricted Zoom and hybrid modalities due to *halachic* constraints (EH), and others due to the facilitator's view that the Jewish community should be in person (ANON). Others focused on the sociological challenges, including increased physical isolation and lack of physical touch (BIV).

Monetization proved to be both a challenge and an opportunity. How do synagogues offer online worship, programming, educational, and pastoral care without appropriate funding? Some congregations have a suggested fee for their online community (CS), and others suggest that participants pay or donate what they can afford (CSS). One community encourages full synagogue membership but offers no category or reduced cost for out-of-town online membership. (SH)

Another interesting opportunity may be emerging with unaffiliated young adults in their 20s and 30s who continue to drop in via Zoom to their home congregation. For those who "grew up in the congregation and still feel a connection," it "definitely has" helped to retain a sense of Jewish community before settling down (CSS) or those representing the "never affiliated" communities who feel an easy first-time entry into a Jewish space of any kind. (CS)

5.4   Recommendations

Common practices emerged within communities that observed social interaction and deepening community evolve using online modalities for worship, education and programming, and life cycle and pastoral care. Several examples of best practices follow:

- The online modality utilized should not be limited to one-way direct live streaming. This builds access, not community. A well-functioning hybrid and/or Zoom platform that creates the potential for interaction between individuals is necessary.

- The facilitator intentionally creates and promotes communication between those on the technological platform and those in the physical space - between the "Zoomers" and the "Roomers."

- The synagogue clergy and leadership support the endeavor of online interactive platforms.

- The individuals attending online make a (financial or other) commitment to join the synagogue. This helps create reciprocity and trustworthiness between the members of the congregation who attend services, classes, and/or programs in person and those online.

- Technology is as seamless as possible: zoom host, AV operator, community member, or facilitator. This is especially true in hybrid settings.

A further study should be conducted with a wider sampling across the United States. The study should be expanded to explore the experience of those engaging in synagogue life using online modalities. This study utilized a relatively small sample based on the United States East Coast. This study's limitation was reflected in each key informant's biases. We learned about these online experiences through their observations but not from the participant's perspective. Understanding the impact of online modalities in the United States today is a new field and is changing daily. The relatively small body of research on using online modalities in synagogues in the United States post-COVID warrants new studies. Considering the high percentage of congregations currently offering some form of online modalities, the landscape is constantly changing.

This study only interviewed key informants who were responsible for directing their community's online modality use after the COVID-19 pandemic ended. To more fully understand the impact of online

modalities in synagogues today, we must study the reasons why people choose to engage online or not. Future research should incorporate the voices of participants on online modalities, not only on the leaders.

While the scope of this study limits its focus on non-Orthodox synagogues, it is interesting to note the following. In our discussion about the future, one respondent was as curious to see the boundaries and suggested that communities may be grappling with some of the same issues in the Open-Orthodox world. (EH) However, "There can be little doubt that many of the challenges and opportunities faced within the non-Orthodox worlds exist in Orthodoxy as well." (Schiff, 2023 p.5) A recent Google search for online Zoom classes offered by Chabad appears endless. It may be noted that some of the opportunities for community online engagement that were birthed from the pandemic are being utilized where applicable, to some degree in Orthodox communities as well.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Like many other clergy, my weekly Torah Talk group started on Zoom at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. We still meet weekly on Zoom, although members live near the synagogue and other parts of the country. Personal relationships have developed and deepened within the group over time. A sense of trust and caring is evident among the class members, which appears to continue even as new members join the weekly gatherings. Friendships have developed among the class members, and meaningful relationships have endured beyond the Zoom room. Members of the group have traveled together on vacation, supported one another through illness and loss, and celebrated simchas together.

The opportunities and challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic have created new spaces for Jewish connection. But beyond connection lies the potential for strengthening Jewish communities. This study will hopefully show that the use of online modalities can foster deep relationships between members of our congregations, which may help create cohesive synagogue-adjacent Jewish community life in the future.

Bibliography

Ain, S. (2022, September 30). *Why go to one synagogue service when you can go to many? Congregants confess their love of virtual shul hopping*. The Forward. https://forward.com/news/519928/jewish-synagogue-service-shul-hopping-online-zoom-livestream/

AJC (2019, October 29). *75 Years Ago, AJC and NBC Broadcast Live First Jewish Service on Nazi Soil.* https://www.ajc.org/news/75-years-ago-ajc-and-nbc-broadcast-live-first-jewish-service-on-nazi-soil

Ali, S., Wang, D., Hussain, T., & Li, B. (2023). The impact of virtual society on social capital formation: A comparative analysis of Facebook and WhatsApp. *Sage Open*, *13*(4), 21582440231210077. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231210077

Aronson, J. K., Saxe, L., Brookner, M. A., Boxer, M., & Magidin de Kramer, R. (2022). American Jews and the domestic arena: Issue 2, The impact of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic on US Jewry: A preliminary assessment. In A. Dashefsky & I. M. Sheskin (Eds.), *American Jewish Year Book 2020: The Annual Record of the North American Jewish Communities Since 1899* (pp. 87–107). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78706-6_3

Bleyer. (2024, February 2). *The virtues of a virtual minyan*. Tablet Magazine. https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/virtues-virtual-minyan-mourners-kaddish

Braun-Lewensohn, O. (2023). Challenges, opportunities, and coping in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of Jewish communities around the world. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *20*(2), 1107. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20021107

Burton, P. (2023, April 7). *As people return to church after COVID, many still choose online services—WBZ News*. CBS News/Boston. https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/as-people-return-to-church-after-covid-many-still-choose-online-services/

Cambridge English dictionary. (2025, February 12). https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/

Central Conference of American Rabbis. (2020, March 31). *Reform Jewish movement's recommendations on COVID-19*. Ccarnet. https://www.ccarnet.org/reform-jewish-movements-recommendations-on-covid-19/

Ciotti, M., Ciccozzi, M., Terrinoni, A., Jiang, W.-C., Wang, C.-B., & Bernardini, S. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic. *Critical Reviews in Clinical Laboratory Sciences*, *57*(6), 365–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/10408363.2020.1783198

Cohen, S. (2023, August 14). *Synagogues post-pandemic*. Thejewishnews.Com. https://www.thejewishnews.com/community/synagogues-post-pandemic/article_31451b5e-3abd-11ee-aed7-1788be3636d2.html

Debs, H. R. (2020, April 21). *What's real about a virtual shabbat service?* ReformJudaism.Org. https://reformjudaism.org/blog/whats-real-about-virtual-shabbat-service

Goodman, L. (2019, July 1). *What's the future of American Judaism?* What's the Future of American Judaism? https://www.brandeis.edu/now/2019/july/sarna-american-judaism.html

Hammond, P. (1998). *With liberty for all: Freedom of religion in the United States* (1st ed.). Westminister John Knox Press. https://www.wjkbooks.com/Products/0664257682/with-liberty-for-all.aspx

Hartog, K. (n.d.). *After COVID, is there a future for brick-and-mortar synagogues in the US? - The Jerusalem Post*. Jerusalem Post. Retrieved February 11, 2025, from https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/after-covid-is-there-a-future-for-brick-and-mortar-synagogues-in-the-us-648967

Heller, J. (2020). *Streaming services on shabbat and yom tov* (Statement No. OH 340:3.2020a). Rabbinical Assembly. https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Streaming%20on%20Shabbat%20and%20Yom%20Tov%20Heller.pdf

Herring, H. (2012). *Tomorrow's synagogue today: Creating vibrant centers of Jewish life*. Rowman & Littlefield. https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781566994262/Tomorrow's-Synagogue-Today-Creating-Vibrant-Centers-of-Jewish-Life

Hoffman, L. (2006). *Rethinking synagogues; A new vocabulary for congregational life*. Jewish Lights Publishing. http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-248-7

Horsfield, P. (1984). Chapter 1: The emergence of religious television. In *Religious Television: The American Experience*. Longman. https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-1-the-emergence-of-religious-television/

Jacobi, C. J., Andronicou, M., & Vaidyanathan, B. (2022). Looking beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Congregants' expectations of future online religious service attendance. *Religions*, *13*(6), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060559

Jacobs, P. (2023, September 6). *The temple of zoom*. Tablet Magazine. https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/temple-zoom-synagogues-remote-options-after-pandemic

Kaplan, D. E. (2009). *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and renewal*. Columbia University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/kapl13726

Kaplan, D. E. (2013). *The new Reform Judaism: Challenges and reflections*. University of Nebraska Press ; The Jewish Publication Society. https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/jps/9780827609341/the-new-reform-judaism/

Kerbel, J. (2021, January 4). The synagogue after corona: From crisis to opportunity. *The Lehrhaus*. https://thelehrhaus.com/coronavirus/the-synagogue-after-corona-from-crisis-to-opportunity/

Levey, J. (2024). *"To be a sanctuary": In the synagogue and online, American congregations respond to COVID-19* [Princeton University]. http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01dz010t41k

Levine, C. (2016). *Kehilot kedoshot—Sacred communities* [Rabbinical School Senior Project, Academy for Jewish Religion]. https://ajr.edu/wp-content/uploads/Levine-Caren-Kehilot-Kedoshot-Sacred-Communities-Emerging-Models-on-the-North-American-Jewish-Landscape-2016-1.pdf

Lowe, T. (2021, February 26). What is "community" and why is it important? *Centre for Public Impact*. https://centreforpublicimpact.org/resource-hub/what-is-community-and-why-is-it-important/

Martin, S. (2023, November 10). *Online worship post-COVID: Where does livestreaming fit now?* Homiletics Online. https://blog.homileticsonline.com/the-back-page/online-worship-post-covid-where-does-livestreaming-fit-now/

Newfield, C. (n.d.). *Why the NIH Cuts Are So Wrong*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved February 13, 2025, from https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2025/02/13/why-nih-cuts-are-so-wrong-opinion

Nortey, J., & Rotolo, M. (2023). *How the pandemic Has affected attendance at U.S. religious services*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/03/28/how-the-pandemic-has-affected-attendance-at-u-s-religious-services/

Oleisky, J. (2021, June 11). How synagogues can reinvent themselves in the post-COVID era. *JMORE*. https://jmoreliving.com/2021/06/11/how-synagogues-can-reinvent-themselves-in-the-post-covid-era/

Palumbo, P. (2021). Digital religious celebrations during and after the Covid-19. Limits and opportunities for regulation. *Stato, Chiese e Pluralismo Confessionale*, *17*. https://statoechiese.it/contributi/digital-religious-celebrations-during-and-after-the-covid-19-limits-and-op

Pew Research Center. (2021). *Jewish Americans in 2020*. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/

Putnam, R. D. (2001). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community* (1st ed.). Simon & Schuster. https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990

Reisner, R. A. I. (2001). *Wired to the kadosh barkukh hu: Minyan via internet* (No. OH 55:15.2001). Rabbinical Assembly. https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/reisner_internetminyan.pdf

Rochmes, C. E.-R. (2022). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Leo Baeck Temple* [Honors Capstone Project, University of California Riverside]. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9j633060

Salkin, J. (2021, November 8). They returned to synagogue. Now what? *RNS*.

https://religionnews.com/2021/11/08/synagogue-church-worship-covid/

Sarna, J. D. (2004). *American Judaism: A history* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhrczf4

Schiff, D. (2023). *Judaism in a digital age: An ancient tradition confronts a transformative era*. Palgrave MacMillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17992-1

Schwartz, S. (2021, January 19). *Synagogue innovation in the age of corona and beyond*. eJewishPhilanthropy. https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/synagogue-innovation-in-the-age-of-corona-and-beyond/

Schwarz, S. (2017, November 30). *Social capital*. https://www.rabbisid.org/tag/social-capital/

Shimron, Y. (2023, August 31). *For Jews, pandemic-era online worship has an enduring upside*. RNS. https://religionnews.com/2023/08/31/for-jews-pandemic-era-online-worship-has-an-enduring-upside/

Sirbu, R. (2006). The power of the pluralist rabbi. In *Studies in Judaism and Pluralism* (pp. 145–151). Ben Yehuda Press. https://www.benyehudapress.com/books/studies-judaism-pluralism/?srsltid=AfmBOooYSdZwZXU5yYM9WjcZhk9tswLux9K3efogpP2BPW1ej0vw4YFv

Stutman, G. (2021, March 11). *Our pandemic year: Bay Area rabbis look ahead to a post-pandemic future*. Jewish News of Northern California. https://jweekly.com/2021/03/11/bay-area-rabbis-look-ahead-to-a-post-pandemic-future/

Tabachnick, T. (2017, August 7). *Old models of Jewish legacy institutions no longer working, experts say*. eJewishPhilanthropy. https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/old-models-of-jewish-legacy-institutions-no-longer-working-experts-say/

Washofsky, M. (2024). *Reading reform responsa: Jewish tradition, Reform rabbis, and today's issues* (First edition). CCAR Press, Central Conference of American Rabbis. https://www.ccarpress.org/shopping_product_detail.asp?pid=50603

Wertheimer. (2021, March 1). *How Will synagogues survive?* Mosaic. https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/politics-current-affairs/2021/03/how-will-synagogues-survive/

Wertheimer, J. (2021, April 1). *What the Coronavirus has shown—And concealed—About the long-term health of America's many synagogues*. Mosaic. https://mosaicmagazine.com/response/religion-holidays/2021/04/what-the-coronavirus-has-shown-and-concealed-about-the-long-term-health-of-americas-many-synagogues/

Wildman, W., & Sosis, J. (2021). Post-pandemic religion. *Religion, Brain & Behavior, 11*(3), 237–238. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2153599X.2021.1961461

Wolfson, R., & Windmueller, S. (2022, April 6). *Rise of the online synagogue*. Tablet Magazine. https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/rise-of-online-synagogue

World Bank. (2001). *How COVID-19 increased data consumption and highlighted the digital divide. In World Development Report*. The World Bank. https://wdr2021.worldbank.org/spotlights/how-covid-19-increased-data-consumption-and-highlighted-the-digital-divide/

Zhou, D., Li, Y., & Tirasawasdichai, T. (2022). Do online social interactions cultivate social capital? Evidence from a longitudinal study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 989137. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.989137

75 Years Ago, AJC and NBC Broadcast Live First Jewish Service on Nazi Soil | AJC. (2019, October 29). AJC Global Voice. https://www.ajc.org/news/75-years-ago-ajc-and-nbc-broadcast-live-first-jewish-service-on-nazi-soil

Appendix

A.1 Sample Key Informant Interview Process

https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/2023-08/tw_cba23.pdf

A.2 Link to Background Data Survey Google Form

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qqJozDH3LfW2TdNTbNrl6WZHKUyzugnxeVShtpVNgAU/edit

A.3 The Key Informant Participants and their Congregations

Michael Kancher, Executive Director, Congregation of Reform Judaism
Website: www.crjorlando.org

Rabbi Abby Michaleski, Beth Israel Congregation
Website: www.bethisraelvineland.com

Rabbi Cantor Mark Goldman,Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El
Website: www.tkae.org

Anonymous

Rabbi Jack Paskoff, Congregation Shaarai Shomayim
Website: www.shaarai.org

Rabbi David Evan Markus, Congregation Shir Ami
Website: www.congregationshirami.org

Temple Beth El of City Island
Website: www.yourshulbythesea.org

Rabbi David Wise, Etz Hayim at Hollis Hills Bayside
Website: www.etzhayimhhb.org

Cantor Lauren Goodlev, Beth David Reform Congregation
Website: www.bdavid.org

Rabbi Cantor Jessica Fox, Temple B'nai Abraham
Website: www.tbanj.shulcloud.com

Rav Hazzan Jerry Blum (survey only),Temple Isaiah of Great Neck
Website: www.templeisaiahgn.org

Cantor Jacqueline Menaker, Rabbi Jonathan Kremer, Shirat Hayam
Website: www.shirathayamnj.org

Rabbi Andrew Kaplan Mandel, Central Synagogue
Website:www.centralsynagogue.org