

Guest Editorial

A Congregation Is Many Things

By Rabbi Robert Seigel

A CONGREGATION IS SMALL CHILDREN, wondering what they are doing here in the first place, sometimes resentful that they cannot be elsewhere playing with friends, yet somehow aware that their presence at services and religious school is important — to them and to the entire Jewish community. The children are our future. We want them to come and be at home in the temple, to feel that they "own" it — that the temple is theirs. It will pay dividends in years to come.

A CONGREGATION IS YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN, whose social awareness of each other is budding, and for whom the chance to see and talk to each other is far stronger than their desire to hear what is being said during the services.

A CONGREGATION IS A FAMILY looking forward to a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, their minds fixed on the swift passage of time, of the little boy or girl now emerging as a young man or woman.

A CONGREGATION IS A MOTHER AND FATHER making plans for their son or daughter's wedding, hoping their child has chosen wisely, and sometimes grieving silently that loved ones who have died will not be there to share the joy.

A CONGREGATION IS HUMAN BEINGS who carry inside themselves the burden of knowledge of some illness that has come to them or to their loved one, and who fear they will not have strength to endure the trial.

A CONGREGATION IS PEOPLE GETTING OLDER, their powers waning, the sense of loneliness increasing, the unthinkable becoming more and more thinkable.

A CONGREGATION IS HEARTS that have faced a recent bereavement, some crushed by sorrow, and others transfigured by wisdom to rebuild their lives.

A CONGREGATION IS PEOPLE who, through hard work, imagination and luck, have "made it." And it is also people who have not "made it," who think of themselves as failures.

A CONGREGATION IS FAMILIES that know the joy of togetherness and love; and it is also families that are beset with strife and hate and bitterness.

A CONGREGATION IS PARENTS who regard their children as neglectful and ungrateful, and children who think their parents know only how to make their children feel guilty. But a Congregation is also parents and children who share a bond of mature and healthy love for each other.

A CONGREGATION IS HUSBANDS AND WIVES who share partnerships of love and loyalty; and it is also husbands and wives whose hearts are broken by knowledge of lovelessness.

A CONGREGATION IS MEN AND WOMEN who consider themselves to be successes in life, who are in control of their own destinies as much as anyone can be. And a Congregation is people who live lives of deep regret for their past mistakes, who believe they have drifted into situations in which they are trapped and buried.

A CONGREGATION IS THE AGGREGATE TOTAL OF ALL ITS MEMBERS, individual human beings with differing needs and desires, sometimes at odds with the needs and desires of others. Every congregation encounters conflicts of personalities, philosophies and principles. It is the mark of a congregation HOW those conflicts are resolved. In so many synagogues, the members fail to rise above the petty differences — and in some instances, fundamental differences — that separate them from each other. Very few understand that melding a diverse membership into a unified body is a full-time job of arduous labor.

We come from many places and from diverse backgrounds. We have found each other and a sense of comfort in our Jewish identity here at our Temple. But that does not mean that we have the same religious background, the identical ideals, feel the need for the same rituals and traditions, respond identically to the same prayers. We do not. The strength of Reform Judaism has been its understanding of this diversity and an openness to encompass the needs of all, as much as possible. In congregations, as in show business, there are critics and producers. The strength of our temple has been the number of producers. The strength of our members who have given and continue to give so willingly of their time, their talent, their energy to make this a congregation that is central to the lives of so many of its members. That is the true measure of the worth of a congregation.

**Deadline for January Issue
is
December 10**

All copy must be typed and double-spaced.

The Legend Of The Lamed Vovniks

By Marvin Bienstock
Director of Charlotte
Jewish Federation

There is a Rabbinic tradition that the world exists for the sake of 36 righteous individuals. The words in Hebrew for the number 36 are Lamed Vov, so these 36 have come to be called the Lamed Vovniks.

A beautiful part of this tale is that the 36 have no idea who they are. They live out their lives in righteousness because that is the way they choose to live, not because they have any exalted image of themselves and their worth.

Now usually, such stories

overstate their point, but I feel this one is vastly understated. Just offhand, I can think of many more than 36 individuals right here in Charlotte who could be considered candidates to be Lamed Vovniks. I have a different name for them, I call them the "Let Me Volunteeriks".

You know who I am talking about. They are the ones who step forward and agree to do the work so that others may enjoy the products of their labors. They are the members of the boards of our institutions and organizations who spend hours in meetings working out the details that make up the final pattern of com-

munal life.

They are the quiet, caring ones who are there when another human being is sick or in pain and needs physical care. And they are there when the pain comes from loss or from being a newcomer in a new land.

They say that if you want something done you should ask a busy person. Everyone must know that saying, because everyone is always asking these same "volunteeriks".

If there's a building fund or a raffle or the annual Federation/UJA Campaign, you know who will step forward. They will shoulder the responsibility and do the asking even though they will receive little credit. Worse, they will have to listen to the endless excuses of people who act as if the world exists only for their sakes.

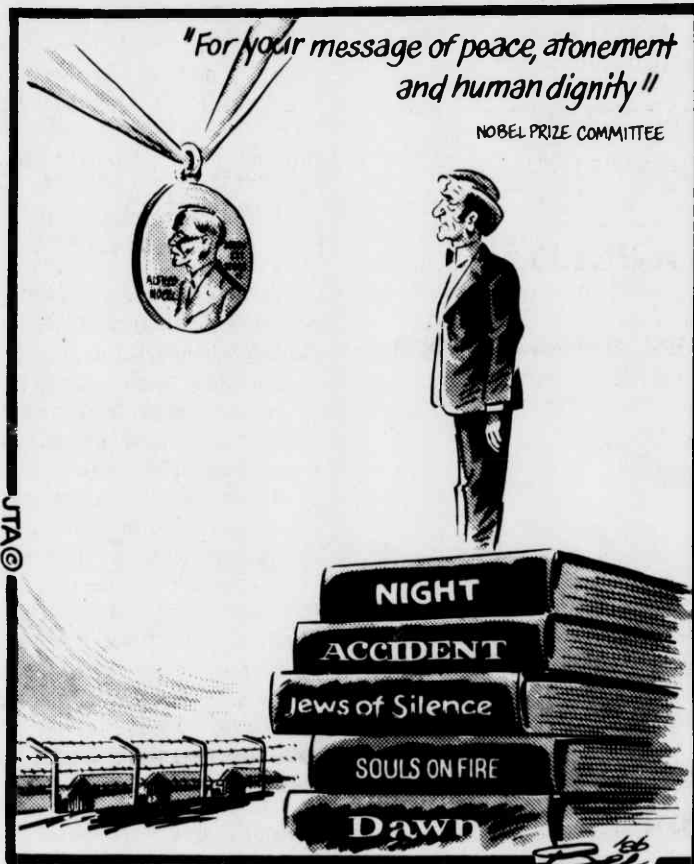
If there's a committee to be chaired, a child to be cared for, an Oneg to be prepared, a group of nine waiting for a tenth for prayers, a class to be taught, a cause to be fought—there they are, our 'volunteeriks'.

I never cease to be amazed at where they find the time. It seems almost as if they defy the laws of the universe, as if some divine hand bends time around them and gives them extra hours in each day.

What of their families? Do they slight their own for the sake of others? Perhaps some do, but I find that they lavish the same kind of care on their spouses and children that they lavish on us. For this they are often rewarded with offspring who grow up in their own image. In their children they can see and take pride in their own reflection. They can sense their own qualities and derive pleasure from knowing that they have ensured quality for all our futures.

Ask them why they do all they do and their answers are not enlightening. They will tell you that someone needs to do it, and it might as well be them.

They bless us by their presence among us just as the legendary Lamed Vovniks bless the world by their presence and deeds. A community with as many "volunteeriks" as Charlotte is capable of accomplishing miracles. Do you doubt that? Then come out to Shalom Park any day and witness our greatest miracle accomplished and prospering through the efforts of our "volunteeriks".



Letters to the Editor

This space is supposed to be utilized by you, our readers, to share your thoughts, grievances, criticisms ... anything which would be pertinent to our community. There are so many issues locally, nationally and internationally about which I am sure someone "out there" would like to make some comments. All it takes is a few moments of your time.

The past two months I have relinquished my editorial space to the learned rabbis of our two temples. Guest editorials are always welcome.

If you have any suggestions concerning the make-up of *The CJN* or would like certain columns included monthly, I hope that you will contact me. In the past seven years, *The CJN* has won five CJF National Awards...the latest being an Honorable Mention which was presented at the recent General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations held in Chicago. Unlike other years, when we competed only with other small city newspapers, the large, middle and small communities now vie against each other. First place went to the Federated newspaper of Chicago. We were in excellent company, and to all the winners we ex-

tend a hearty "Mazel Tov."

The January issue will mark the 8th birthday of *The Charlotte Jewish News*; it really seems like I've been doing it forever! Why not wish *The CJN* a happy birthday by sending in your comments. Thank you and may you all have a very happy Chanukah and a healthy '87!

— Rita Mond
Editor

We encourage our readers' viewpoints. Letters should be submitted typewritten and double-spaced and signed. Please include your address and phone number. We reserve the right to edit.

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

Published monthly by:

Charlotte Jewish Federation.....Marvin Bienstock, Director
Foundation of Charlotte Jewish Community &
Jewish Community Center.....Barry Hantman, Director
N.C. Hebrew Academy.....Berta Straz, Administrator
Lubavitch of N.C.....Rabbi Yossi Groner, Director
Editor.....Rita Mond
Advertising.....Blanche Yarus

Copy deadline the 10th of each month
P.O. Box 13369, Charlotte, N.C. 28211

The appearance of advertising in *The News* does not constitute a kashruth endorsement.