

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE An Evolving Federation System

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The federation of the future will be more inclusive, more welcoming of debate, enjoy increased financial and human resources, have stronger connections to the worldwide Jewish community, and will take advantage of technological advances to achieve more and faster communication with its constituents. However, it will still define Jewish responsibility in the same way as federations of today, and its critical concern will continue to be Jewish continuity.

It is very difficult to predict the future. The past several years have demonstrated that even when one predicts the future accurately, events in Jewish life usually overtake any thinking or vision that one may have. Could anyone have predicted the changing dimensions of Jewish life in the world during the past five years? Or could we have really imagined that, as we sit in 1995, we would be using a new lexicon to talk about fast-paced, immediately accessible communication on the cyberspace? Such words as Internet, World Wide Web, and even E-mail have become commonplace and understood by most people. Today one expects an answer five minutes before the question is asked.

When I was in high school, the old school building was being demolished to make room for a new modern facility, and the cornerstone was being opened to find out what pearls of wisdom our forefathers had written one hundred years earlier. When the crane crashed down on this centennial message and everyone was standing silently, trying to anticipate what people five generations ago were thinking, one could hear a pin drop. When the president of the Board of Education began to read the document, the silence quickly turned into laughter. The bottom line was that the predictions all missed the mark by fifty years or so. The generation looking into the future did not have confidence in the rate of growth and change that society would un-

dergo, and they measured tomorrow by what they perceived was the growth rate of their day.

The celebration of a hundred-year history is something of which the entire Jewish world can be proud. When the seeds were planted for the federation system to grow, Jews from far-away lands were arriving in the United States looking for a piece of the Golden Medina as they ran from pogroms and oppression and searched for free expression. The past century has been a wonderful illustration of the federations' capacity to change. They showed determination, commitment, and the ability to grow and flourish despite terrible odds and some of the worst examples of man's inhumanity.

During this century each generation has left a firm and dedicated legacy for future generations, thereby creating a dynamic Jewish community. Children and grandchildren were given great opportunities to build on the work of previous generations. And now, as we celebrate one hundred years of strength, we have to look to the future. One might feel that my "crystal ball" is colored by rose-colored glasses. There may, in fact, be some truth to that. Yet, the Jewish federation system has served Jewish life well. Even with its own limitations in resources—financial and human—never has so complex a voluntary system done so much for so many while always rising to new challenges. The annual campaign of the federation system has been and will con-

tinue to be the mainstay, the fuel, and the underpinning for all of the systemic and endemic change that will need to take place as we face new challenges.

As we look through the crystal ball together, what do we see? How will we address Jewish community, and what will develop to continue to help the Jewish community be relevant and worthwhile to Jews? The themes of the federation system of the future are sketched out below.

THE WIDER NET OF THE FEDERATION

The pride in having a roof organization, an umbrella of sorts, will continue. Jews need to be safe in community, and the federation has provided a safety net, second to none, that has allowed a comfort level for all Jews and all issues. But this net will need to be bigger, stronger, and better, and so wall-to-wall coalitions will be built. Society in general and the Jewish community specifically will be much more focused on grassroots involvement, and the federation of tomorrow will work much harder at being inclusive with wide-open doors. That is not to say that the federation of today is a closed institution. It is not and will never be! Tip O'Neill, the famous long-time Speaker of the House, said "All politics are local." In the new federation all decision making, representation, and reference points will be focused on the needs of the masses, and no organizational framework will exist as an island unto itself.

As the hundredth year is celebrated in Boston, it is important to recognize that this location reflects the profound statement made by the participants in the Boston Tea Party—*no taxation without representation*. For almost 220 years America has been struggling to ensure a democratic value system of representative decision making. For one hundred years, the federation system has been struggling with the same issue. The struggle will be resolved by the federation of tomorrow—a dynamic local instrument dedicated to the proposition that every Jew is a stockholder in the Jewish enter-

prise. The federation will continue to be the change agent of Jewish life and focus its energies on what it does best—building a community.

DEBATE AND CONSENSUS

Today, federation is no longer a behind-closed-doors family gathering. Everything is public, and what organizations do today is reported tomorrow. Things that used to be unmentionable are now mentionable.

What has been our greatest strength has been the ability of the community to make each decision with a consensus position. The future will strengthen our resolve to build a stronger, democratically valued consensus. However, there will be a major change—active public debate will be part of federation deliberation. The community will build a house completely enclosed by glass and surrounded by all aspects of community life looking in, viewing while participating in the action. The Jews in North America are not monolithic, and therefore, there are multiple streams of thought on virtually every issue. The federation will continue to encourage the proponents of all of these issues to come to the table and be presented. What will change is that the diversity of opinion will be more valued as an asset of active Jewish life, and the federation will embrace our differences in the same manner that it embraces our similarities.

In the future, leaders will feel less uneasy about issues being contested and debated and more secure in dealing with controversy. Debate is not and will not be the antithesis of a consensus. It will be treated as the instrument to build a consensus, and the strength of the open-door glass house will be the recognition that the only address in town that gives ears to legitimate points of view in the deliberative process will be the Jewish federation.

In this vein, the federations will begin to redefine what makes good process, with the full recognition that the ultimate decision is not always as important as the building of

consensus through bringing together divergent constituencies with divergent points of view. The stockholders of the enterprise are the million people who make an annual gift so that they can ensure a Jewish future. These stockholders will continue to have divergent points of view, and the federations will be aggressive in seeking their input around the table in order for strong and effective decision making to take place.

GROWTH OF FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

In this time of wondering what is wrong, we must acknowledge what is right. The federation system has been the most envied and successful philanthropic enterprise on the continent. It can be proud of its past because it has always put its dollars where the needs were greatest. One million Jews throughout North America have provided substantial sums of funds year after year to support this effort. Many times Jewish needs caused Jews to give *tzedakah* at great personal sacrifice, and they did. Tens of thousands of lay and professional leaders throughout our system have given of themselves so that the community could do what it needed to do. I sit in awe of the professional leadership who have given so much to bring us to where we are today.

It is very difficult to imagine the quick-paced fast growth of a consensus system, such as the federation. But the future will make that rapid growth a reality. The federation system will raise more funds from more people to do more things. This will require a clear understanding and new covenant between the Jewish community and the federation. The new campaign will be innovative and involve larger numbers of Jews as part of our broader concept of community building and as contributors to the all-embracing campaign for Jewish needs worldwide. The federation system will move to a more national campaign that will demonstrate the totality of Jewish needs, and the federations will coordinate their campaigning so that everyone can see the

width and breadth of the umbrella at the same time and in the same way. Much has been written about financial resource development, and there is little to add. The annual campaign of the enterprise will continue to be central to the organization, although it will feel, look, and act differently.

In the new era of campaigning, our enabling people to provide resources to the enterprise will become more donor centered. Tomorrow's donors will want to feel their commitment in a different way. Billions, if not trillions, of dollars will transfer from one generation to another, and in 100 years the federation will have found the way to become very relevant to this new generation of Jews who want to experience hands-on philanthropy.

The oneness and fresh air of the federation system will bring more and more people to the table in a variety of roles. Deployment of volunteers and lay leaders will provide the greatest asset that the voluntary sector has ever known. The federation will re-engineer itself to be more effective and to involve a greater number of people to raise more resources. In the next century, more and more people will enter our ranks at a younger age, more educated and committed to providing a strong Jewish future.

BROADER DEFINITION OF JEWISH COMMUNITY

The definition of Jewish community will change and will broaden as Jews find new ways to connect with the worldwide Jewish community. The historic division between Israel and the Diaspora will end, as most certainly, Jewish identity will be based on common definition and not geography. The struggle to define the Israel-Diaspora relationship will be replaced by the struggle to define Jewish identity. Jews around the world will struggle to find meaning in their Jewish existence, and there will be less ideological schisms and more Jewish debate in the world arena. The movement of people from one place to another to connect to each other will cause the Israel experi-

ence to explode into a panoply of opportunity. Jews from the Former Soviet Union, which will have its own sense of community by that time, North America, and Israel will have found the place to build the Jewish house together in order to build a strong Jewish world for the future.

And yes, the nature of the relationship between world Jewry and Israel will be different. Funding will continue to increase as new opportunities will present themselves for building a strong Israel, which will celebrate its centennial during the middle of the next century. In the 103rd year of the federation movement, the General Assembly will celebrate its first fifty years, which will inaugurate a new vision for the way Israel and North American Jewry relate to each other.

A MORE CONNECTED AND FASTER-PACED JEWISH COMMUNITY

The technological revolution will make events happen faster and more dependably. A telephone call to Israel will cost about the same as calling across town. A trip there will take six hours and cost about the same, in relative terms, as a cross-country journey. Cyberspace will provide instant access and accountability to everyone, and there will be no excuse for not knowing information and not responding to it. The local federation will be accessed by every household, and E-mail will cut down on postage costs for people wishing to connect to the Jewish world. Videophones and conferencing will allow engagement of people worldwide, and

there will be more and more and faster and faster communication. The issue will no longer be access to information, but rather its content. The task of the new era will be to help people gain easy access to high-quality material. The overarching concern during this new reality will be how to maintain human contact and all that encompasses while at the same time being responsive to the communication, transportation, and cyberspace technological explosion.

CONCLUSION

The federation of the future will define Jewish responsibility in the same general terms as earlier generations while, at the same time, responding to ideological, sociological, and conceptual changes in the landscape. Despite the wide net of federation life, debate, consensus, growing financial resources, the connections necessary for Jewish self-definition, and the hi-tech revolution, future generations of Jews will continue to ask this critical question: What kind of Jewish community did I build for my children and grandchildren? I feel that their answer will be, "An incredible one." In the coming years, the catch words of Jewish continuity and Israel-Diaspora relationships will change to become ones of action. The "first hundred years" generations did something good in that they provided for the second hundred years with determination. Young leaders of tomorrow will take control of the Jewish future with great vigor and will change the culture of the federation system.

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Journal of Jewish Communal Service (ISSN 0022-2089) is published quarterly: spring, summer, fall and winter at \$30 per year, \$8 per single copy, \$12 per double issue. ©1995 by the Jewish Communal Service Association, 3084 State Highway 27, Suite 9, Kendall Park, New Jersey 08824-1657. Second-class postage paid at Lancaster, PA 17604-3657. Postmaster send address changes to JCSA, 3084 State Highway 27, Suite 9, Kendall Park, NJ 08824-1657.

Compositor: COMPUTER MAVEN, BALTIMORE, MD

Printer: LANCASTER PRESS, LANCASTER, PA

A Quarterly of Professional Trends and Developments

JOURNAL

OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

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Published by the Jewish Communal Service Association

3084 State Highway 27 • Suite 9 • Kendall Park, NJ 08824-1657 • 908-821-1871 • Fax 908-821-5335
