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## N.J. Group Pays Visit to Cuban Jewish Community

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Schwartz, who is also the mission's co-chair.

A teacher praised Cuba's small Jewish community following a December visit by the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey to the island nation.

"They have a very strong spirit, or *ruach* [in Hebrew]," said Marcia Schwartz, a Spanish teacher at Edison Township Public Schools for the past twenty-five years, according to *MyCentralJersey.com*.

Cuba has fewer than 1,500 Jews, a population too small to maintain a rabbi. The group had attended on a Friday night *Shabbos* service at Temple Beth Shalom, which is the largest of Cuba's three remaining synagogues and is part of the Jewish cultural center called the *Patronato*.

"The youth group led a lovely service in Hebrew and Spanish," said

The service was attended by at least 100 Cuban Jews, according to *MyCentralJersey.com*.

Roughly 90% of Cuba's Jewish population fled after dictator Fidel Castro seized power in 1959.

"Most of them left Cuba in the early 1960s and settled in the Miami area, and some even settled in New Jersey," Schwartz was quoted as saying. "Many of the people who stayed were older people, or people who had family members who were ill."

Due to its small numbers, the community is struggling with the issue of intermarriage as well.

"There's a lot of conversion into the Jewish community," Schwartz said. "They're welcoming to take others in."