



Changes in Society

Jewish Society

The Market Driven Community

Jewish Winnipeg Demographics

Innovative Approaches to Judaism & Jewish Life

A Brief History of Jewish Winnipeg

Jewish Society

Society has changed. Tremendous leaps in industrialization and technology have changed the way people build communities and civil society since the first settlements in North America. The way individuals relate to each other and to organizations has a significant impact on how communities need to adapt over time in order for Jewish community to remain relevant now and in the future. The following is the second in a series of papers prepared for use as background for the various community planning efforts undertaken by the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg in 2016.

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Key Trends:

- Jewish Identity is less and less derived from denominational affiliation and harder to obtain as society is more open and welcoming.
- Globalism is reflected in Jewish society through the principles of Jewish Peoplehood and the practical reality of online communities and resources, access to everything that is happening worldwide in seconds.
- Young Jews are re-inventing the practice of Judaism and themselves as modern Jews.
- Israel is a strong connection point for many Jews, though love of Israel is interposed over ambivalence about the political reality.
- Secular Judaism is blurring with religious Judaism as Jews embrace their traditions, history, and culture along with prayer.
- Post-denominational, non-denominational, multi-denominational, cross-denominational and pluralistic are replacing Conservative, Reform, etc. in describing new programs, educational models, and other aspects of Jewish life.
- If this diverse understanding of affiliation includes independent minyanim and chavurot and traditional synagogues and all, there is evidence to suggest that more Jews are affiliated than ever before.
- As communities become inclusive of all kinds of Jews e.g. intermarried families, same sex couples, and gender creative children affiliation and community can grow.
- All of these trends will require creative and innovative approaches to funding, defining membership, volunteerism, etc.

1. Jewish Identity:

The Winnipeg Jewish community faces challenges like other Jewish communities. How do we maintain Jewish identity in a society that accepts us, in modern times when institutional religion has fallen out of favour, when our sense of peoplehood is highly influenced by Israel?

Liberal Society: The good news is that we live in an open, democratic society that most often welcomes Jews into all aspects of life: business, academia, clubs, social life, culture and the arts, and so much more. The waning and unacceptability of prejudice and anti-semitism in personal interactions in modern society means that the vast majority of Jews alive today have never been the object of an overt anti-semitic act. So what makes us feel Jewish?

The lack of negative influences has given rise to new positive expressions of Jewish identity that blur the lines between culture and religion.

Globalism: With the historical dispersion of Jews who retained a common identity of peoplehood as well as religion, Jews had a head start. The advent of technology to support global connectedness has reduced community isolation by leaps and bounds in a period of twenty years.

As a Jewish community it is as much or more strongly apparent that we live in a global age. We are more influenced by the outside world than some of us think. These influences come to us from as varied sources as the internet and the grocery store. Young people from Winnipeg find communities online that lead to trips with other young Jews for service learning. While the kosher products in our grocery store have symbols from kosher agencies from around the world.

In the last two decades Winnipeg Jews have leaped into modernity, driven by instant access to information worldwide, a pioneering spirit, and Winnipeg do-it-yourself attitudes. The influence of young Jews moving away and back, new immigrants moving to Winnipeg, and a high rate of travel to Israel allow Jewish influences from many other places to accelerate the pace of change for the Winnipeg Jewish community.

Jewish online: Jews have embraced the Internet with extraordinary vigor, even as Israelis have participated in the rapid development and deployment of new communications technologies worldwide. In addition to finding the answer to almost any question on Judaism online, one can find texts with and without translation, learn Torah trope interactively online, take credit and non-credit courses online in most aspects of Judaism including Talmud study, participate in a Shabbat morning service and even get matched with a telephone study buddy. And then there's J-Date and social networking. Jews have access to information and to each other without ever setting foot in a Jewish institution. Want to learn to make the perfect Challah? Check out YouTube for dozens of recipes and different instructions.

In modern society it is even possible to find a community online. While sociologists and psychologists study this phenomenon and what it will do to change the nature of human interactions, the power of the internet and online sources grow daily.

Rebooters.net – Communities through the net is a concept not easily accepted by established institutions. With research behind them and Summits to vet and test new ideas, Rebooters is finding new ways to re-invigorate Jewish identity and practice for plugged in Jews. Synagogues and communities can now get involved by hosting discussions and events that add a face to face component to an online discussion.

10Q is a young initiative that offers anyone a new way to reflect on your year and improve yourself for the 10 days of awe from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. What's Jewish about this reflective community and website? The questions, the timing, the underlying study that went into its invention and the ability for any Jewish group to use the material now being prepared to enhance the learning with face to face discussion in a local Jewish setting make this initiative both a Jewish activity and a portal for those who want more.

Find new expressions of Jewish identity - <http://www.rebooters.net/>

Attend a service you're your home -

<http://www.jewishwebcasting.com/synagogueserviceselive.htm>

Study with an online partner

<http://www.partnersintorah.org/>

Israel, Zionism, and Alienation: For some years now it has been clear that younger Jews do not connect with Israel in the same way, with uncritical commitment and trust, or with the same level of emotional attachment as in the early days of the State. But Winnipeg continues to boast a high rate of travel to Israel on educational tours and programs like March of the Living, birthright Israel, one year at Hebrew University's Rothberg School, and various students who attend a variety of high school, yeshiva, travel/study, and university programs.

It is clear that younger Jews are less attached to the State of Israel than older Jews. The authors of a recent research report describe how they set out to study the extent of this phenomenon and determine whether it is related to the birth cohort or life cycle (will change as each cohort ages).

They found "That each age group is less Israel-attached than its elders suggests that we are in the midst of a long-term and ongoing decline in Israel attachment." Each cohort is less attached than their elders, and it is more pronounced among intermarried Jews. "It does appear that levels of attachment are linked to when people were born and came to adulthood." However "...it seems fair to say that the [single] Israel trip [e.g. birthright] leaves a noticeable lasting impact on attitudes toward Israel" and that it has a more pronounced effect on young Jews.

For those who work with young adult Jews in their twenties, the dichotomy of love of Israel and ambivalence with Jewish establishment positions on Israel is frequently evident. Students who express love of Israel or interest in Israel are not always prepared to engage in Israel Advocacy activities. The rise of J-Street as an alternative Jewish political voice on Israel in the United States is a phenomenon echoed in private conversations and debates among groups of Jewish young adults.

The Pew Report notes that about 60% of Jews 18-49 “feel somewhat attached to the Jewish state”. Only 23% of “Jews of no religion” see Israel as an “essential part of being Jewish”. Among Modern Orthodox Jews, 79% see Israel as essential.

Alienation has come about as a result of lack of acceptance of diverse points of view among Jews who love Israel. J-Street is an example of politically diverse views amongst Jews who are supportive of Israel in some way.

Synagogue as the central institution for Jewish community: Synagogue and church memberships are down. Did you know that annual dues were invented in 1824 to counteract the auctioning of honours in the synagogue? They no longer fulfill the purpose of enhancing belonging based on the new experience.

The model of the synagogue as the central point of connection for Jewish identity, Jewish education, friendships through sisterhood, youth groups, family programs has waned. Synagogues are less attractive to individualistic young Jewish or intermarried families. This trend towards individuality is forcing many synagogues to re-think the way they operate, re-examining the financial model, the services they offer, the way they attract members, etc.

2. Blurring of culture and religion

Culture at its basic level is what people do. Therefore, Judaism is a form of culture. Going to a Jewish film festival is an expression of Jewish identity for some, just as going to Shabbat services is an expression of Jewish identity for others. As synagogues offer Israeli dance and JCC's offer Shabbat dinners the lines between religious and cultural Jewish identity and behaviours blurs.

In 2013 Ruth Calderon became an MK and brought silence to the Knesset as she, a secular scholar, taught Talmud to the Knesset in her maiden speech. Ruth is the founder of Elul, a pluralistic Beit Midrash. At Elul, text study is not a religious activity but an act of embracing our heritage.

It is not uncommon that community events include Shabbat candles on Friday night or Havdallah on Saturday night.

A recent release about foundation awards highlighted a program of the Manhattan JCC that "offers a portal for engagement in Jewish life and community within small, supported groups (chavurot)." Chavurot is a term that is applied to Jewish non-denominational prayer groups, friends who gather to daven on Shabbat or celebrate holidays together.

Post-denominational Judaism: Samuel Freedman tracks the polarization of Jewish denominations in the year 2000 in his book *Jew vs Jew*. In the Epilogue, he speaks of the demise of secular Judaism. Jewish humour is actually American humour. Bagels are everywhere. Volunteerism is encouraged even through public policy without ever hearing of "tikkun olam". The grand and great-grandchildren of principled secular Jews – Yiddishists, Communists, Bundists, etc. often seek meaning in their Jewish identity, but as familiar "Jewish characteristics" become common place in society, it is harder to identify with Jews as a unique ethnocultural group.

Without the Jewish education of their ancestors, they can not reject religious Judaism. These seekers are found in chevrahs, independent and partnership minyans, yoga retreats, online communities like Rebooters' 10Q and many new initiatives that look nothing like synagogues. Many young Jews are attracted to Jewish groups that allow them to identify with a broader social agenda.

Wertheimer's research found young Jewish leaders who "care about some aspect of being Jewish and have strong commitments to create a particular type of Jewish community – one that helps their peers find meaning in being Jewish and that is welcoming and inclusive." He identifies three aspects of the American Jewish agenda that engage young Jews.

Protective programs that engage strongly identified young Jews in preserving Jewish life include programs that support the Jewish poor, offer stronger Jewish educational opportunities to strengthen weak Jewish identities and get involved in mainstream

Jewish organizations that engage in activism to combat anti-semitism and support Israel.

Jews still tend to view other Jews as an advantaged group in society and like to contribute to the improvement of society as a whole. Environmentalism, service projects by Jews in the general community or abroad, and “social justice causes, including what they regard as justice for the Palestinians” all attract Jews in their 20s and 30s.

Young Jews also seek personal and spiritual meaning in their Jewishness. The menu includes all aspects of Jewish culture including foods, languages, film, music, new forms of Jewish religious services, and a wide array of Torah study opportunities.

Jewish Secularism and God: “Secular Jews do not replace themselves. We just grow new ones in each generation.” These words spoken by a secular Jewish reporter for Jewish press at a satellite broadcast of a panel of Jewish thinkers is a startling statement in a community with such strong Yiddishist/Zionsit/Socialist secular roots. But it is a reminder that Judaism is indeed a religion.

A popular book for families studying for bar mitzvah is called “Putting God on the Guest List”, by Jeffrey K Salkin as even affiliated Jews struggle with liberal secular ideology.

Judaism and Jewish tradition have much to offer. Intelligence on young Jews and spirituality suggests that God *is* on their guest list. Authentic and unabashed use of texts, traditions, and religious practices is essential to engaging young Jews. The way in which it is offered is as important as the authenticity. But secularism does not satisfy Jews who are looking for spirituality in the way that Judaism does.

While God talk is not popular in upwardly mobile Jewish circles, there is no evidence that it prevents Jews from getting involved in something Jewish. ***It is not God, but the perceived exclusivity of human Jewish society that creates an entry barrier.***

Weakening Denominational affiliations: A recent article in the Forward outlined statistics that show weakening levels of membership and a rebellion of leaders against the denominational affiliation. Even larger congregations are having trouble seeing why they need to pay high dues to denominational oversight bodies. The author quotes a professor of sociology, religion and divinity as describing a phenomenon generally in congregational life – not specifically Jewish. “What is unambiguously a trend is lower amounts of money being given by churches to denominational offices, and that is causing financial turmoil at the denominational level.”

The Pew Study notes that fully 30% of Jews do not identify with any denomination and 66% of “Jews of No Religion” belong to no particular denomination.

Cross-denominational, non-denominational, pluralistic: Rabbi Arthur Green of Hebrew College quotes his mentor Rabbi David Hartman of the **Shalom Hartman Institute**. Hartman says “As long as we are learning, we can all be together. As soon as

we start *davening*, we go off into separate rooms.” These two are examples of well-established institutions that have insisted on a non-denominational or pluralistic approach to bringing Jews together around “learning, spiritual work and human kindness ... Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim”.

The **Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies** in Jerusalem engages adults in Talmud study and much more within a traditional model that reaches out to and respects Jews of all backgrounds.

Limmud, a Jewish learning festival which started in England more than thirty years ago is fiercely pluralistic, insisting that all forms of Judaism and Jewish experience are welcome. Shabbat morning can include a diverse array from Torah yoga to ultra-orthodox services.

In the last ten years there has been an explosion of programs and prayer choices that follow this principle.

Regardless of their background, from orthodox to secular humanist, Jews at university with an interest in an ongoing Jewish connection meet at Hillel or an equivalent Jewish student organization, where they will have a hand in shaping a non-denominational prayer option, or in a social service program, or engage in Israel advocacy or socialize with other Jews. They experience a welcoming environment, often lay/peer led, with a high level of participation, with little or no cost. Similarly, Jews in the 20s and 30s who join an independent minyan may not find an option in an established congregation that engages them.

Newer models of minyanim are less interested in distinguishing religious and cultural Judaism. In the same way that denominations are less interesting to younger generations, those Jews are also less interested in the political position of institutions that see bar/bat mitzvah as a synagogue thing rather than a life cycle event that can be celebrated in any convenient venue. The “independent minyan” list published by Mechon Hadar includes groups who meet on Friday night for dinner or gather to do tikkun olam projects, even though they don’t pray together.

Steven Cohen finds evidence of the rise in **nondenominationalism** in the 1990 and 2000 US National {Jewish} Population Studies. A common experience for someone in their 30s might look like this. You

- grew up in a community day school,
- attended one synagogue with your grandparents for high holidays throughout your youth,
- possibly had a bar mitzvah which may have been a stressful event relieved only by a great party,
- had Shabbat dinners at university that were social events on a Friday evening paid for by Hillel or Chabad or another Jewish organization,
- had an amazing lay led Shabbat experience while attending a student conference,
- went to Israel for free on birthright, and
- married a non-Jew in a civil ceremony just as you settled into a new career.

Inter-denominational criticism and infighting is not of interest to you. Talmudic debate without any of the satisfying sense of the spiritual you got during college, is how you remember Jewish school and synagogue.

It should not be a surprise to anyone that you are not interested in any particular Jewish denomination. With enough background to drive you to pursue some sort of Jewish connection for your family, you will look for the most welcoming, accessible environment as the priority characteristic for having a positive Jewish experience.

Empowered Judaism: In his book on what Independent Minyanim bring to modern Jewish life, Rabbi Elie Kaunfer offers insights into what attracts young Jews to alternative options. , pg 81.

“...what animates the attendance at the minyanim is a connection to the vibrancy of Jewish prayer and community. If that vibrancy is missing....people may go back to their pre-minyan Shabbat routine: sleep through services and find other ways to engage with their spiritual side. This generation does not join out of guilt or institutional obligation, but out of a search for meaning, then if the meaning is absent, some will not join at all.”

It is the welcoming, participative model of davening that engages those who have experience but no attachment to a particular movement. It is the warm, close sense of community that engages those without Jewish experience in prayer. This combination creates a comfortable environment rarely found in institutions like synagogues, but not impossible to create. The innovative synagogues that successfully create these empowering and welcoming environments that are growing in North America.

3. More affiliation, fewer members

NJPS, the National Jewish Population Study of 1990, was the significant study of American Jewish population that sounded alarm bells about the rate of intermarriage and the need for Jewish education on a broader scale. In a recent article in the online journal eJewish Philanthropy, an article titled “25 years since NJPS: Did We Make It?” By Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman examines the response, whether and how they changed the results over the last twenty years.

Saxe speaks about the rise in the number of Jews concurrent with the growth of intermarriage.

Saxe (Leonard Saxe, director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University) also reports that more people belong to synagogues today than they did in 1990, despite reports of dwindling membership. When you expand the definition of synagogue to include *minyanim* and *havurot* and account for the growing American Jewish population, adults who live in a household of a synagogue member is essentially unchanged, the number of households that include a synagogue member has increased by 30%

“More than a million households currently include an adult member of a synagogue compared to 840,000 in 1990.”

Bucking the trend for institutional engagement: The organizations that buck the “anti-membership” trend are the ones that help the individual build social capital in small groups with common interests, while maintaining a positive association with the organization. It is interesting that one of the models chosen by Synagogue 2000, a ten year initiative to develop ways of re-invigorating synagogue life, is Saddleback Church, one of the prime examples showcased in *Better Together*. Saddleback Church grew from nothing in the 1970s. With a determined leader who built solid relationships and focused on making the experience meaningful and enjoyable, some say entertaining, for his congregants.

Admiration for the Saddleback experience described in *Better Together* is echoed by Larry Hoffman and Ron Wolfson in their books on the Synagogue 2000 initiative. Parking next to the front door is for visitors, alternative connections through over 200 “ministries” that bring smaller groups together to experience the sacred and build social capital, outside the confines of the church, are hallmark experiences. You can attend the mega service regularly or rarely. Collections are for regulars and are voluntary. Visitors are encouraged and welcomed. Music is a key element of worship. The structure is focused on building and empowering small groups. Ron Wolfson refers to Saddleback and Chabad as **models of ‘radical hospitality’**.

4. The Pew Report

The Pew Research Center released a report in October 2013 titled “A Portrait of Jewish Americans”. Some of the highlights are indeed daunting:

- A full 32% of Millennials (born after 1980) in the United States, who identify themselves as Jewish in some way, do not identify as Jewish by religion.
- The intermarriage rate for Jews who have married since 2005 is 58%, the overall rate is 44%. For respondents who did not have a Jewish denomination, what the report calls “Jews of no Religion”, the rate is 70%.
- 42% of respondents say that “Having a sense of humor” is part of what it means to be Jewish while only 19% chose “Observing Jewish Law” as one of their answers.
- Only 56% “Jews by religion” responded “Very important” to the question “How Important is Being Jewish in Your Life?” but 94% of all Jews “are proud to be Jewish”.
- 37% of intermarried families are not raising their children as Jewish.

So “what is the glass half full of?” you might ask. I remain an optimist. The arguments 40 years ago were that intermarriage would decimate Jewish communities. But the prediction of our demise was premature.

- 20% of intermarried families in the survey are raising their kids as Jewish and another 25% are raising their kids as partly Jewish and another 16% are just Jewish. That glass is actually 2/3 full!
- All of the 32% of Millennials above identified as Jewish in some way, though not as a religion.
- Jews who are Jewish by religion are heavily involved in educating their kids in dayschool and camps and supporting Israel.
- 70% of Jewish respondents participated in a seder last year.
- And we can always remind ourselves that Canadian communities are different. Out here in Winnipeg, we’re more connected than in most communities our size.

We’re not done yet! And clearly we’re all going to need that Jewish sense of humour to get through. There is a transformation happening in Jewish life and Jewish communities.

5. Jewish Diversity

Uncoupled: “Half of non-Orthodox American Jews ages 25-39 are single.” Proud to be Jewish but largely unconnected with organizational life and Jewish observance, what does the modern synagogue offer them. The evolution of the American synagogue involved a substantial focus on children for the last 50 years. The program focus of today still revolves around those who are already members, enrolling in pre-schools and bar/bat mitzvah preparation classes. Pricing provides discounts for families, and singles are included whenever convenient. As adults marry later in life and have children at an older age, this large group of adult singles can not be dismissed. They are developing the habit of looking elsewhere for environments that engage them spiritually and socially. “Their relatively low levels of measurable Jewish behavior have more to do with the available options for expressing engagement than with the putative absence of interest in things Jewish.Single Jews are akin to “swing voters”how they make Jewish (or non-Jewish) choices will determine the future of Jews, Judaism and Jewishness in the United States.”

LGBTQ: Jewish community is finding new ways to accept differences in the population. For example, www.orthogays.org has resources for Orthodox Gay and Lesbian Jews. The film *Trembling before God* brought the issue of acceptance in high school to the forefront. Winnipeg hosted an international conference of LGBTQ Jews including Rabbi Steve Greenberg, the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi as a speaker.

Intermarriage has been a fact for two generations, and as modern Jewish organizations begin to embrace intermarried families, they become part of the community in ways that contradict predictions from 50 years ago.

Also see Part D. Jewish Winnipeg Demographics for more specific patterns in Winnipeg.

6. *Philanthropy then and now*

In Jewish circles, philanthropic trends reflect generational change as in the general population.

The Winter 2006 issue of *Contact* focused on Jewish Philanthropy. One of the articles is about a new vehicle for young philanthropists to express their values through their own giving in a new way. “Part of Natan’s appeal is that it gives its members complete control over their contributions. Each year, Natan members choose the funding areas that interest them, thereby creating an organization that expressly reflects the philanthropic interests of the group.”

Similarly an October 2001 article by a young philanthropist born into the role describes her philanthropy as follows. “While I try to implement my parents’ values of tzedakah, I have earned their trust and respect to make funding decisions based on my own interpretation of societal need. I look to find Jewish organizations that reflect the values of my generation. I ask who leads these organizations – on both the staff and board levels – and I ask myself whether or not the services they provide are relevant to either my Jewish or secular world.”

Young leaders: In “Generation of Change: How Leaders in Their Twenties and Thirties are Reshaping American Jewish Life”, Jack Wertheimer describes his research into what motivates and animates young Jewish leaders in their twenties and thirties. He notes that many of them have Jewish education, i.e. are the beneficiaries of the very institutions from whom “they declare their independence of once sacrosanct ways of thinking and organizing”. Contrary to a common myth that young Jews are self-centered and apathetic, it is clear that “Due to the efforts of young leaders, Jews in their 20’s and 30’s who wish to get involved have hundreds of potential options.”

Philanthropy and Youth in Winnipeg: One of the most impressive indicators in the Federation Benchmarking Project’s presentation of data on Winnipeg as compared with other Federations of Jewish communities in the Large-Intermediate category bodes well for our future. Winnipeg had the highest rate of donors under 45 both in 2006 and 2009. Highest in our class at 13% and 16% respectively, significantly higher than the average of 9-10% in both surveys for mid-size communities as well as large communities.

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