

Letter about Men's Groups at Temple Sinai

Larry Saidman:

When Arlene and I moved back to the Bay Area in 1996, what I missed most from my former life in San Diego was my men's group. We were twelve men who met at one of our offices or homes every other Tuesday evening for two hours to speak about our lives. Nothing was "off the table" and the discussions dealt with subjects as wide ranging as our children, our wives or partners, our jobs, our triumphs and failures, our illnesses, our finances, and our hopes for and concerns about the future. We shared virtually everything about ourselves and over the course of nearly twenty years we experienced most life cycle events including births of children and grandchildren, death of a member of the group, divorce and remarriage, loss of and retirement from jobs we mostly enjoyed. These two hours every other week were sacrosanct and for most of us, virtually nothing would supersede our commitment to meet with the "guys".

Fortunately for me, Rabbi Chester organized a Temple Sinai Men's Group in the fall of 1997. We began as a group of fifteen Temple members plus the Rabbi and a facilitator (both of whom left the group after several months). During our first year we evolved into a permanent group of eleven meeting once a month rotating to each of our homes with an ad hoc dinner meeting at a restaurant two-three times a year. As with my former group, no subject is taboo and we too have shared, with much support and good humor, many life cycle events naturally occurring in the lives of middle and older-aged men.

Evidence of our success is measured by virtually complete attendance when we are in town and in addition the query from others about the possibility of joining the group. However, when a group such as ours develops a history, there is reluctance to invite additional members because this history has not been shared. Thus the Rabbi has agreed to organize an additional Temple Sinai Men's group and he has arranged for a facilitator to help launch the group. The membership of our group is so positive about this that several of us have volunteered to attend early meetings of the new group to help it get started and we encourage temple men to attend the organizational meetings. Feel free to contact any of us about our experiences and good luck in this new adventure!

Robert Schoen:

Being part of a men's group is one of the most rewarding, enriching, and meaningful activities a man can do. Members of the group meet at each other's homes, talk about what's new in their lives, and share their ideas and comments on a wide variety of topics, ranging from current events, health issues, family relationships, and, of course, Judaism and how being Jewish affects us and our relationship to the world. The group becomes an extended family, sharing simchas, and supporting each other during times of illness and the passing of loved ones.

The opportunity to share his thoughts and feelings and, when appropriate, his fears and trepidations with a group of trusted men who listen, support, and respond in appropriate ways gives each member of the group a forum to not only discuss his own issues and concerns, but to help others deal with issues they are facing in their own lives.

Many American men live today in a world where they do not have close relationships with other men. The Temple Sinai men's groups provide a wonderful opportunity to complete this part of our lives that is too often missing.

This group and the idea of men's groups is close to my heart. Women have this innate ability to congregate and socialize and support each other. It's more of a challenge for men, but I'm sure you'll agree that our group is a great source of support and comfort to us all.