

Masorti Judaism Strategic Plan

Adopted by the Board of Trustees, September 2018

SUMMARY

A. Background (p. 3)

- Shrinking and ageing overall Jewish community and synagogue memberships vs. Masorti growth
- Growth of the Haredi community
- Growth of non-synagogue institutions including Jewish schools and non-formal networks
- Longer period of 'emerging adulthood'

B. Purpose (p. 4)

- The purpose of Masorti Judaism is to develop flourishing communities, rooted in traditional practice and modern values, where people can find meaning by connecting to Judaism and to each other.

C. Values (p. 5)

Our communities and the movement as a whole will be:

- Learning
- Inclusive
- Traditional
- Empowering

D. 10 year vision (p. 5)

- Growth: from 4000 to 6000 adult members; from 9 to 15 FTE rabbis and chazanim
- Deepening involvement: increased outreach, welcoming, participation, learning, observance and leadership in every community and programme
- Innovation: implementing experimental, alternative community models and offering innovative educational, cultural and social action programming

E. Aims (p. 7)

- Growing and developing our synagogue communities
- Supporting youth, young adults and young families
- Nurturing Jewish innovation
- Promoting our ideas – Jewish thought leadership

Introduction

This is a proposal for a strategic plan for Masorti Judaism, based on discussions at the Trustee away-day in January 2018 and with groups of staff and community leaders facilitated by Bruce Rigal during the last few months. It focuses on the movement's purpose, vision, values and overall aims for the next ten years, together with a summary of the work priorities we will pursue to realise our aspirations in the more medium three to five year horizon. Once this strategy has been reviewed and agreed, we will then begin developing a work plans, staffing needs and estimating funds required to reach these objectives.

Our previous strategic plan (2015-18) set out the following aims:

1. To provide professional services to all Masorti communities to enable them to continuously improve their work, achieve their goals and flourish.
2. To grow the movement in terms of membership, attendance/involvement and number of communities.
3. To raise our profile, making Masorti a well-defined, universally known concept across the Jewish community.

We have achieved these aims in the following areas:

- Developing systems, programmes and personnel for supporting existing communities
- Rabbinical training and recruitment – creating a training programme and ensuring funding is in place
- Developing movement leadership – implementing a governance review, recruiting a new board, developing relationships with prospective lay leadership candidates
- Noam community work, particularly within NNLS
- Further improving the quality of Noam/Marom Israel engagement and Jewish education
- Maintaining numbers at Noam camps and other programmes
- Internal communications – improving content, quantity of output and systems
- Organisation and staff development – introducing new rabbinic, community development and communications staff; improving our systems and productivity
- Strengthening our funding base

Areas where we have not delivered on our goals include:

- Establishing new communities
- Significantly growing our membership; although we have bucked the trend of reductions in synagogue membership across the broader community and some communities have grown rapidly
- Expanding high level educational leadership programmes
- Centralised leadership training programmes
- Developing Marom – a physical hub, enlarged team, more programming
- External communications and marketing to make Masorti more broadly understood

In summary, we have made considerable progress on aim (1) – supporting existing communities, have seen some mixed success on aim (2) – growth, but have not managed to deliver significantly

on aim (3) – external profile raising. We have also worked hard to establish Masorti Judaism as an effective, functional, robust organisation, with the capacity to realise our aims in the future.

These aims will continue to be relevant and shape our work as we move forward. Our Trustees have agreed that the aims of community development and profile raising need to be supplemented with investing in young people (youth and young adults). We have also identified a brand-new area of work, albeit one which overlaps with and supports our existing workstreams: nurturing Jewish innovation. This set of priorities is reflected in the proposed purpose, vision, values and aims/priorities that follow.

A. Background

1. The Jewish community has continued to shrink over the past 15 years, as has synagogue membership which has dropped from 59 to 56% of Jewish households. Central Orthodoxy (the United Synagogue) has shrunk fastest with the Progressive movements remaining static as a percentage of total synagogue membership. In addition to shrinking, the mainstream Jewish community is also ageing. The Haredi community has grown which masks an even sharper decline in mainstream synagogue membership.
2. The growth in the Haredi population and the community's increasing assertiveness has produced some associated anxiety in the mainstream community, examples including: Ofsted reviews of Haredi schools, attacks on LGBT+ programming at JW3 and campaigns against Rabbi Joseph Dweck.
3. The Masorti movement has experienced significant growth. We have grown by 718 adult members or 21% since 2008 (+315 or 8% since 2013). NNLS has grown the most (+471 since 2008, +351 since 2013). Since 2013 our other communities' membership has been flat on aggregate. However, if the two communities which have shrunk (EMS and NEMS) are excluded, the remaining non-NNLS communities have shown significant growth (+474 or 42% since 2008, +201 or 14% since 2013).
4. The Jewish community has experienced a proliferation of non-synagogue, educational, cultural and social action institutions including Limmud, JW3, Jewish Book Week, UK Jewish Film Festival, Moishe House, Open Talmud Project, Tzedek, Yachad, the Campaign Against Antisemitism, as well as non-synagogue (often post-denominational) havurot and minyanim such as the Partnership Minyanim, Grassroots Jews, minyanim in Kentish Town and Willesden, and our own Havurah and Ohel Moed groups.
5. Jewish schools are an important arena of Jewish involvement for thousands of children and families.

These facts raise several important issues which underlie this strategy proposal:

1. What can we learn from Masorti's growth against the background decline in mainstream synagogue membership? Should we temper our ambitions based on the tough climate or

do we have the potential to buck the trend? Are we so small as to be statistically insignificant and therefore able to grow despite the trends?

2. What does our uneven growth teach us? Is synagogue growth determined by geography? If so, this should inform our strategy of seeding new communities and relocating into more demographically promising neighbourhoods. Or is growth primarily determined by variables under our control?
3. Is the growing influence of the Haredi community an opportunity, a threat, or irrelevant to us? Could increasingly right-wing approaches, which centrist Orthodoxy is unwilling or unable to resist, open a niche for Masorti as a traditional yet resolutely modern, liberal alternative.
4. How should we respond to the growth of non-synagogue - and private, non-community based - Judaism (which revolves around cultural and charitable events for example)? Should we increase our efforts to make synagogue a compelling experience for people, invest in innovative communal structures which do not revolve around prayer, or experiment with Jewish programming which departs entirely from a membership model?
5. What are the implications of longer 'emerging adulthood' – the increasingly extended period those in their 20s and 30s take before acquiring the traditional attributes of adulthood like marriage, children and mortgages? Emerging adults do not generally join synagogues and this increases the importance of considering alternative forms of Jewish activity and community.
6. Should we shape ourselves to the demands of the market? To what extent should we establish our own vision and agenda even if this means 'bucking,' rather than responding, to existing trends?

B. Purpose – statement and commentary

The purpose of Masorti Judaism is to develop flourishing communities, rooted in traditional practice and modern values, where people can find meaning by connecting to Judaism and to each other.

There is a strong connection between the name of our movement - 'Masorti' - and the balance we aim to achieve between tradition and modernity. The word Masorti comes from the Hebrew root m-s-r which is the root of words such as *limsor* – to pass on, *messer* – a message, and *musar* – morality, and connotes the passing down of moral code from generation to generation, where each generation receives, reshapes and passes it on in turn. Masorti Judaism entails constant deliberation about the correct balance between tradition (receiving and passing on) and change (reshaping). This is reflected in our vision and in our core aims – see below.

C. Values

We aspire for all our communities and the movement as a whole to be:

Learning – we will

- Regularly participate in Jewish learning
- Engage with the world in an open-minded and intellectually honest way
- Give and receive feedback, evaluate our work, and respond dynamically to the results

Inclusive – we will

- Welcome and integrate new people intentionally and proactively
- Build communities that reflect a wide range of Jewish belief and practice
- Celebrate diversity and ensure our communities accommodate people irrespective of (for example) their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, relationship and parental status, income, age, disability and political views
- Enable the increasing number of mixed Jewish/non-Jewish families to participate fully in communal life

Traditional – we will

- Operate in the public sphere in accordance with halacha as understood by the Masorti rabbis
- Gently encourage our members to intensify their involvement in Jewish learning and observance
- Explicitly ground our work and communal activity in Jewish values, for example: *mitzvah* – commandedness, *talmud torah* – Jewish learning, *klal Israel* - Jewish peoplehood, *kvod ha-briyot* - human dignity, *mahloket* – pluralism and debate, *tikkun olam* – repairing the world, the centrality of *medinat Israel* – the state of Israel

Empowering – we will

- Put ‘people before programme’ and prioritise relationship-building
- Systematically talent-spot, recruit and develop leaders
- Maximise volunteer involvement
- Avoid unnecessary hierarchies and make decisions at the lowest possible level

D. Vision

Previous strategic plans have not explicitly articulated a long-term vision for Masorti Judaism in the UK. Developing a vision means tackling the following interlinked issues:

1. **Mass movement or elite?** Do we aspire to be a relatively small, focused movement for people who share our values, or do we aspire to appeal to a wider section of UK Jews? To be a significant focused movement (e.g. greater than 5% of the community) we need to double or triple in size, so deciding between these two alternatives will not affect our need to grow over the coming years. However, it will affect the kind of members we

hope to attract, our messaging and the content of our community development and educational work.

Are we interested in breadth – minimal engagement with the maximum number of people – or depth – a more intensive educational and community building process with smaller numbers? In particular, is our aim to provide an inclusive, non-judgemental home for Jews of diverse levels of learning and practice, or is our agenda to work with people who share our ideals and to connect with those who are currently more distant (in a non-coercive, welcoming, educative way)? How ideological do we want to be and are we happy to provide an organisational home for people and communities who are ambivalent about denominational labels?

2. **Organisation vs. influence.** Is our aim to promote the message of Masorti Judaism by building our movement and communities or are we content to influence other organisations and the broader Jewish community? For example, how would we feel if our movement failed to grow its membership, but our educational programming and communications led to: the proliferation of non-denominational, modern Orthodox and more traditional Reform communities, higher levels of observance and learning overall, and a shift in the public discourse of Anglo-Jewry towards Masorti principles and values? Would that be seen as success?

In order to have greater influence we will need to increase our capacity so significant short-term membership growth will be required whichever way we go on this question. However, our choice will affect our willingness to compete or cooperate with other organisations, the extent of our support for cross-communal endeavours particularly in the field of Jewish education, and the target audiences we select for our services. Will we see it as success or failure if people who engage with and learn from our movement remain members of (or join) other communities?

3. **Models of community.** What kinds of community do we want to create? Is our vision of more, bigger and better, traditional, prayer-focused, synagogue-style communities, or do we aspire to develop a more diverse range of communal structures which put alternative activities – learning, activism, tzedakah, culture – at the centre? This question mirrors a distinction between two types of Jews: dwellers and seekers. Dwellers want to feel at home in a familiar, comfortable Jewish setting, while seekers (often but not exclusively young people) want to explore their Jewish identity in a challenging way through new experiences. Sometimes each of us can be both or move between the two.

As a movement, we need to appeal to both types and draw on the strengths of each. We also need to ask how we hope for these visions to interact: how can innovative forms of Jewish community enrich and influence synagogues, and how might newer structures learn from the success of traditional forms?

An associated question is whether we are interested in Jewish programming which is less communal in the traditional sense: less a membership community where you opt in with

the expectation that most of your Jewish needs will be met within its boundaries, and more a 'smorgasbord' of activities to dip in and out of as a way of constructing a more fluid, individualistic form of Jewish life.

Based on these issues, our recommended vision will include the following elements:

In 10 years' time, Masorti Judaism will be

Sustainable

- Our membership will have increased by 50% to 6000 adults, driven primarily by growth in our existing communities.
- We will have 15 full time rabbis and chazanim (up from 7 full time and 3 volunteer/part time today), leading communities and projects in an entrepreneurial, innovative, growth-driving way.

Deepening involvement and commitment

- Every community will be actively engaged in outreach, welcoming, and developing their members.
- All communities and programmes will see increased active participation, learning, observance and leadership, measured both numerically and in terms of qualitative changes in the lives of individuals.

Innovating and influencing

- We will be supporting five established groups or programmes based around experimental, alternative community models, engaging 1,000 people in total.
- There will be a range of innovative educational, cultural, social action programming (face-to-face and virtual) provided by our communities or by the movement, with success measured in terms of innovativeness and breadth of engagement.
- Masorti Judaism, our rabbis and leaders will be actively influencing the wider Jewish community through thought leadership and collaborating with a range of like-minded Masorti and non-Masorti organisations and affiliated groupings in the UK and overseas

E. Aims and Priorities

Here are our four primary aims for the next five years. These will be fleshed out in the context of a business plan which will accompany this strategy document.

1. Developing our synagogue communities

Synagogues are the traditional core of the Jewish community: membership organisations whose primary regular activity is *tefila* (prayer services), around which other social, cultural, welfare, charitable and educational programming revolves. We aim to strengthen our synagogue communities, enabling them to continuously improve their work, meet the needs of their members, achieve their goals and grow. For practical reasons our priority is developing our existing communities. However, we will not rule

out the development of new communities if circumstances favour this option, particularly in the later stages of this plan's implementation.

In the short-term, developing our existing synagogue communities is likely to be the primary means for growing the movement numerically. We aim to grow our synagogue membership by 750 individuals (18% growth) over five years. The assumption here is that growth will be a natural outcome of successful communities and therefore the bulk of our investment should be in training and recruiting *klei kodesh* and developing high-quality community leaders, enabling our communities to address the needs of all our members. We will also develop marketing and financial initiatives to encourage specific demographics to join our synagogues, and may also offer direct operational support in particular to smaller communities.

2. Supporting youth, young adults and young families

Young people are the future of our movement. We will continue to support and invest in young people and young families by developing high quality local and centralised youth programming via Noam, and by providing professional advice to boost the quality of our communities' provision. We aim to grow participation in Noam programming in a controlled, sustainable way year on year, minimally keeping pace with the growth in our communities. We will also increase our investment in Marom with the aim of developing thriving, innovative community life, Jewish programming and leadership development with young adults aged 18-25.

3. Nurturing Jewish innovation

While many people still see the synagogue as the primary focus for Jewish involvement, declining membership rates suggest that there are growing numbers of people – especially in their 20s and 30s – whose Jewish needs are not being met by synagogues. We have a responsibility and an opportunity to experiment with alternative models of Jewish community and engagement in order to broaden our appeal, meet the needs of wider circles of Jews, and rise to the challenge of creating meaningful, relevant forms of Jewish life. This means incubating experimental models of community and Jewish programming and then supporting the roll-out of the successful results. We aim to facilitate and support a network of five community groups or programmes, engaging in potentially fluid and innovative ways up to 1,000 people, and to support the emergence of these initiatives by investing in Marom as an incubator for Jewish innovation among young people.

This aim supports our long-term goal of community development. It also specifically addresses the priority of investing in young people, particularly young adults in the increasingly significant life-stage of 'emerging adulthood' (20s and 30s), whose need for non-synagogue, innovative forms of Jewish and community involvement have been clearly identified.

4. Promoting our ideas – Jewish thought leadership

As well as connecting people with Masorti Judaism by attracting them into our communities, we want to achieve this by bringing our ideas to them and influencing the Jewish discourse of the wider community. Our aim is to articulate a compelling vision of Judaism and promote it to as wide an audience as possible. This means sourcing, producing and disseminating content that explores new, compelling approaches to Judaism, community and Jewish life across diverse media and platforms: writing, video, events, social media, traditional and digital marketing and print.

These four aims are interlinked:

- They aim to develop forms of Jewish and community life which reflect the values of Masorti Judaism. While our core synagogue community development work will focus on institutions which are organisationally and ideologically part of the Masorti movement, we will need to establish an ethos framework for working with groups and programmes which broadly agree with our values but are ambivalent about or unwilling to commit to denominational affiliation or categorisation.
- They involve community building: enabling people to form relational Jewish communities motivated by common self-interest and shared values and shaped around Jewish content and practice, broadly understood; in other words, helping Jews ‘be Jewish’ with other Jews.
- All are multi-generational and future-oriented; they aim to improve, develop and grow Masorti Judaism in the UK and intend to serve not only the communities and members who we have in the present, but those people we hope to connect with in the future. The boundary between them will likely be porous: for some people, non-traditional community models will prove to be alternative routes for life-long involvement, while for others they will serve as a short-term way of enabling people to remain involved and then join synagogues when the time is right.
- There is a synergy among these aims: work with young people will support synagogue growth and Jewish innovation work; thought leadership will inform both synagogue life and Jewish innovation; learning from the results of our innovations work will boost the creativity of our synagogues and help them succeed; and innovative projects will be shaped by the best of our communal, synagogue practice: membership, volunteerism, relational culture and leadership development.