

What We Heard

A summary of the Sharing Our Strengths listening campaign

Spring 2026 · 33 listening sessions · 17 cohorts · approximately 300 participants

This past winter and spring, Temple Emanu-El gathered in conversation. Members across every part of the congregation — families with young children, teens, young adults, older adults, lay leaders, staff, and longtime worshippers — shared what they value, what they hope for in the next senior rabbi, and what they need from this transition.

What the Congregation Said

Community and Belonging

Across every single group, the primary answer to “what keeps you here?” was the people — the relationships, the familiar faces, the sense of being known and seen.

Vision Paired with Humility

Members want a rabbi who leads with clarity and listens before acting — and who will commit to Temple for the long arc, not use it as a stepping stone.

Pastoral Presence

Members want a rabbi who knows their names, shows up in grief, and is present at life's highest and hardest moments — named in nearly every session as a quality that cannot be delegated.

ECEC as Temple's Front Door

The Early Childhood Education Center is where most new families begin their Temple story — and the congregation expects the next senior rabbi to be a visible presence there.

Sermon Quality

Across virtually every group, sermon quality was named as a primary engagement driver. Members want a preacher who roots the moment in Jewish text and tradition, not just the headlines.

External and Civic Presence

Members expect their senior rabbi to be a visible leader beyond Temple's walls — in Dallas civic life, interfaith dialogue, and the broader Jewish world.

Welcoming Culture and Social Justice

Temple's openness and its commitment to social justice are not programs — they are the congregation's core identity, and members want the next rabbi to personally embody both, rooted in Jewish text and tradition.

Confidence in the Continuing Clergy

Members drew real comfort from the strength of the continuing clergy team, naming them as a foundation of spiritual continuity and stability through this transition.

Music, Worship, and Participation

Temple's music was named repeatedly as a reason people come and stay. Members also expressed a strong desire for worship that invites the whole congregation in — not just the bimah.

Jewish Identity and the Current Moment

October 7th deepened the meaning of Jewish community for many members. The congregation wants a senior rabbi who can hold the complexity of Jewish identity, respond to antisemitism with courage, and keep Temple a place where every voice feels at home.

Youth and Jewish Education

Members care about the full arc of Jewish learning — from ECEC through b'nai mitzvah and beyond. Multiple sessions named engagement after b'nai mitzvah as an area needing stronger attention and leadership.

Engagement, Belonging, and Affordability

Members raised honest concern about retaining young adults and post-b'nai mitzvah families, and named the cost of membership as a real barrier that deserves serious institutional attention.

Voices from the Campaign

<i>“What keeps me here? You guys.”</i>	<i>“This place feels hamish — intimate and warm — even at almost 6,000 members.”</i>
<i>“When I walk into this building, I feel three generations behind me.”</i>	<i>“You don’t know that you need a rabbi until you need a rabbi.”</i>
<i>“Humility, empathy, vulnerability, humor — that’s what I’m looking for.”</i>	<i>“You don’t try to fill those shoes — you put them over here and say, ‘those are David’s shoes.’ Let’s get a new pair of shoes.”</i>
<i>“Temple walks the walk — it doesn’t just talk about social justice, it does it.”</i>	<i>“I myself am not Jewish, but the values of just be a good human — that’s what keeps me here.”</i>
<i>“We came for the ECEC Shabbat, and I realized — I want this for my whole life.”</i>	<i>“I can turn on the news to hear a pundit talk about the world today. When I go to synagogue, I want the rabbi to tell me how Jewish tradition has grappled with these things over time.”</i>
<i>“Most of us do feel that the music is really what brings a lot of people to Temple, and keeps a lot of people here.”</i>	<i>“I Googled ‘are there Jews in Texas?’ — and found Temple. It became home.”</i>
<i>“Since October 7th, the need for Jewish community has been much more prevalent, and I think you can really feel the community here.”</i>	<i>“This is the one time during the week when I’m around a lot of my people, fellow Jews. It feeds me.”</i>

What This Means for What’s Next

The Senior Rabbi Search The listening campaign feeds directly into the search. What the congregation named most — pastoral presence, sermon quality, vision paired with humility, social justice, civic visibility, and genuine investment in Jewish education — will shape what the Search Committee looks for. Members were also clear that Temple is seeking a long-arc partner, and that the search should be open to someone who brings these qualities in their own expression.	Transparency in the Search The congregation asked for genuine updates, not just announcements. Members want to know how this listening data was used, who is on the Search Committee and how they were selected, what the timeline looks like, and when the next update will come. That level of communication is not a courtesy — it is what members asked for, and it is what builds the trust this transition requires.
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Thank you to every member who made time to participate. These are your words, and they will shape what comes next.