COMMUNITY

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Rabbi Yissochor Lichtig, Rosh Yeshivas Baer Hatorah, speaks at the yeshivah's first Vhaarev Na *siyum*.

Third HaGefen *Shidduchim* Conference

Last Wednesday, hundreds of *shadchanim* gathered together in Yerushalayim for the third HaGefen Conference. The *shadchanim* came from all parts of the *kehillah*, united in their desire to help to establish Jewish homes by bringing people, particularly older *bachurim* and girls, together.

Among the distinguished guests at the conference were the Boyaner Rebbe; the Biale Rebbe of London, Harav Boruch Leib Rabinowitz; Harav Shmuel Ludmir, the Pressburger Rav; and many other special guests.

The first session was opened by Rabbi Tuvia Freund, who praised the *shadchanim* for all their work and efforts in this sacred task. The conference is a direct follow-up from a meeting for HaGefen *shadchanim* held in London, which has had tremendous results.

Rabbi Meir Schwartz shared some inspiring thoughts, after which Health Minister Rabbi Yaakov Litzman spoke. The conference was directed by Rabbi Mordechai Eichler, enabling hundreds of *shadchanim* to discuss the painful issues of *shidduchim* for older singles.

After a short break in the conference that took place on the grounds of the wedding hall, the Boyaner Rebbe and the

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Shul Membership in U.K. Declines By 20 Percent in a Generation

There are a record number of shuls in the United Kingdom today, according to a newly published survey, but shul membership numbers have continued to decline. The report was produced by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research on behalf of the Board of Deputies.

The report shows that although there are now 454 shuls in the United Kingdom — the largest number ever recorded — shul membership numbers have dropped below 80,000 households for the first time since record-keeping began.

Shul membership figures have been analysed consistently over several decades, and constitute the best measure of Jewish communal affiliation in the United Kingdom that exists. They provide the only consistent indicator of patterns of Jewish affiliation and belonging over time, and are thus of particular interest to community leaders and planners.

The new report reveals that 79,597 Jewish households across the United Kingdom held shul membership in 2016, down from 99,763 in 1990, the equivalent of a 20 percent decline over a quarter of a century. The rate of decline has fluctuated over time, but membership has dropped by 4 percent since the last shul membership report was published in

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Edgware Beis Chinuch Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Beis Chinuch Girls' Primary School in Edgware marked its 10th anniversary last Thursday with a festive dinner, held in the banqueting suite of the Allianz Stadium, Mill Hill.

Beis Chinuch was established with just nine pupils in Spring 2007. Since then its numbers have increased steadily each year to its current roll of almost 250, *ka"h*. In September there will, *iy"H*, be a two-form entry to the nursery and a total of eight full year groups from kindergarten through to year 6. Given this, the theme of the evening, "A Decade of Growth," was especially apt.

Guest speaker the Gateshead Rav, Harav Shraga Feivel Zimmerman, *shlita*, described Beis Chinuch as one of the most outstanding *mosdos* in the country. Having visited the school, the Rav testified as to its warm atmosphere, the visible joy on the pupils' faces, their love of learning and the dedication of the teaching staff. He alluded to the immense challenges faced today by those involved in *chinuch* in view of the all-pervading distractions from wider society. He said the key to keeping today's young generation on the right path was to "enthuse children with an inner love for *Yiddishkeit*." He suggested that our quest for this enthusiasm was encapsulated in the words of our Shabbos and Yom Tov *tefillos*: "*kadsheinu b'mitzvosecha*" and "*sabeinu mituvecha*."

The guests of honour were Dayan Chanoch and Rebbetzin Ehrentreu. A special presentation was made to the *Dayan*, *shlita*, in recognition of his outstanding service to the *kehillah* as a whole for so many years, and in particular for his achievements for the Edgware community and the Beis Chinuch school. The Rebbetzin likewise received a presentation from the ladies in respect of her exceptional dedication to numerous worthy causes — deeds deservingly recognised earlier this year by way of a Queen's Award.

Dayan Ehrentreu spoke of his long association with Edgware, and his original vision for a *kollel* in the area. The flourishing Kollel Beis Aharon, established under his aegis, is now a landmark throughout the Torah world. Beis Chinuch was very much a product of this development, since so many of the school's pupils were daughters of *avreichim* and other *bnei Torah* associated with the *kollel*.

Paying tribute to the school's leading governors, Dayan Ehrentreu declared, "If the presentations this evening had been left to me I would have awarded them to Rabbi Moshe Cohen and Rabbi Shloime Craimer." He praised the boundless energy the two *askanim* had invested into nurturing and building up the school on a day-to-day basis. The *Dayan* went on to stress the importance of purchasing a dedicated and exclusive home for the school, to replace the split-site improvised accommodation it currently occupies within the Edgware Yeshurun and Machzikei Hadass shuls. He gave his *brachah* that a suitable building in the area should be acquired before long, to enable the school to rise to even greater achievements.

Avi Yodaiken

Seated at table (L.-R.) Rabbi Shmuel Joseph, rav of Kol Yaakov: Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu, Guest of Honour; Rabbi Shraga Feivel Zimmerman, Guest Speaker; Rabbi Eliezer Schneebalg, rav of Machzikei Hadas Edgware.

Avi Yodaiken

Mr Shlomo Craimer (R.) making a presentation to Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu (L.) at the dinner.

Avi Yodaiken

Part of the crowd at the dinner.

Avi Yodaiken

Guest speaker Harav Shraga Feivel Zimmerman.

Shul Membership in U.K. Declines by 20 Percent in a Generation

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2010, the equivalent of 3,366 households across the country.

The authors of the report maintain that the reasons for the decline are only partially related to assimilation, and can be explained primarily by demographic forces — a general decline in the number of Jewish households that exist in the United Kingdom.

The largest denominational group remains "Central Orthodox" — an amalgamation of shuls affiliated with the United Synagogue, the Federation of Synagogues and other independent Modern Orthodox shuls around the country — yet their share of total membership has dropped to 53 percent, down from 66 percent in 1990. By comparison, the Reform and Liberal shares, at 19 percent and 8 percent in 2016, have slightly increased over that period.

Hamodia contacted the main synagogal bodies in the United Kingdom to ask for their comments.

Rabbi Avrohom Pinter is the chairman of the external affairs committee of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. He commented on the report's findings that the *chareidi kehillos* are very successful at instilling a strong Jewish identity and pride in *Yiddishkeit* into their young people, so that they want to remain a part of the community in which they grew up. However, he continued, this has its own challenge — that of continuing to provide a suitable infrastructure, including housing and schools, for the growing community.

A spokesman from the United Synagogue said, "The JPR and BoD report on shul membership makes for interesting reading, emphasising as it does several points that our own strategic review highlighted. The report's data will be useful as we continue our work, building vibrant communities for the future.

"Orthodoxy continues to constitute over two-thirds of those affiliated to communities in the U.K., and we are aware that a small number of our members are moving to the right with an even smaller number moving to non-Orthodox groups. Our responsibility is to continually respond to such changes in the Jewish community and to provide the best possible offering for all our members."

Speaking for the Federation of Synagogues, its president, Andrew Cohen, commented, "The report clearly indicates that the future growth of Anglo Jewry will come from what it refers to as the 'Strictly Orthodox' denomination.

"It strongly validates the direction in which the Federation's trustees have steered the organisation since taking office in 2013. Over the past four years, over 500 new members have come under the Federation umbrella via new shuls that have joined, and over 50 percent of the Federation's constituent *kehillos* should now be categorised as 'Strictly Orthodox.'

"We are currently in talks with several other *chareidi* communities who are interested in joining our ranks and are witnessing a steady uptick in our growth, rather than the general downturn for Central Orthodox memberships that is highlighted in the report."