

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

A few weeks after I began my tenure as the rabbi of Hillcrest Jewish Center, I received a call from a congregant. "Rabbi, may I ask you a question?"

I got excited. Here I am in my new congregation and a congregant has a question for me. After all, I thought, the years I spent in rabbinical school will pay off. "Sure," I said. "How can I help you?"

"Rabbi, is the pool open today?"

People want to know if this is a true story. Yes, it is. People also want to know what I replied to the congregant. I went to the office, found out that the pool was indeed open, and told the congregant, who said thank you and seemed happy with the answer.

I tell you this story (one of my favorite ones) for a couple of reasons. First of all, you will know that you can ask me any question you want, whenever you want. Yes, you can ask me Torah and Jewish law questions, but you can also ask me if I have a good plumber to recommend, or how do I like my new car, or what is my favorite bourbon, or even if I have some tips to improve your golf swing (keep an eye on the ball and follow through).

The second reason is because I want to talk in this message about the most frequently asked questions congregants ask rabbis (and I'll give you a hint: it is not about how to enhance the Shabbat experience).

Can you guess? The most frequently asked questions congregants ask rabbis are related to times for services and duration of services. What time is Yizkor? How long is Ma'ariv for Rosh Hashanah? Will we be out by 12:30 PM? With Hallel, at what time will services conclude?

You should know that I don't take these questions (or any questions) lightly. Silvia and my children ask me the same questions and if I go to another synagogue, I may ask the same questions myself. People have guests, arrangements and invitations and they need to know. I also believe that people don't ask questions if they don't have a need for an answer, and it is my obligation to be kind and to address people's questions – any questions – with respect, and to try to provide an answer to the best of my abilities.

So, because the holidays are over, and a full new year of activities is starting, I will take this opportunity to give you an overview of times and length of services at Hillcrest Jewish Center. Please take note.

Weekday Morning Minyan

Monday through Friday @ 7 AM. Service takes approximately 45 minutes on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, and approximately 55 minutes on Monday and Thursday when there is Torah reading. During Rosh Chodesh or Chol Hamoed, add 10-15 minutes.

Sunday and National Holidays

Sunday and National Holidays @ 8:30 AM. Service takes approximately 45 minutes.

Weekday Evening Minyan

Sunday through Thursday @ 7 PM. Service takes approximately 30 minutes if we daven Mincha and Ma'ariv (March through September roughly) and 20 minutes if we daven only Ma'ariv (too late to daven Mincha, roughly September through March).

Friday Night (Mincha, Kabbalat Shabbat, and Ma'ariv)

The time when services begin changes throughout the year and you should check the bulletin (or ask me). Services take approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Shabbat and Yom Tov Morning Services

Services being at 9 AM and should be over by 11:30 AM.

Shabbat Afternoon Services (Shabbat Mincha, Shiur, and Weekday Ma'ariv)

The time when services begin changes throughout the year and you should check the bulletin (or ask me). Services (including a 30 minute-shiur) take approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Yom Tov Evening Service including Mincha (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Rosh Hashanah)

The time when services begin changes depending on the holiday and you should check the bulletin (or ask me). Services takes approximately 30 minutes.

Rosh Hashanah Morning

Services begin at 9 AM and should be over by 12:30 PM.

Kol Nidrei

The time when services begin changes slightly every year. Services take approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes.

Yom Kippur Morning

Services begin at 9:30 AM and should be over by 1:30 PM.

Yom Kippur Mincha and Neilah

The time when services begin changes slightly every year. Services take approximately 3 hours and conclude with blowing of the Shofar at the end of Yom Kippur.

Some people want to know if we are going to keep these times for the foreseeable future. Yes, this is the idea. However, if things change for some reason or if services occasionally last a little longer than expected, please be understanding, flexible, and forgiving. And if services are shorter than you expected, feel free to file a formal complaint and send it to my attention (is there a smile on your face?).

The most important thing, now that you have all the information about times and duration of services, is that you join us, whenever you can, as often as possible. We will always welcome you, regardless if you are a "regular" or if you just wish to dip a toe in the davening experience at Hillcrest Jewish Center, and regardless if you are on time, or a little late. Whenever we see you, it is good to see you!

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan