

From the Rabbi's Desk

December 2018

Chaverim,

I am writing you in the days approaching Thanksgiving. It is a time to give thanks for our many blessings and accomplishments. I am particularly thankful for the magnificent AiR (Artist in Residence) weekend this past month. The weekend had been in the making since the URJ biennial last year when I reconnected with Rabbi Or and Feliza Zohar. I left Boston with an idea that Sherry and I could bring something to our community that is exceptionally unique. The weekend demonstrated the vibrancy and creativity of Reform Judaism and also built another link between our community and Israel. Or and Feliza brought the gifts of their beautiful music and teachings to us, and we opened our hearts and spiritual home to them. Afterwards, they commented on how they felt a part of our congregation and that they had made real friendships. I believe this is true. Their music will continue to reverberate in our sanctuary and our hearts. This was a tremendous accomplishment for our congregation.

There are many people who made this weekend possible. Sherry Barnes jumped enthusiastically on board when I brought this idea to her. She worked countless hours pulling together all of the music and working with the choir and musicians. The endowment committee, particularly Barbara Senges who has encouraged me every step of the way, underwrote the weekend. Gail Weber led our committee of Merrill Mazzella, Caren Linden, Sherry and myself. The committee worked hard to plan every aspect of the weekend. Merrill Mazzella not only brought her wisdom but also made sure all of the meals were wonderful. Special thanks to Terri Goldsmith for hosting and sponsoring our Erev Shabbat Oneg. Gail and Steve Weber hosted Or and Feliza in their home. Sue Fornara designed beautiful posters and postcards. Minuteman press donated posters and provided expert printing services. What really made the weekend special was how well Or and Feliza worked with our musicians Jonathan Rowe, Chris Rock, Barry Greenhalgh, our guest keyboardist Michael McCarthy and our choir members Jo-el Fernandez, Sandy Greenhouse, Bethany Kanfer, Barbara Luftglass-Morea, Merrill Mazzella, Jo Michaelson, and Armi Rowe. Together, we plumbed the depths of our shared spiritual tradition. *Halleluya Mima-amakim*—Halleluya from the depths!

Unfortunately, the tragedy in Pittsburgh tore at the fabric of our American Jewish experience. To have such a tragedy happen in a synagogue ripped open deep wounds of anti-Semitism. There are two things that I feel have carried our Temple community through this horrific time. First is the tremendous outpouring of support from our community. The Monday evening vigil held at our house of worship included government, secular, and religious leaders and first responders from all over Southeastern Connecticut. My clergy friends and colleagues assuaged our wounds with their heartfelt words. I am grateful to them for being with us. Unlike anti-Semitism experienced in earlier generations, we do not stand as a people apart, but rather as people surrounded by our friends. Second, our Temple Emanu-El security group had been working hard since before the High Holy Days to improve our security procedures. The increased security measures we have implemented since Pittsburgh were small additional steps along a well-thought-out path.

Rich McCaffrey and Mike Haynes have been leading this effort. Armi Rowe and Jennifer Zettler implemented necessary security measures in our religious school even before Pittsburgh. Many people are stepping up to be door monitors. Some of our newest members, Rob and Justice Szeligowski are helping track down grant programs for improving our security infrastructure. All this is to say, that we were already well on our way to making Temple Emanu-El more secure. You will notice that we will talk more about security at services and events and that there is a new level of vigilance. We must not allow ourselves to become complacent. This is what is demanded of us by the new reality of the times in which we live. Rest assured there are many of us dedicated to ensuring our spiritual home is safe. I am grateful for all of them.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Marc